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FAITH THAT MOVES MOUNTAINS (MARK 11:20-26)

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

In Mark 11:23 Jesus makes an astounding promise to His disciples:
“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.”

Clearly, this statement raises a number of questions. What is the context of this statement? Is it to be taken literally? What does it mean? In the process of answering these questions another issue will surface. Does this promise support the idea that the Church has replaced Israel?

In this article I will attempt to answer these questions.

II. THE CONTEXT

The Lord’s statement about a faith that can move mountains is found in the broader passage of Mark 11:20-26.¹ In turn, these verses are contained in the larger context of 11:12-26. Verses 20-26 form the closing section of an *inclusio*.

Mark 11:12-14 contains the account of Jesus cursing a fig tree. He comes to the tree expecting to find fruit, but finds none. Verses 20-26 describe what happens the next day and also refer to the fig tree. The disciples see that the tree has been withered at its roots (vv 20-21). Verses 22-26 involve the Lord’s teachings about what the withered fig tree demonstrates to the disciples.

¹As will be discussed below, the majority of scholars believe the passage ends at v 25 and that v 26 is a scribal gloss. However, the majority of manuscripts contain v 26. This article will argue that v 26 certainly makes sense in the meaning of the passage as well.

Sandwiched between the events at the fig tree, Mark tells the reader that Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. The day before, Jesus had come to the temple and looked around (v 11). Based upon the fact that the next day He cleansed the temple out and was not pleased with what He saw, we can safely assume that He did not find what He expected to find. This is supported by the fact that He denounces what He saw going on in the temple (v 17). Like the fig tree, He did not find any acceptable “fruit” in the temple.

The fig tree was destroyed by the word of the Lord. The actions of the Lord in the temple, occurring between the two events at the fig tree, showed that the temple was to be destroyed. In Mark 13:2, the Lord will specifically state that this is what is going to happen.

Piotrowski says that this reminds those familiar with the OT about the account in Jeremiah 7–8. Jesus quotes from Jer 7:11 when He cleans out the temple (Mark 11:17). In Jeremiah 8, God does not find any figs on fig trees and this is the reason for the imminent destruction of the temple described in Jeremiah 7 in Jeremiah’s day. Jesus’ not finding figs indicates that the temple of His day will be destroyed as well.²

Stein agrees that the whole section of the accounts of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:12-26) indicates a coming judgment on the nation and temple.³ These verses should be seen as a unit. Mershon agrees and says that the cursing of the fig tree and cleansing of the temple should be viewed together as a condemnation of Israel.⁴ Grassmick says that these episodes help explain each other.⁵

Viewing these accounts as a unit finds support in the idea that Mark has used this “sandwiching” technique before. In Mark 5:21-43

²N. G. Piotrowski, “‘Whatever You Ask’ for the Missionary Purposes of the Eschatological temple: Quotation and Typology in Mark 11–12,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 21, (2017): 102-103. Piotrowski’s points are well taken. However, it must be pointed out that Piotrowski says that God looks for figs on the fig trees in Jeremiah. That is not the case. Instead, God takes away the figs from the trees as a judgment on the nation (Jer 8:13). If we are to find parallels with Mark 11, perhaps we should say that Jesus takes away the figs from the tree when He says that no one will ever eat from it again.

³Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 521.

⁴Barry Mershon, Jr., “Mark,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, vol 1 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 189.

⁵John D. Grassmick, “Mark,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament Edition (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 157.

he tells of how the Lord meets a man with a very ill daughter (vv 21-24). The Lord eventually heals the girl, raising her from the dead (vv 35-43). In between, Mark relates how the Lord heals a woman with an issue of blood (vv 25-34). Mark intends that the reader sees these two healings as a package. Perhaps they teach that Christ can overcome defilement, or the woman teaches the man that Jesus can raise his daughter, even after he is told his daughter had died.⁶

A. Different Contexts?

When studying the context of Mark 11:20-26, another issue is the question as to whether all these verses belong to this time in Jesus' life. France says that the account of what happened to the fig tree (vv 20-21) is a symbol of the judgment that is about to fall upon Israel and the temple, but that the verses that follow (vv 22-25) were spoken of Jesus on a different occasion.⁷ If this is the case, then the teachings in vv 22-25 were not used by the Lord in the context of judgment upon Israel and the temple. These teachings include a faith that can remove a mountain and the need for forgiveness when praying.

France and others maintain that vv 22-26 do not belong in the context of the cursing of the fig tree, in part, due to the abrupt shift in the subject matter. It is difficult to see a connection between judgment on Israel as illustrated in the fig tree, and the need for faith that can move mountains. The connection is even less clear when one speaks of the need to forgive others.

Stein is even more blunt than France. He says that vv 22-25 have nothing to do with the cursing of the fig tree.⁸ The fig tree was not used by the Lord as a lesson about faith and forgiveness. Collins says that these teachings were part of the instructions of Jesus when He performed another miracle.⁹ Cranfield also believes that vv 22-25

⁶he connection between the accounts is also seen in the fact that the girl is 12 years old and the woman has had an issue of blood for 12 years. In addition, both are healed by Jesus touching them in their uncleanness. To touch a woman with an issue of blood made one unclean. To touch a dead person did as well.

⁷R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 447-48.

⁸Stein, *Mark*, 519.

⁹Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 532.

were not found in this context, but were part of a catechism of the early Church that the writer of Mark adds on here.¹⁰

This view may strike some as reflecting a low view of the inspiration of the Scriptures. This article will argue that there is no need to conclude that Jesus did not say vv 22-26 at this point in His ministry.

B. Verse 26

Scholars seem to generally agree that v 26 supports the idea that vv 22-25 were not a part of the original context. Many contend that when Jesus says that if we do not forgive others we will not be forgiven, it comes from a scribal gloss (Matt 6:15) and is not a part of the original Gospel of Mark.¹¹ This suggests that the verses prior to this statement also came from elsewhere. After saying that v 26 is a scribal gloss from Matt 6:15 Stein points out that all of vv 22-25 is found in other Gospel accounts as well and could have been imported by Mark into this context (Matt 5:23-24; 6:9-15; 7:7-8; 17:20; Luke 11:9-10; 17:6; John 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:23-24).¹²

By their rating given to v 26, Metzger and his committee are confident that the verse is not a part of the original.¹³ They give its exclusion a rating of “A,” which reflects their highest level of confidence. Based upon their comments, however, their confidence seems firmly grounded in the preference for the Critical Text (hereafter CT). They place great weight on the fact that v 26 is not found in early witnesses, even though it is found in the majority of manuscripts. The committee also admits that v 26 could have been original and *omitted* by an early scribe due to homoeoteleuton.¹⁴ This would explain its absence in these early manuscripts.

¹⁰ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Mark*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (London, ENG: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 360.

¹¹ Stein, *Mark*, 522; Cranfield, *Mark*, 362; Collins, *Mark*, 532; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 194; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 409.

¹² Stein, *Mark*, 520.

¹³ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 110.

¹⁴ Homoeoteleuton comes from the Greek and means “same endings.” When scribes copied a manuscript they sometimes omitted words because of the same endings of words in the next successive lines. The scribe thought he had already copied a verse because it was similar to the next one in many respects. In the case of v 26 the similarities between the words of v 25 and v 26 are very apparent, both in Greek and English.

C. Summary

Even though many see an abrupt shift of focus between vv 20-21 and vv 22-26, it is not necessary to conclude that vv 22-26 were not a part of Jesus' teachings at the withered fig tree. The fact that Jesus taught the same truths in other places does not negate this conclusion. The Lord could have certainly taught the same truths in different contexts. If it can be shown that these teachings fit in the context of judgment upon Israel, then we should find that Mark accurately reflects what the Lord said on this occasion.

The same thing can be said specifically about v 26. If one is not predisposed to the CT, he does not need to posit the theory that v 26 was *added* to Mark by a later copyist who had Matt 6:15 in mind. The Majority Text (hereafter MT) may be correct and v 26 was *omitted* by an early scribe. This would explain its absence in the CT. This is especially true if v 26 makes sense in the current context.

III. IS IT LITERAL?

Does the Lord call upon His disciples to move literal mountains and cast them into the sea? This is highly doubtful for a number of reasons.

There are no examples of the Lord's people throwing a mountain in a sea. The withering of the fig tree is parallel to the casting of the mountain into the sea. France makes the helpful comment that they are parallel at least in the sense that both are destructive acts.¹⁵ Since mountains usually have people living on them, the throwing of a mountain into the ocean would have severe consequences! If the cursing of the fig tree is an illustration of coming judgment on the nation of Israel, it is natural to conclude that the removal of a mountain is also to be understood as an illustration of something.

DeGraaf maintains that the illustration of the removal of a mountain was understood by the Jewish disciples as doing what seems to be impossible. The OT prophets used this illustration in this way (Zech 4:7).¹⁶ The mountain represents an obstacle that cannot be removed

¹⁵ France, *Mark*, 448.

¹⁶ David DeGraaf, "Some Doubts about Doubt: The New Testament Use of Diakrino" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 48:8 (December 2005): 744-49.

by human means. We use the phrase in a similar way when we say that we thank God for the mountains and valleys He has brought us through. This statement is understood as meaning that God has brought us through difficult times. God did it when we couldn't do it in our own strength. Both Stein and Grassmick agree that the verse is a hyperbolic illustration about doing what is humanly impossible.¹⁷

Cranfield says the illustration can have a broad range of uses. He comments that the Jews used the phrase in reference to rabbis who were good interpreters of the Scriptures. If there was a particularly difficult passage to understand, the teacher who could determine its interpretation was called a "mountain remover."¹⁸ When others thought the meaning was impossible to obtain, this teacher did the impossible.

Related to the question of whether removing a mountain is understood in a literal sense is the identity of the mountain in this case. Jesus refers to "this" (*touto*) mountain. Did He have a particular mountain in mind?

If Jesus did have such a mountain in mind there are two options in the immediate context. He is coming from Bethany and the mount of Olives (Mark 11:11). He is headed towards the temple mount (v 27).

France holds that since the removal of the mountain is clearly an illustration, the demonstrative adjective "this" should not be understood as referring to either the temple mount or the mount of Olives. The whole phrase is simply a proverbial saying. He particularly rejects the idea that the specific mountain is the temple mount. But as mentioned above, France does not believe v 22-25 belong to this context.¹⁹ If one rejects the idea that Jesus spoke about a faith that can move mountains when He cursed the fig tree and prefigured the destruction of the temple, it is easy to reject the idea that "this" mountain in Mark 11:23 has a connection with the temple mount.

It must be recognized, however, that Jesus was heading towards the mountain the temple was on and it was in sight. In addition, Jesus' actions in the temple and towards the fig tree in Mark 11 deal with judgment on the temple. The Lord will soon predict its complete destruction (Mark 13:2). France mentions that the Gospels never call

¹⁷ Stein, *Mark*, 522; Grassmick, "Mark," 158.

¹⁸ Cranfield, *Mark*, 361.

¹⁹ France, *Mark*, 449.

the temple mount a mountain. But he admits that Isa 2:2-3 can be understood to do so.²⁰ One could add Micah 4:1-3, which is parallel to Isa 2:2-3.

Jesus may very well have used the removal of a mountain as a proverbial, hyperbolic, statement. But this does not mean that He is not using the temple mount as an example of a humanly impossible obstacle. Evans takes this view as well.²¹

It may be significant that when Jesus refers to the sea, He does not modify it with the adjective “this.” Stein says this is a general statement. The Dead Sea was visible from the mount of Olives, and the Mediterranean Sea was nearby to the west. The Lord did not have a particular sea in mind.²² But the lack of specificity indicates that even if Jesus was dealing with the temple mount in some sense in this illustration, He was not talking about literally casting it into a literal sea.

To summarize, the Lord did not tell His disciples that if they believed they could cast a literal mountain into a sea. The statement is best taken to mean that faith can overcome seemingly impossible obstacles. At the same time, one is probably justified in seeing that Jesus is dealing with a particular mountain in this passage. It takes center stage in the whole account of vv 12-26. He doesn’t literally throw it into the Dead Sea, but the temple mount presents an obstacle for the Lord.

With this background, it is possible to discuss the meaning of the passage.

IV. THE MEANING OF MARK 11:23

A. The Broader Context

Mark 11 falls within the last week of Jesus’ life. He has come to Jerusalem to offer Himself as the King (Mark 11:1-11). However, the nation will reject and crucify Him. The religious leaders will lead the way in this endeavor. Even in the extended passage under discussion,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Evans, *Mark*, 188.

²² Stein, *Mark*, 520.

after Jesus cleanses the temple, the religious leaders are said to seek how they might destroy Him.

Prior to arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus has told His disciples that these things were going to happen to Him. He tells them the religious leaders will kill Him (8:31). Then, He says that He will be delivered over to men who will kill Him (9:31). On the third occasion, He describes His upcoming death in a way that indicates He will be crucified by the Romans (10:33-34).

In each of these predictions of His death, the disciples do not understand what He is saying. It is clear that they think He is going to Jerusalem to be the King. They have proclaimed that He is the Christ (8:29). As they follow the Lord to Jerusalem their biggest concern is over who will be the greatest (9:34). In fact, two of the inner circle want the highest positions of honor in the kingdom that they think will soon appear (10:37).

The reaction of the religious leaders is tragic in light of the way the Gospel of Mark began. John the Baptist had come before the Lord, preparing the way for His entrance to the nation. He had preached a message of repentance and the need for forgiveness (Mark 1:1-4). Implied in the need for forgiveness is that judgment will follow if the nation did not obey that message.

Jesus preached the same message to the nation (Mark 1:15). He told them they needed to repent and believe the good news about the kingdom. If that nation had turned from their sins and believed that the kingdom was at hand in the Person of Jesus Christ, that generation of Jews would have seen the coming of the kingdom.

People today are saved by faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life. The message of the good news in Mark 1 was different. It was the good news about the kingdom of God for the nation of Israel. That generation of Jews had the requirement of turning from sins before the kingdom would have come at that time for the nation as a whole. Both John and Jesus proclaimed the necessity for that nation to bear the fruit of repentance (Matt 3:8). They were looking for a nation pursuing righteousness.

When Jesus comes into Jerusalem in Mark 11, He does not find that fruit. The temple had turned into a den of thieves (Mark 11:17). The nation, through its leaders, had decided to reject the King and His offer of the kingdom.

This explains the need to clean out the temple. It also explains the cursing of the fig tree. Because Israel, as pictured by the fig tree, had not born the expected fruit, judgment was coming upon it.

It is not an accident that immediately after the incident of the fig tree, the Lord is opposed by the religious leaders. They want to know by whose authority He had cleaned out the temple (11:28). Basically, the Lord tells them His authority came from the same place John the Baptist got his. Both John and the Lord preached the same message. Part of that message was that if the nation did not repent and believe, judgment would fall.

B. Jesus' "Mountain"

Jesus found Himself in a difficult situation. The temple was the place by which God called His name. The prophets had said that the kingdom was coming to the nation of Israel. But God's people had rejected His messenger John, His message, and the Lord Himself.

This was not the way the Jews understood what would happen when the Messiah came to the nation. Certainly the disciples did not understand how the nation could reject their King (Mark 8:32; 9:32).

But Jesus does what seems to be humanly impossible. He pronounces a judgment on the very temple of God. The temple was the pride of the nation. Who could pronounce that the day would soon come when not a single stone of those magnificent buildings would lie one upon another (13:2)? Christ postpones the coming kingdom of God for the nation of Israel. He puts off the very plan of God for His chosen people. If we see "this" mountain as a reference to the temple mount, we could say that Jesus has figuratively removed a mountain by pronouncing judgment upon the nation and her temple.

The withered fig tree is a picture of it. The illustration itself is a picture of the humanly impossible. A person cannot cause a live tree to wither at the roots simply by his word.

Marcus points out that Mark wants to make a connection between the complete destruction of the temple in 13:2 and the fig tree withered at its root in 11:21. In both cases a disciple tells the Lord to "look" (*ide*) at something amazing.²³ The first is the withered fig tree.

²³ Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 793.

The second is the beautiful buildings of the temple (13:1). The Lord pronounces judgment on both.

When Peter points out the withered tree to the Lord (v 21), Jesus immediately tells the disciples to have faith in God (v 22). Lane is one who questions if the teachings of vv 22-25 originally belong to this context because of the supposed difference in subject matter with v 21. However, he admits that there may indeed be a connection. Jesus received His authority and power to pronounce judgment upon Israel from God the Father.²⁴ That is what He will say to the religious leaders immediately after this account (11:27–12:12).

Jesus, in the midst of difficulties and rejection, believed in God and relied upon Him. As such, He could do what was seemingly impossible. He will now tell the disciples they should follow that example.

C. Believe in God (vv 22-24)

As Jesus' ministry was characterized by reliance upon God, the disciples should do the same. While some do not see the connection between this exhortation and the cursing and the withering of the fig tree, there is indeed a clear one.

Jesus did what was seemingly impossible in a difficult situation. The disciples would face difficult situations as well. But there is another connection.

With the rejection of the Lord by the nation the disciples would experience trying times. Mark is a book about the cost of discipleship. Discipleship is not the same thing as believing in Jesus for eternal life. As they followed the Lord, the disciples would learn the cost of following the King who was rejected by His people. Jesus had spoken to them of this earlier (Mark 8:34-38).

As disciples, and by taking up their crosses in following the Lord, they will find themselves in situations that seem humanly impossible to endure. Of particular importance here is the original audience. Most scholars agree that Mark was written to Christians living in Rome. There is evidence of this from early Christian writers. These Christians were encountering persecution.²⁵ How appropriate that

²⁴ Lane, *Mark*, 409.

²⁵ Grassmick, "Mark," 99; Mershon, "Mark," 140.

Mark would include in the life of the Lord an event that taught the disciples that God is completely reliable in the midst of extreme difficulties and opposition. Finding Himself in that seemingly hopeless situation, the Lord could speak of the temple mount being destroyed. He could cause a tree to wither at the roots as an illustration of what would happen.

The Lord instructs His disciples to be people of prayer (v 24). In prayer, Jesus tells them, they have the source to find the very power of God.²⁶ Jesus just did a miraculous thing (v 21). They can as well as they rely on God and believe He will do what they ask.²⁷ God can deal with any difficulty.²⁸ This would have been particularly comforting to the original readers as well.

It needs to be noted that the faith Jesus speaks of here (v 23) is the faith of a disciple. It is not a super kind of faith. When Jesus says to believe in the “heart” He is not referring to a faith that is greater than a head faith. Believing with the mind and believing in the heart are the same thing (Luke 24:25, 45). They both mean that faith is something that happens internally and simply mean to accept that something is true.²⁹ Here, it means that God is able and will do what we ask.

The faith here, then, is not the faith that leads to eternal life. Instead, it is the faith needed when disciples, who are already believers and have eternal life, face hardships. The original disciples would face difficulties as they see the nation reject the One they proclaimed as the Christ. They would need faith when they saw that the coming of the kingdom was delayed.³⁰ We must bear in mind that at this time they had no concept of the Church. For them, they could not even think of a scenario where the nation rejected the King and the temple was destroyed.

It is evident as well that the Lord is speaking of praying for things according to the will of God (Matt 6:9–10; John 14:13–14; 15:7; 16:23–24). In the case of Jesus, it was God’s will that the nation be

²⁶ France, *Mark*, 447; Grassmick, “Mark,” 158.

²⁷ Collins, *Mark*, 534.

²⁸ Lane, *Mark*, 410.

²⁹ Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2015), 249-50.

³⁰ Mershon, “Mark,” 190.

judged for their sins. The Mosaic Covenant required that the nation be cursed if it rejected God (Deut 27–28). Blessings would come upon the nation for obedience. Cursing would come upon it for disobedience. In Mark, Jesus had offered the nation the incredible blessing of the promised kingdom. It was now inevitable, according to the will of God, that the curse of judgment would fall upon them.

When disciples face difficulties and opposition they have the privilege of praying to God for His will to be done. The will of God is expressed in the Word of God. Even if such things seem impossible, especially when faced with opposition, God will accomplish His will. For example, God wants His people to bear fruit and glorify Him by living righteously. In times of persecution and difficulties, it may seem like this is impossible. But the believer should not “doubt” it (v 23). DeGraaf summarizes the sense of these verses:

The person praying can therefore believe that what he requests will happen because it is God’s will. He will neither doubt God’s ability to do what he requests, since God can do anything, nor will he doubt that God will grant his petition, since it is God’s will. He will not have a divided heart about this matter.³¹

But the Lord says the believer needs more than faith in order to have his prayers answered. He also needs to be merciful. Specifically the believer must forgive those who sin against him.

D. The Necessity for Forgiveness (vv 25-26)

As mentioned above, some maintain that when Jesus introduces the idea of forgiveness at the end of this pericope Mark is importing His words from a different context. The idea of forgiveness seems foreign to the discussion about the destruction of the temple and the need for faith in God’s revealed will.

The most obvious connection is that answered prayer does not just depend upon faith in God. It also depends upon forgiving others. But faith and forgiveness are intimately connected. Part of the revealed will of God is that believers forgive one another. It takes faith to do that. Often times, when others wrong us we do not want to forgive. We must believe what God has revealed. We are to forgive.

³¹ DeGraaf, “Some Doubts,” 749.

There is also a connection to the larger context. Jesus is speaking of the difficult times disciples will face. In times of difficulties it is common for believers to sin against others. In these times of stress it is even easier to harm, or sin against, others as we feel we need to do things in our own power.

The Lord speaks of the fact that if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive others. There is a positional forgiveness that the believer receives when he believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life (Col 2:13-14). This positional forgiveness makes fellowship with God possible.

Here in Mark 11:25-26, the Lord is not talking about positional forgiveness. He is speaking of fellowship forgiveness.³² The believer in fellowship with the Lord will experience answered prayer. In 1 John 3:22 John says that when we do what God commands, and are therefore in fellowship with Him (abide with Him), we receive what we ask of God. God commands us to forgive. If we want our prayers answered we must forgive. When we forgive others we receive a daily cleansing of sins which allows us to be in intimate communion with God.

There may also be a connection here between forgiveness and the removal of a mountain. Forgiving others may seem impossible for us. But God has commanded us to do so. If we ask Him for the grace to do it, He will remove that “mountain.”

Once again, the reader of Mark needs to remember that it is a book about discipleship. Walking in Christ’s footsteps is difficult. Part of that walk is forgiving others. That can be a difficult thing to do. But the Lord is saying that those who do so by believing in what God has commanded will experience answered prayer.

E. Summary

After the disciples discover that the fig tree Jesus cursed has become withered at its roots, the disciples are amazed (vv 20-21). Jesus then tells them that they have the same power at their disposal.

The cursing of the fig tree was not just a miracle. It was an illustration of what was going to happen. God’s people and temple were to be judged. This judgment and what happened to the fig tree did not seem humanly possible.

³² While all believers have received positional forgiveness, only those who confess their sins and who forgive others when sinned against receive fellowship forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

As the disciples experienced difficulties because of that coming judgment, they should rely upon the power of God. In prayer they had that power available. They needed to believe that God could remove whatever “mountain” they encountered as they did the will of God. Part of that will was forgiving others. As they did they would experience the power of God in answered prayer.

But there is an additional question that arises in light of the judgment that Jesus speaks of in this account. Does the judgment on Israel mean that God is finished with the Jewish nation and that the Church has permanently replaced the temple God judged?

V. HAS THE CHURCH REPLACED ISRAEL?

Some who believe that Mark has imported teachings from Christ in other contexts in vv 22-25 believe that there is still a connection with the judgment that is coming upon the nation. They see this connection in what is called replacement theology. The withered fig tree (vv 20-21) pictures judgment on the temple. This judgment means that the Church has replaced Israel. Mark uses the teachings of vv 22-25 to make this point.

France says that even though the “house of prayer” in Jerusalem is about to be destroyed, it will be replaced by the praying community of the Church.³³ Marcus similarly says that the connection between vv 20-21 and vv 22-25 is that prayer will stop at the temple, but prayer will continue to go on in the elect community of Christians.³⁴

Culpepper says that the “mountain” Jesus speaks of is the mount of Olives and that in Mark 11:23 He has in mind Zech 14:4. Zechariah says that in the last days Christ will split the mount of Olives. For Culpepper, the point is that in the destruction of the nation and the coming of the Church the eschatological day has come. He even connects Jesus’ discussion on forgiveness with the destruction of the temple. Even though the temple is destroyed, that cannot block one’s prayers. However, unforgiveness within the Church can.³⁵

³³ France, *Mark*, 448.

³⁴ Marcus, *Mark*, 794-95.

³⁵ R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 382.

Evans also says that Zech 14:4 is behind v 23. The temple is no longer the place of prayer. It might as well be cast into the sea. In these last days, God accomplishes His redemptive work in the Church. Those who have been redeemed and are forgiven express that new relationship in prayer.³⁶ Lane says that v 23 and its connection with Zech 14:4 means that we have entered the Messianic Age.³⁷

It is difficult, however, to understand how Zech 14:4 can be the reference behind v 23. Zechariah deals with the splitting of the mount of Olives, and not a judgment on the temple. More importantly, Zechariah 14 speaks of the coming of the Lord at the end of the Tribulation. It is not talking about the Church age.

Even though the Church is the temple of God in the Church age, this does not mean the Church has replaced Israel. One cannot deduce this from these verses. The Lord is telling the disciples that Israel did not bear the fruit that was expected. This is pictured in the fig tree.

But the disciples can. As they walk in obedience and forgive one another, they will not only experience answered prayer and a daily cleansing of sin. They will be in fellowship with God. Even in the midst of difficulties, including the destruction of the temple, they can produce fruit that pleases God.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the book that bears his name, James, the half-brother of the Lord is addressing Christians who are going through difficult times. He tells them that in the midst of trials they should pray to God for the things they need. They are to be people of faith, not doubting that the Father will answer their prayers. This will include bearing spiritual fruit (Jas 1:2-6).

James also says that as they go through these difficulties they will need to be merciful (James 2:13). It is during times of difficulties that Christians are especially susceptible to treat others in an unloving manner (Jas 3:14; 4:1-2). Forgiving one another will be sorely needed.

In Mark 11:20-26, Jesus teaches His disciples the same truths. The Lord had offered Israel the kingdom when He came to them. In order

³⁶ Evans, *Mark*, 195.

³⁷ Lane, *Mark*, 411.

for that kingdom to come the nation needed to produce fruit. It did not. They would even reject and kill the One who is the King. As a result judgment would fall.

This judgment would involve the severe discipline of God's chosen people. It would involve the destruction of the temple of God. It would involve putting off the kingdom of God until a future generation of Jews receive it.

Only the power of God could accomplish such things. But Jesus pronounced that judgment. He was in control in the midst of the difficulties before Him. As an illustration of that judgment He caused a non-fruit bearing tree to wither at its roots.

The disciples were instructed to learn from Christ's example. The same power that Christ displayed was available to them. They were about to experience difficult times. In the midst of that that should be people of prayer. In those prayers they should believe that God would do the things they asked as they followed His will.

They were to be people of faith as the kingdom was delayed in its coming. As they went through these difficulties they were to forgive each other. This is an example of what it means to believe God. He would give them the ability to do so. Such obedience would result in fellowship with Christ as He forgave them of their sins on a daily basis. In fellowship with Him, they would do what Israel did not do. They would produce fruit that was pleasing to God.

In fact, there was nothing that God would not do for them. He would remove any "mountain" in their path. This was true even though they were facing things that at that time they had no idea were coming.

SALVATION AS SPIRITUAL HEALTH IN 1 CORINTHIANS

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I. INTRODUCTION

There are nine uses of the Greek verb *sōzein*, *to save*, in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 1:18, 21; 3:15; 5:5; 7:16, twice; 9:22; 10:33; 15:2). There are no uses of the related noun *sōtēria*, *salvation*.

There are five uses of the Greek noun *sōtēria* in 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 1:6, twice; 6:2, twice; 7:10), but only one use of the verb *sōzein* (2 Cor 2:15).

My studies in three pivotal verses of 1 Corinthians (3:15; 5:5; 15:2) have convinced me that at least in those places, the salvation in view is not salvation from eternal condemnation. Instead, it is something else entirely, which we will discuss in this article.

My conclusions on those three verses have led me to wonder whether the other occurrences of *sōzein* and *sōtēria* in 1–2 Corinthians refer to the same type of *salvation*. Space, however, does not allow a consideration of the other references to salvation in the two Corinthian letters.

Let's begin at the verse that started me on this journey, 1 Cor 5:5.

II. THAT HIS SPIRIT MIGHT BE HEALTHY AT THE BEMA (1 CORINTHIANS 5:5)

Around twenty years ago at the Pre-Trib Study Group annual conference, I heard Dr. Dick Mayhew talk about the Day of the Lord. As an aside, he mentioned that the expressions “the Day of Christ,” “the Day of the Lord Jesus,” and “the Day of Jesus Christ” never refer

to the coming Tribulation, but instead always refer to the Judgment Seat (Greek, *Bēma*) of Christ (hereafter, Bema). He moved on with his presentation. My mind kept on working.

I wondered if he could be right. If so, what did that say about 1 Cor 5:5? I resolved to ask a friend of mine, Zane Hodges, that Sunday at church.

I told Zane what Dick Mayhew had said, and the conversation continued in this way:

BW: So is he right? Are the Day of Christ and its related expressions always a reference to the Bema?

ZH: Of course. That is a longstanding position in dispensationalism.

BW: If so, then what on earth does 1 Cor 5:5 mean where Paul says he delivered the sinning brother over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit might be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus?

ZH: Well, you know, Bob, that the Greek verb *sōzein* is flexible in meaning. One of its major NT meanings is to be made healthy. Remember, “your faith has made you well.” As you know, the words “made you well” translate *sōzein* (“to save”). So in 1 Cor 5:5 Paul was saying that he delivered over the sinning brother so that his flesh, that is, his fleshly inclinations, would be destroyed and so that his spirit, his inner man, might be spiritually healthy at the Bema.

BW: Wow. That is a radically different way to look at 1 Cor 5:5.

ZH: Yes. But it is really the only way that makes sense. Paul couldn’t be saying that if the sinning brother failed to respond properly to the coming discipline, he would end up in the lake of fire! Whether the sinning brother responded properly or not, he would remain eternally secure.

BW: That makes sense. But if that is the case, might that not influence the way we understand other uses of *sōzein*

in 1 Corinthians, like 1 Cor 3:15, “saved so as through fire”?

ZH: Yes, it might. That is a line of inquiry worth pursuing.

Very quickly I became convinced that at least 1 Cor 5:5 referred to being spiritual healthy at the Bema.

At that time, I did not consult the commentary literature. I’ve done that now, but before I share what the commentaries say, I will share my research that led me to confirm what Zane Hodges suggested.

The issue is sexual immorality in the church of Corinth. A man in the church of Corinth—“there is sexual immorality *among you*” (1 Cor 5:1, emphasis added)—had taken his father’s wife as his paramour. While this was surely not his own mother, but his father’s second wife, it was the sort of sin that even the immoral unbelievers of Corinth did not commit (v 1).

That this man was a believer cannot be doubted since Paul went on to say, “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person” (v 11).

Delivering him to Satan looks at church discipline. This expression is found twice in the NT, both in Paul—here and in 1 Tim 1:19-20. “Some...concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” The word *learn* is from *paideuō*, a verb associated with training children and with the chastising ministry of the Lord toward believers (cf. 1 Cor 11:32; Heb 12:6, 7, 10; Rev 3:19).

While 1 Cor 5:5 does not use *paideuō*, the idea is present in the reference to the destruction of the flesh, which we will now consider.

For the destruction of the flesh. This is a unique expression, found only here in the Bible. It does not refer to physical death because the aim of this destruction is restoration (“that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”).

In Paul, *the flesh* often refers to the sinful fleshly lusts of a believer (e.g., Rom 7:25; 8:4-5; 13:14; 2 Cor 7:1; 10:2). The destruction of the flesh refers to the cessation of the man’s sinful behavior. Paul’s aim was his restoration. If 2 Cor 2:5-11 refers to this man, then he was indeed restored to fellowship through church discipline.

That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. It never made sense to me that Paul was talking about salvation from eternal condemnation here. If he were, then he would be saying that if the man repented, he would regain everlasting life. And he'd be saying that if the man did not repent, then he would have lost everlasting life forever. But everlasting life cannot be lost (John 6:35; 11:26).

The contrast between the flesh and the spirit here is strong. Destruction of the fleshly lusts would result in the salvation of the man's spirit. In other words, his inner self would be spiritually healthy "in the Day of the Lord Jesus."

The following expressions all refer to the Bema:

- The day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14)
- The day of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:8)
- The day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6)
- The day of Christ (Phil 1:10; 2:16; 2 Thess 2:2).¹

Once I saw that "the Day of the Lord Jesus" referred to the Bema, the idea that the salvation in 1 Cor 5:5 referred to being spiritually healthy made perfect sense. In order to be spiritually healthy at the Bema, a believer must be walking in fellowship with Christ at the time of his death (or at the time of the Rapture). That idea is found also in 2 Tim 2:12 and Rev 2:26.

The word *save* (*sōzein*) in the NT often means to be physically or spiritually made well, healed, or healthy.² The following verses, all of which are translating *sōzein*, show this to be true:

- "Your faith has made you well" (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 8:48; 17:19; 18:42).
- "Your faith has saved you [i.e., made you well]" (Luke 7:50).
- "...the prayer of faith will save [i.e., heal] the sick" (Jas 5:15).

Admittedly, the theology of many will not even consider such an interpretation as possible in 1 Cor 5:5 (or the other two texts we are considering). Even if the interpretation I've laid out is obvious and compelling, one cannot accept it if his theology says that a believer

¹ See Bob Wilkin, "The Day' Is the Judgment Seat of Christ," at <https://faithalone.org/journal/2007ii/Wilkin%20The%20Bema%20Is%20the%20Day%20edited.pdf>. All the passages mentioned in this paragraph are considered in detail.

² BDAG writes concerning this type of salvation, "[to] *be restored to health, get well* ... Matt 9:21, 22b; Mk 5:23, 28; 6:56; Luke 8:36; Ac 4:9; 14:19," 982.

cannot be guilty of sexual immorality this extreme. (Most people hold that genuine believers may fall prey to sexual immorality, but that they will not remain in it for long, nor will they be involved in extreme forms of sexual immorality.³)

I do not expect to change the view of people who are convinced that this passage can't be talking about a born-again person. I'm writing to everyone who is open to the possibility that the most natural reading of the text is that Paul is talking about an errant believer being restored to fellowship via church discipline so that he might be healthy at the Bema.

A. The Views Concerning 1 Corinthians 5:5 in the Commentary Literature

Most commentators think that Paul is saying that if the sinning brother did not respond properly to the discipline coming, he would not make it into Christ's kingdom. Many commentators imply he would prove he was never born again in the first place. Some suggest that a failure to repent would result in loss of everlasting life.

I only found two commentators who suggest the interpretation of being spiritually healthy (or not) at the Bema. Dwight Hunt writes,

There are two strong clues as to what is meant. First, the verb *sōzō* is often used in the NT to refer to being *healed* or being healthy (cf. Matt 9:21-22; Mark 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 8:36, 48, 50; 17:19; 18:42; Acts 4:9; 14:9; Jas 5:15). Second, Paul's desire is that this man's spirit *will be healthy in the day of the Lord* Jesus. As already noted, *the day of the Lord Jesus* is the Bema (cf. 3:13 and comments there). Thus Paul's desire is that this man would respond well to church discipline so that his spirit would be healthy at the Judgment Seat of Christ.⁴

Tony Evans similarly comments, "In other words, Paul wants the man to be driven to repentance and even allows the devil to be used

³Most Calvinists would say that an isolated incident of heterosexual immorality, or even a short affair, is possible for a born-again person. However, they would say that even one incident of incest or homosexuality would prove that the person was not born again.

⁴Dwight Hunt, "1 Corinthians" in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Edited by Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010, 2019), 357.

as the instrument to accomplish this so that the man could be delivered from this sin before facing Christ's judgment seat."⁵

David Lowery sees this as referring to temporal judgment and church discipline, but does not discuss the Day of the Lord Jesus or the salvation of the spirit.⁶

Many commentators seem to imply that the salvation in question is ultimate deliverance from eternal condemnation, yet without clearly explaining how a believer can end up being eternally condemned.⁷ Ciampa and Rosner are clearer than many, saying that

...those who persist in flagrant sin have no future with God...[While] Paul is confident that God's faithfulness will confirm believers "until the end, blameless at the day of our Lord Jesus" (1:8)...future salvation is not a foregone conclusion for any who claim to be fellow believers but are sexually immoral (v. 11). It is not that ethical failure results in the loss of salvation, but that assurance of salvation depends in part on ethical progress...Paul does not answer the question of whether the man is presently saved. His point is that so-called brothers who engage in blatant sexual misconduct will finally be saved "on the day of the Lord" only if "the sinful nature is destroyed".⁸

In a Feb 19, 2019, blog, John MacArthur argues that this man is a genuine believer and that if he repents, he will avoid premature death. But, if he does not repent, he will die prematurely, yet "The inner man belongs entirely to Christ and we have absolute assurance that he **will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.**"⁹ How this statement fits with his view that all believers are guaranteed to persevere in faith and good works until death is not stated.

⁵ Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2019), 1155.

⁶ David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (NP: Victor Books, 1983), 514.

⁷ See, for example, Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 99-100; Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 90; PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 93; Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958, 1985), 86.

⁸ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 209.

⁹ <https://www.gty.org/library/bibleqnas-library/QA0140/what-does-it-mean-to-be-handed-over-to-satan>.

B. Conclusion of 1 Corinthians 5:5

This verse is very difficult for Calvinist interpreters since it does not readily fit their paradigm. It is no difficulty for Arminian interpreters since it fits their view that everlasting life can be lost. But the view that best deals with the particulars of the text is the Free Grace dispensational interpretation. The issue here is temporal judgment with the aim that the believer in question will be healthy at his eschatological judgment, the Bema.

III. SAVED SO AS THROUGH FIRE (1 CORINTHIANS 3:15)

The interpretation I learned for this verse when at Dallas Theological Seminary was that Paul was saying that even if all of a believer's good works were burned up at the Bema, such that he had no good works on display, he would be saved, that is, admitted into Christ's kingdom.

I never felt very comfortable with that view. Believers are secure no matter how many or how few good works they have. Why would Paul say something so obvious?

Besides, will there be a single believer at the Bema who has absolutely zero good works? The only way I could see that happening is if a believer died at the moment of faith or within minutes of his new birth.

Didn't the Lord Jesus say that even *unbelievers* do good works? He said,

“If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:11-13).

Didn't the Apostle Peter say that the unbeliever Cornelius was a man who had “work[ed] righteousness” (Acts 10:35)?

Even unbelievers still retain the image of God.¹⁰ It is likely that every human being does some good works almost every day. Of course, that is a far cry from saying that every human being is walking in fellowship with God, or that their lives are characterized by good deeds, or that their good works are rewardable. If a believer does good works with bad motives, then those works cease to have eternal rewardability (Matt 6:1-21). If an unbeliever does good works, he may gain blessings in this life (and a lessening of eternal torment if he fails to come to faith before death, Rev 20:11-14).

After coming to see salvation in 1 Cor 5:5, a Bema passage, differently, I began to wonder if 1 Cor 3:15 (which also deals with the Bema) also referred to being spiritually healthy at the Bema.

First, I will explain how I came to see the passage. Then afterwards I will discuss whether modern commentators agree or disagree with my interpretation.

The context concerns Paul and Apollos, spiritual believers. Verses 5-15 of chap. 3 deal with the Bema. Two men are used as illustrations: Paul and Apollos. Those men are mentioned by name in the verse which precedes this discussion (v 4), as well as in vv 5 and 6. In addition, Paul refers to himself or both of them using pronouns in vv 9 and 10. It is evident he is talking about them both when he speaks of planting and watering in vv 7 and 8. And after this section ends, he again refers to Paul and Apollos in v 22.

When we look back at 1 Cor 2:14–3:4, we see that Paul and Apollos illustrate spiritual believers, not carnal believers, or babes in Christ. It is vital that we understand that this is not some general Bema text. This is a specific Bema text concerning the judgment of believers who persevere to the end of their lives as spiritual believers.

Texts like Matt 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27, and 2 Cor 5:9-11 consider all types of believers at the Bema. But not this text.

The bad building materials lack eternal value. I once thought that gold, silver, and precious stones referred to good works and wood, hay, and straw referred to bad works. But one day a friend challenged me to consider the possibility that the issue is works with eternal value versus works lacking eternal value. He illustrated the latter

¹⁰ See, for example, Deidre Richardson, "Has Man Lost the Image of God?: A Study of the Old and New Creation," at <https://www.bible-knowledge.com/image-god-old-new-creation/>. Last accessed Dec 30, 2019.

types of works with a church youth group ski trip. The youth and adults on the trip will enjoy a nice vacation together. But aside from an occasional Bible study or spiritual conversation, most of what will be done that week will have no eternal value. He suggested that to do works which certainly have eternal value we should invest our lives in things which the Bible clearly commands.

Paul is talking here specifically about how spiritual believers, “wise master builder(s)” (v 10), build up the local church. His words can be applied to all areas of life, marriage, parenting, work, extended family, neighbors, etc. In a sense, of course, all areas of life are part of the ministry of the local church. So being a good spouse is part of building up the local church.

On giving this further thought, I came up with other examples. Golfing, fishing, hunting, watching sporting events, going on vacation, and the like are all morally neutral things. There is nothing wrong with any of them. But those things have little eternal value. If a believer spends too much time in those sorts of activities, he will find that much of what he did with his life will not be rewarded at the Bema.

There is no indication that the *wood, hay, and straw* represent bad deeds like immorality, murder, theft, lying, and so forth. If that is what Paul meant, he would have said so as he did in vice list passages (e.g., Gal 5:19-21).

Most buildings in the world today have a lot of wood in them. Wood is not a bad building material. But it is a building material that will not survive a fire. The point is that we should build on the foundation of the local church with works that will survive close inspection (i.e., fire) at the Bema.

The good building materials have eternal value. We know what some of these works are because Paul uses them as illustrations. Planting (i.e., evangelism) and watering (i.e., discipleship) are works that have eternal value. Whether you preach in the pulpit, teach a home Bible study, teach Sunday school, evangelize or disciple your children and others, you are laying up works that will survive the test at the Bema (assuming your motives are correct, Matt 6:1-21).

The burning up of works lacking eternal value is not the burning of all works. It is surprising to me now that I formerly thought that Paul was talking about the burning up of 100% of the works of a given

believer. In the context he is talking about the burning up of the *woody* sort of works, not the golden works. Paul will have a lot of rewardable works at the Bema. But not all of his works will be shown to have had eternal value.

Paul is urging spiritual believers to make their lives count. Maximize your life. Don't be satisfied being a half-hearted believer (e.g., Luke 8:14). Don't let cares, riches, and the pleasures of life choke out your effectiveness so that much of what you have done will go up in smoke.

The reference to future salvation shows regeneration is not in view. In Eph 2:8-9, Paul used a past tense (perfect passive indicative) to refer to the salvation of the believers in Ephesus. They had been saved in the past. They were still saved at the time Paul wrote. And they would remain saved forever.

Paul occasionally spoke of reaping everlasting life as a reward (Gal 6:7-9; cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5-7; 1 Tim 6:12, 19). But on those occasions, he was speaking of reaping *an abundant experience of everlasting life*. Paul never used the word *saved* (*sōzein*) in the future tense to refer to what many today call *final salvation*. For Paul, as with his Lord, salvation was final the very moment a person believed in Jesus.

Therefore, when Paul says, "he will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus," he is talking not about *final salvation*, but about a fullness of salvation that the enduring believer will receive at the Bema.

"The Day" (3:13) refers to the Bema. As with 1 Cor 5:5, the word *day* (*hēmera*) is used. The Day, by itself, refers to the Bema. Compare 1 Cor 4:3, "it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court." The word translated as *court* is actually the Greek word *hēmera*. Paul is saying that he does not fear being judged by any human *day*. His concern is the Divine Day, "the time" (*kairos*, 1 Cor 4:5).

Bottom line: the spiritual believer will be healthy at the Bema. A point often missed is that Paul is saying that even if some (many?) of a spiritual believer's works will be burned up at the Bema, he will still be spiritually healthy at the Bema.

If Paul meant to say that there will be some believers at the Bema who never did a single work that had eternal value, he could have said that.

A. The Views of 1 Corinthians 3:15 in the Commentary Literature

As with my view of 1 Cor 5:5, I did not find many commentators who were in essential agreement. Dwight Hunt writes,

While this future salvation is commonly understood as being granted kingdom entrance, it is possible that in this context Paul is thinking of being found spiritually healthy at the Bema. Compare 5:5 and comments there.

Paul and Apollos, the examples under consideration (vv 5, 6, 9, 10), were both spiritual men who, if they continued on the same path, would be found healthy at the Bema, though both would surely have some works that failed to pass the test of eternal value.¹¹

David Lowery lays out four different understandings of the two types of building materials (the first of which is the view I suggest):

(a) The **gold, silver, costly stones** refer to the enduring quality of the builder's work; and the **wood, hay, or straw** suggest work that is temporary and valueless. This view is supported by "work" (v. 13) and "what he has built" (v. 14). (b) The three expensive materials suggest sound doctrine which the builder "builds" into people's lives, and the three valueless materials are false doctrines. (c) The first three materials refer to the worker's worthy motives, and the other three to his unworthy motives (cf. 4:5). (d) The "gold, silver, costly stones" refer to believers who constitute the church...and the "wood, hay, or straw" represent unregenerate people present in the church...¹²

PHEME PERKINS, though not crystal clear as to what the salvation is, does refer to Paul and Apollos as likely the builders in question, and she does speak of builders who "might forfeit some penalty if the work was not up to code."¹³

CIAMPA and ROSNER, though not taking the passage precisely as I've laid out, do agree on several points.¹⁴

¹¹ Hunt, "1 Corinthians," 355.

¹² Lowery, "1 Corinthians," 511-12.

¹³ Perkins, *First Corinthians*, 74-75.

¹⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 150-57. They suggest that the good building materials may concern what 'is important about Christian ministry'...The issue then is not reward or punishment, heaven or hell, but reward or no reward. It is the builder's 'work'

Most commentators suggest that the words “saved so as through fire” refer to getting into Christ’s kingdom, though they are often quite vague about whether there will be believers with zero works and even what the good and bad building materials represent.¹⁵

B. Final Thought on 1 Corinthians 3:15

Understanding and explaining the salvation in 1 Cor 3:15 is so much easier if one recognizes that “the Day” (1 Cor 3:13) refers to the Bema.

IV. PRESENT TENSE SALVATION CONTINGENT ON HOLDING FAST TO THE GOSPEL (1 CORINTHIANS 15:2)

The common interpretation of 1 Cor 15:2. Most commentators understand the salvation mentioned in 15:2 to refer to getting into Christ’s kingdom and avoiding eternal condemnation.¹⁶

Robertson and Plummer say that *you are being saved* refers “to what is being done for the future. They accepted his teaching; in it they stand with a firm foothold; and they are thus among *hoi sōzomenoi* [those who are being saved]...those who are in the way of salvation.”¹⁷

Holding fast is nearly universally understood as continuing to believe and apply the truth of Paul’s gospel. Most commentators believe Paul is warning the readers that for them to obtain *final salvation* (or in order to prove they are actually saved), they must continue to abide

(3:13) that will burn up, not *the builder* himself...The word *reward* could be translated ‘wages, pay, salary,’ the main concept being ‘closely bound up with that of an employer’s assessment of the value of the work.’...Whatever its [the reward’s] precise nature, its essence is ‘praise from God’ (4:5)” (pp. 156-57).

¹⁵ For example, Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 65, write, “The *sōthēsetai* [i.e., The words *he shall be saved*] can hardly refer to anything else than eternal salvation, which he has not forfeited by his bad workmanship...Salvation is not the *misthos* [reward], and so it may be gained when all *misthos* is lost. But it may also be lost as well as the *misthos*. The Apostle does not mean that every teacher who takes Christ as the basis of his teaching will necessarily be saved: his meaning is that a very faulty teacher may be saved, and ‘will be saved, if at all, so as through fire.’” See also the complete discussion by Lowery, Perkins, and Ciampa and Rosner.

¹⁶ See, for example, Perkins, *First Corinthians*, 179; Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, 283-84.

¹⁷ Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 331.

in Paul's gospel until the end of their lives. Perseverance is required in order to make it into Christ's eternal kingdom.

Leon Morris summarizes his view of v 2 in this way:

If people profess to believe the gospel, but have not given due consideration to what that implies and what it demands, they do not really trust Christ. Their belief is groundless and empty. They lack saving faith.¹⁸

Ciampa and Rosner write concerning the need for perseverance for the Corinthians to have eternal salvation,

Those who believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and those who reject that doctrine both agree that people who do not persevere in the gospel have no true claim on its promised blessings and benefits.¹⁹

Charles Hodge writes:

The present tense is used to express either the certainty of the event, or the idea that believers are in this life partakers of salvation. They are already saved. There is to them no condemnation. They are renewed and made partakers of spiritual life. Their salvation, however, is conditioned on their perseverance. If they do not persevere, they will not only fail of the consummation of the work of salvation, but it becomes manifest that they never were justified or renewed.²⁰

For years the typical explanation of 1 Cor 15:2 was unsatisfying to me. It did not fit with Paul's teachings elsewhere. Why should someone have to hold fast to Paul's gospel in order to stay saved or prove that he is saved? And why was Paul using the present tense to speak of salvation?

Zane Hodges came up with a solution to this problem and it satisfied me for a few years. He suggested that the Greek verb translated as *if you hold fast* (*katechō*) in this context essentially means *if you have believed*. He writes,

The problem in correctly understanding this verse is caused by the English translation. A very flexible Greek

¹⁸ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 201.

¹⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 744.

²⁰ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1857, 1980), 311.

verb (*katechō*) is translated “hold fast” in the NKJV (the AV has “keep in memory”). But the verb could equally be rendered “take hold of” or “take possession of.” In that case it would refer to the act of appropriating the truth of the Gospel by faith.

Closer examination of the Greek text suggests that this is indeed the correct understanding. The Greek word order can be represented as follows: “by which also you are saved, by that word I preached to you, if you take hold of it, unless you believed in vain.” From this it appears that Paul is thinking of the saving effect of the preached word when it is duly appropriated, unless in fact that appropriation (by faith) has been in vain.²¹

Holding fast is not the same as one-time believing. While grasping something might be synonymous with believing it, the context suggests that Paul is referring to *an ongoing* holding fast, or *an ongoing* believing (and applying), of his gospel that is required for the salvation to continue. The conditional particle *if* (*ei* in Greek) before *you hold fast* suggests this is not automatic. In fact, it is quite similar to Col 1:23, “if indeed you continue in the faith” (*ei ge epimenete tē pistei*), another Bema passage.²² Their present salvation would only continue *if the believers in Corinth continued to hold fast to Paul’s gospel*, unless Christ did not rise from the dead (the subject of 1 Corinthians 15), in which case they had believed in vain.

Paul goes on in vv 3-11 to remind the readers what his gospel is. It is the message that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, rose from the dead, all in keeping with OT prophecies, and then He appeared to many, including Paul.

In vv 12-19, Paul counters the view that “some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead” (v 12). There was a need for the rest to hold fast to the gospel Paul preached lest they be led astray (cf. 1 Tim 1:18-20).

Paul’s use of the word “believe” (pisteuō). Paul used the word *believe* at the end of v 2 and again in v 11. If he had meant *since you have believed*, Paul would have used a perfect tense of *katechō*, not a

²¹ Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1981, 2017), 153-54.

²² See, for example, Charles C. Bing, “The Warning in Colossians 1:21-23,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 2007): 74-88.

present, and he would use the verb *pisteuō*, not *katechō*. In addition, he probably would not introduce the conditional word, *if*.

It is extremely unlikely that even if *katechō* were a well-known synonym for believing, Paul would use the synonym first and then the actual verb. Why not the other way around?

The context deals with the Bema. As with 1 Cor 3:15 and 5:5, the context here deals with the Bema. While Paul does not refer to the Day of the Lord Jesus here, he does end the chapter with a magnificent reference to the Bema: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” To be steadfast and immovable and always abounding is akin to holding fast to Paul’s gospel. Or, to put it the other way, one must hold fast to his gospel in order to be steadfast, immovable, and abounding. One cannot cease to believe (and apply) the death and resurrection of Christ and yet still be an overcoming believer.

The salvation in 15:2 is most naturally being spiritually healthy. As with 1 Cor 3:15 and 5:5, the verb *sōzein* is used. In all three places the context is the Bema. In this passage the focus shifts from being spiritually healthy *then* to remaining spiritually healthy *now*. A person must persevere in the faith in order to be healthy at the Bema (Col 1:21-23; 2 Tim 2:12). One who is spiritually healthy now must hold fast to the gospel in order to remain spiritually healthy (1 John 2:28).

I was able to find a few commentators who essentially agree with the interpretation I’ve suggested. Dwight Hunt writes,

Furthermore, it is the Gospel **by which also [believers] are saved, if [they] hold fast that word.** This statement stresses the fact that the gospel includes more than justification, which brings forth eternal life; it also includes daily sanctification (*are saved*) if believers *hold fast* (or abide in) the *word* (cf. John 8:31-32; Rom 1:15; 10:9; 1 Cor 15:2; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:10; Jas 1:21). This daily sanctification process relates to the quality of life the Christian will spend in eternity.²³

Tony Evans concurs, saying,

Paul affirms that the same Gospel that justifies sinners, giving them eternal life, also sanctifies them as saints

²³ Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 758.

(**being saved** here refers to present tense salvation for deliverance from the power of sin). But they must continually abide (i.e., **hold fast**) in the knowledge and application of God's Word (15:2).²⁴

V. CONCLUSION

Three passages in 1 Corinthians which speak of present (1 Cor 15:2) or possible future (1 Cor 3:15; 5:5) salvation have been shown to be rewards passages, not passages dealing with who gets into Christ's kingdom. Two of those three texts refer directly to the Bema in the verse itself when they refer to "the day of the Lord Jesus" (5:5) or simply "the Day" (3:13-15). The third verse is part of the great resurrection chapter, which ends with a strong statement about our labor in the Lord not being in vain (15:58).

To be *saved* in these three passages refers to being *spiritually healthy*. That should be the aim of every believer. We are spiritually healthy today by being grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ (15:2). We, as part of a group of believers who are encouraging one another until Christ returns, can remain spiritually healthy by holding fast to the gospel.

²⁴ Evans, *Bible Commentary*, 1173.

JACOB'S ETERNAL SALVATION AND GENESIS 32

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Book of Genesis records many events in the life of Jacob. Two of the most prominent are found in Genesis 28 and Genesis 32. The first describes the Lord's appearing to the patriarch at Bethel, with angels ascending and descending on a ladder. At this time, the Lord repeats the covenant He made with Abraham. Afterwards, Jacob erects a pillar in honor of the Lord and vows to give a tenth of what he earns to Him (Gen 28:10-22).

The second event takes place at Peniel. Genesis 32 records another encounter between the Lord and Jacob. The patriarch and the Angel of the Lord wrestle through the night.¹ At the conclusion of this "fight," Jacob is permanently injured from a touch by the Lord. However, he is blessed by the Lord with a new name. That new name is Israel.

A common interpretation of the encounter at Peniel is that this is when Jacob was spiritually saved.² In 2016 at a conservative

¹Hosea 12:4 says that Jacob wrestled with an angel. This angel is identified as God in Gen 32:30. This angel was probably the Angel of the Lord and the Preincarnate Christ. See Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 80-81. See also Randy Rheaume, "Abraham Rejoiced to See My Day and Saw It": Jesus' Take on Theophanies," *JOTGES* (Spring 2019): 73-79.

²Examples of those who take this position are: C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Genesis, Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 1:307; Kurt Strassner, *Opening Up Genesis* (Leominster: Day One Publishers, 2009), 118, 129; and J. H. Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 573-74. Strassner calls Jacob a "despicable character" in Genesis 28 who is "radically changed inside and out" in Genesis 32. Walton comments that Jacob, in Genesis 28, did not have the same relationship with God that his grandfather Abraham did.

Evangelical seminary, I was attending a class on Genesis. There were approximately twenty students in the class. This was the position of the professor, as well as every other student in the class.

At least three arguments are given for this position. The first is that one can see a great difference in Jacob in Genesis 32 as compared to when he made the vow in Genesis 28.

The second argument is that after Peniel, the reader observes a change in character in the patriarch, and this signals a change in nature. Some attribute this change in character to spiritual maturity. Jacob was already saved but learned in this encounter to trust God fully.³ Others, however, indicate that this change in character indicates the new nature that saving faith brings. In the commentary tradition, sometimes it is difficult to determine what the author thinks on this topic. Often a comment is simply made that Jacob had a change of character. Since many of these writers believe spiritual salvation brings such a change, there is at least the implication that there has been a spiritual change in Jacob at Peniel.

The third argument is that the encounter at Peniel is an accurate picture of what happens when one experiences eternal salvation. This is seen in the wrestling and the renaming of Jacob which takes place.

This article will evaluate the merits of these arguments which clearly support a Lordship Salvation view of how a person receives eternal life. In analyzing these issues, this article will also address certain themes in Genesis. These themes are found in other narratives concerning Jacob, as well as the other patriarchs and certain leaders in the OT. Finally, this article will suggest another purpose and interpretation of Jacob's encounter at Peniel.

II. THE FIRST ARGUMENT: THE VOW

Some point out that Jacob must have been eternally saved in Genesis 32 because of the change that takes place in him. This change contrasts with how he acted in his previous encounter with God, as recorded in Genesis 28. The vow made by Jacob in Gen 28:22 demonstrates that change.

³ See, for example, Ross, "Genesis," 80-81; and Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 446. Ross says Jacob now became "bold" in faith and crippled in his own strength as a way of life. Waltke says there is a change in Jacob's manner of living.

Boice is one of those who maintains that the vow in Genesis 28 paints a very negative picture of Jacob. By making this vow, Jacob shows a lack of faith. It also shows the reader that Jacob is completely self-centered. He only wants a blessing from God.⁴ Even though the vow is directed towards the Lord, it is also focused on Jacob and what he is willing to do. However, this willingness is dependent upon the Lord's doing something for him. The Lord must fulfill certain promises towards Jacob. The way the vow is made shows that Jacob is not trusting in the Lord to fulfill those promises. Jacob is trying to force the Lord into an agreement between himself and the Lord.

Boice adds that the whole account in Genesis 28 shows that Jacob is deceitful. Part of the purpose of the vow is simply to preserve his life. The vow is a bargaining tactic, and the promise on Jacob's part to give a tenth of what he earns springs from a carnal mentality.⁵ Jacob, in showing this lack of faith, is not sure God will bring him back to the land. In Boice's view, this demonstrates that Jacob is an unbeliever at this point in the narrative:

...we cannot help but wonder if the revelation of God to Jacob at Bethel had made anything more than the most rudimentary impression and achieved anything more than perhaps the mere beginning of his conversion.⁶

Ross interprets Jacob's vow in Genesis 28 in a much more favorable light. In fact, he flatly contradicts Boice by noting that Jacob did indeed believe what God promised. His oath was not a way to bargain with God:

Jacob's promise to worship God at Bethel was solemnized by oath. Vows were not made to induce God to do something He was not willing to do. They were made to bind the worshiper to the performance of some acknowledged duty. Jacob made his vow on the basis of what God had guaranteed to do. So he was taking God at His word and binding himself to reciprocate with his own dedication.⁷

⁴James M. Boice, *Genesis 12–36: A New Beginning* (Ada, MI: Baker, 1998), 774–75.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 774.

⁷Allen P. Ross, "Studies in the Life of Jacob Part 1: Jacob's Vision: The Founding of Bethel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July 1985): 223.

One aspect of how the vow is interpreted is the sense of the word “if” in v 20. Boice admits that the word can have the meaning of “since” and that Jacob could be saying that since God is going to fulfill His promises to Jacob, Jacob will give a tenth of his earnings. In that case, Jacob would not be bargaining with God. He would simply be stating a fact. But Boice says this is not the proper way to see the word, based upon the “mood” of the passage. Instead, Jacob did indeed have doubts about God fulfilling His promises. Even if the word is to be translated “since,” it would only reflect the idea that Jacob did not want to openly express his doubts toward God.⁸

This is an interesting comment when one considers Jacob’s actions in the verses leading up to the vow (vv 16-19). Boice argues that Jacob, in giving the vow, does not have faith in God. But in the passage, the reader is given several details regarding Jacob’s response to the Lord when he wakes up. He acknowledges the presence of the Lord (v 16). He responds with fear and awe (v 17). He builds a pillar for the Lord and pours oil over it in order to commemorate what happened there (v 18). All of these actions express an attitude of respect and worship. Only after these things does Jacob give the vow. S. Lewis Johnson comments:

Jacob’s vow at the conclusion of the experience has sometimes been called mere bargaining. He does vow that, if God will be with him and bless him, then the Lord will be his God. On the other hand, his response to the experience of the vision argues otherwise. He was filled with awe, which von Rad calls “a feeling of pious shuddering.”⁹

Johnson clearly believes that in Genesis 28, Jacob is a believer. The patriarch was not concerned about the things promised by God, but with the presence of God. The result was that Jacob worshipped God and made a covenantal pledge. In v 15, God had promised to be with Jacob wherever he went. Jacob applied that promise to a particular situation. He did not see the tithe in v 22 as a gift to God, but as

⁸ Boice, *Genesis Part 1*, 775.

⁹ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “Jacob’s Ladder and the Son of Man: Or, Grace Unsought, and Unforgettable,” *Emmaus Journal* 18:2 (Winter 2009): 146. He refers to the comment found in Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 321.

giving God what belonged to Him already. One may say that Jacob was not a *mature* believer, but he was a believer.¹⁰

In the final analysis, it is a moot point if Jacob doubted God's promise. Certainly, a believer can have doubts. This is seen throughout the Scriptures. Boice is reading his Lordship Salvation view of faith into this passage. For him, a "true believer" cannot doubt God.

Even if one looks at the passage in Genesis 28 to find negative aspects of Jacob's vow, he is confronted with the fact that there is ample evidence to show that Jacob did believe God. While one might doubt the eternal salvation of Jacob in Genesis 28 on the suggestion that a believer would not bargain with God, the Bible teaches otherwise.

A. Bargaining Believers

In the broader context of Genesis 28, the reader sees that Jacob finds himself in a trying time. His brother Esau wants to kill him. He is forced to flee to a foreign land. In such a situation, believers can indeed doubt God's care for them as they face these fears.

In the OT, examples of this include Gideon and Barak in the Book of Judges. The author of Hebrews speaks of these men as examples of godly believers and comments that they were among those who by *faith* subdued kingdoms, did works of righteousness, and obtained promises from God (Heb 11:32-33).¹¹ In the case of these judges in Israel's history, we find men who showed fear as they faced the possibility of physical death. In Judg 6:36-40, Gideon looks for reassurance from the Lord through a sign involving a fleece. Discussing this event, Chisholm comments:

When one surveys the evidence in the Book of Judges, it becomes apparent that the Spirit empowered recipients for physical conflict, but possession of the Spirit did not insulate the recipient from foolish behavior. This problem first surfaced with Gideon, who asked for a sign from God shortly after being endowed with the Spirit.¹²

¹⁰ Johnson, "Jacob's Ladder," 146.

¹¹ All of Hebrews 11 gives examples of believers. See, Kenneth Yates, *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 173-87. Even if one takes the position that these men are unbelievers, it is clear that the author of Hebrews gives them as examples to follow. New Testament believers can follow the example of these men.

¹² Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., "The Ethical Challenge of Jephthah's Fulfilled Vow," *Bibliotheca*

Gideon is a man chosen by God, empowered by the Spirit, charged with leadership from God, and listed among the faithful in the Book of Hebrews. However, he still struggles with his faith. He looks for miracles from the Lord to show that God will fulfill what He has promised. The implications are obvious. For Gideon, the promise of God is not sufficient for him to act.

In the Book of Judges, another warrior of God, when faced with an obstacle, also uses bargaining tactics. Barak was facing battle and sought reassurance. In his case, he sought this assurance in a woman rather than the Lord (Judg 4:4-8). The prophetess Deborah revealed to Barak that God had commanded him to destroy the armies of the Canaanite general Sisera and that the Lord had promised to give him victory. However, Barak will not do what the Lord commanded unless Deborah joins him.

Clearly, Barak is negotiating with the prophetess: “And Barak said to her, ‘If you will go with me, then I will go: but if you will not go with me, I will not go’” (Judg 4:8).

O’Dell correctly points out the lack of faith on Barak’s part. He says that the judge saw Deborah as a good luck charm. He was hedging his bet. If God did not come through, and he lost the battle, perhaps the presence of Deborah would save his life. He relied on his own strength and cunning.¹³ Just as some have said concerning Jacob, Barak also is fearful and places conditions upon his obedience to what the Lord has commanded. In Barak’s case, the word “if” explicitly has this meaning.

In all three of these examples, the men involved were faced with death before their enemies. All three had been given the promise of deliverance. If Jacob is bargaining with God, he is like the other two. While one can certainly argue that these men show a lack of confidence in what God has said, there is nothing in the text that excludes them from being seen as genuine believers. In the cases of Barak and Gideon, we know them not only to be believers, but men whom the author of Hebrews commends as faithful examples for us, despite their failures.

Sacra (Oct, 2010): 411.

¹³ John L. O’Dell, “The Prophetess and the Reluctant Soldier,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* (Spring 2005): 42.

B. Fearful Believers in Genesis

In the Book of Genesis itself, the reader sees that a believer can have doubts and fear. In fact, the book relates the story of another patriarch who experienced both doubts and fear concerning the Lord's promise that He would return him to the Land of Promise.

Twice in the life of Abraham we see this lack of faith. In Gen 12:10-20, Abraham tells his wife to lie to the Pharaoh in Egypt about being his wife. She does so, and the king takes her as a concubine. God intervenes in the situation. When asked why he lied, Abraham says he feared for his life.

Abraham follows the same pattern in Gen 20:2-11. He tells his wife to lie to King Abimelech about being his wife. Once again God intervenes and saves both Abraham and Sarah. Abraham again admits that he lied because he feared for his life (Gen 20:11).

It is true that the account in Genesis 12 occurs prior to Gen 15:6, in which God declares Abraham righteous because he believed God. Most believe Gen 15:6 is when Abraham received eternal life.¹⁴ If that is the case, the first incident of Abraham's fear for his life and episode of lying occurred prior to salvation. However, the parallel account in Genesis 20 clearly occurs after Abraham was spiritually saved. God had promised him that that he would die at peace at a good old age (Gen 15:15). But in Genesis 20, he doubts God will bring this about or bring him back to the land God had promised to give him.

Abraham's son and Jacob's father Isaac did the same thing. He had his wife Rebecca lie because he feared for his life (Gen 26:6-7, 9).

When one compares Abraham with Jacob at Bethel, the issue of protecting the patriarchs outside the Promised Land is relevant. In both Genesis 12 and 20, Abraham is outside of the land, but God remains faithful to him. At Bethel, Jacob's fears are tied to leaving the Promised Land. The Lord promises to protect him in this situation.

God had also promised to give Abraham a son. In Gen 16:1-2, Abraham and Sarah have doubts that the Lord will fulfill this promise. By using Hagar to bear a son, Abraham and Sarah attempt to work around the Lord. Once again, the Lord fulfills His promise to the couple.

¹⁴ Some, however, based upon Heb 11:8, believe Abraham was saved when God called him from Ur of the Chaldees. This would mean Gen 15:6 is a statement of what was already true in Abraham's case.

The point of interest here is that scholars do not doubt the eternal salvation of Abraham in Genesis 16 and 20, even though Abraham doubts God's word and does things his own way. It is inconsistent that many of these same scholars question Jacob's salvation at Bethel because he doubts God words and tries to do things his way.

Vawter sees the parallels between Jacob and Abraham's post-salvation doubts and fears. Speaking of Jacob, he says that, "Jacob is a prime example of one who chooses to help God along rather than trusting God to keep His word."¹⁵ If this means Jacob was not a saved individual, then neither was Abraham. However, Gen 15:6 makes this latter conclusion impossible. Believers can have doubts, fear, and lack of faith in God's promises.

III. THE SECOND ARGUMENT: JACOB'S CHANGE OF CHARACTER

In connection with the doubts and fear demonstrated in the life of Jacob, it is common among many to see a drastic change in his character after his encounter with God at Peniel. Some see this change as a sanctification issue, while others see it as a proof of his reception of eternal life.

Those that see Jacob receiving eternal life at Peniel say that his actions prior to Genesis 32 are the actions of an unregenerate man. In addition to not trusting God, he steals the birthright from his brother Esau. He lies to his father Isaac. He does the same thing with his uncle Laban. After Peniel, it is maintained, there is a changed nature which is made evident by his actions. Howell, for example, says that after Peniel there is a "marked change in Jacob's character" and that it comes about as a "result of wrestling with God and God's seeing Jacob's undeterred passion for His blessing."¹⁶

A. Jacob's Change in Genesis 32

Jacob's supposed transformation is seen when he meets his brother Esau after Peniel. After seeing the face of God and surviving, he is

¹⁵ Paul Vawter, "An Exposition of Jacob's Experience at Jabbok: Genesis 32:22-32," *Maranatha Baptist Theological Journal* (Fall, 2013): 43.

¹⁶ Brian Howell, "God's White Flag: Interpreting an Anthropomorphic Metaphor in Genesis 32," *Southeastern Theological Review* (Winter 2010): 45.

no longer afraid to meet Esau. This lack of fear is contrasted with the doubts he has in chapter 28, as well as the fear he had at the prospect of meeting Esau in Genesis 32. Before his encounter with God, Jacob had sent gifts to Esau twice (vv 20-21). He also sent his family before him. After wrestling with God he goes *before* his family. This shows he no longer has the fear that characterized him before.¹⁷

However, did such a change take place? Jacob is separate from the company when he meets the Lord at Peniel. Does the reader assume that he was *not* planning to join the group later and then lead his family when they met his brother? That is not stated. We don't know that meeting God face to face caused a change in his plans.

Howell says that Jacob attempted to send gifts to Esau. However, after the encounter with God and meeting Esau, he successfully gives these gifts to his brother. Jacob insists that Esau take the gifts after Esau at first refused them (Gen 33:10). This is said to show that Jacob, who had formerly stolen from his brother, now becomes one who gives and blesses. It also reminds the reader of the tithe he promised to give God if He would bring him back to the land safely (Gen 28:20-22). Jacob fulfills his promise.¹⁸

This positive spin on Jacob's actions seems forced. There simply is no change in Jacob's actions before and after the encounter at Peniel. In addition, we are told the reason Jacob sent the gifts to Esau. He wanted to appease his brother in the hope that Esau would receive him (Gen 32:20). Jacob seeks his brother's favor because of Jacob's past crimes against Esau, and this intention is restated upon their meeting *after* he wrestles with the Lord (33:8). The attempt to change Jacob's motives to humility rather than self-preservation, despite no change in action and repeated statements of intention, is simply unwarranted.

Another element to this meeting is the division of Jacob's family. First, Jacob divides his family into two groups prior to wrestling with the Lord. He repeats this action *after* wrestling with the Lord and right before meeting with Esau (33:1-2). Howell acknowledges this repetition, but insists the two same actions are to be interpreted differently. After the encounter with God, such actions are examples of

¹⁷ Ibid., 43-45.

¹⁸ Ibid., 45.

prudence as Jacob is simply being cautious.¹⁹ Before, those same actions were sinful. Howell is suggesting he can read the mind of Jacob.

We are not left to wonder why Jacob divided the company. In Gen 32:7 it was because Jacob was “greatly afraid” and distressed. If Esau attacks his family, the first group will be lost, but at least the second company will survive. He repeats this action after his wrestling match with the Lord. If he divided them because he feared for their lives the first time, there is nothing that suggests a shift in intention after Peniel. He still fears the wrath of Esau and doubts the Lord’s protection.

After meeting Esau, Jacob seems to display another example of lack of faith in God’s promises. When he bows to the ground seven times and has his family bow as well (33:3-7), he seems to have forgotten what God had said to him in the blessing from Isaac (Gen 27:29). Esau was to bow down to *him*, not the other way around.

If Jacob was trusting in the Lord to fulfill His promises and protect him during his meeting with Esau, it stands in sharp contrast for him to bow down to the brother who was to bow down to him. This is after Jacob separates the family and showers Esau with gifts. None of these actions speak of a man who is confident in his protection from God. He still fears Esau.

The climax of this meeting is yet another display of deceit by Jacob. Esau seeks to travel with Jacob to Seir (33:12). Jacob agrees to meet him, coming from behind, claiming his caravan is slow due to women and children (33:14). Esau traveled to Seir, but Jacob travels to Succoth (33:16-17).

B. Jacob’s Character after Genesis 33

There seems to be no immediate or drastic change to Jacob’s character after Peniel. To argue, based on a perceived change, that Jacob was spiritually saved there is invalid. In addition, as was observed in the discussion above on Gideon and Barak, believers can continue to exhibit sinful traits. Olson plainly states this about Gideon. He says, “Before the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him, Gideon is cowardly,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

hesitant, and secretive. After the Spirit of the Lord has come upon him, Gideon does not change (Judg 6:11-34).²⁰

The same is true for Jacob. Even as Jacob matures in his faith, his actions continue to be mingled with sin. If one says that Jacob was not saved prior to Genesis 32 because he was a deceiver who lacked faith, then he was not saved later either. He remains a deceiver who lacks faith.

In Gen 34:25-29, Jacob's sons kill Hamor and his son Shechem because of the rape of their sister Dinah. Jacob's response to this massacre is noteworthy:

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I *am* few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. *I shall be destroyed, my household and I.*" (Gen 34:30 NKJV, emphasis added)

Yet again, the patriarch expresses fear over the possibility of death for himself and his family. Of course, his family cannot be destroyed in this manner in light of God's promises to Jacob.

In Gen 35:1-5, Jacob is told by the Lord to return to Bethel and worship Him. Jacob responds by telling his household to rid themselves of their idols in preparation for this encounter with the Lord. While certainly this is a godly action and shows growth on the part of Jacob, it does beg the question as to why there are idols still present in his household at this point. This is long past the time of the Peniel incident.²¹

The actions of Jacob in the Book of Genesis are full of lies, power plays, fears, lack of faith, favoritism of one wife over the others, and self-interest. If one attempts to determine, based upon Jacob's character, the time at which Jacob received eternal life, that person will run into all kinds of obstacles. The reason for this is simple. Both in the NT and the OT, good works and change in character are never

²⁰ Dennis T. Olson, "The Book of Judges," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 2:767.

²¹ Many years ago at the annual GES conference, the late Charles Ryrie made a NT parallel to this. He pointed out that in Acts 19:18-19, Luke records the fact that at Ephesus believers in Christ still had magical books and practiced the things written in them. Luke says that Paul stayed in the city for two years, so for some believers this went on for a time (Acts 19:10-19).

meant to prove the salvation of anyone.²² The only requirement is to believe in the One whom God has promised will come (in the case of OT believers) or the One who has come (in the case of NT believers) to give us eternal life.

IV. ARGUMENT THREE: JACOB'S ENCOUNTER AT PENIEL IS A PICTURE OF ETERNAL SALVATION

The account at Peniel is a watershed moment in Jacob's life. It is no surprise then that some scholars come to the account at Peniel and hold to the idea that this is when Jacob received salvation. This is fleshed out through several elements of the episode. These would include Jacob's wrestling with God and his surrender, the "confession" of Jacob's given name, and the change of that name to Israel.

A. Wrestling with God

Some argue that in the act of Jacob's wrestling with God and his subsequent surrender to Him in asking for a blessing, the patriarch provides the reader with an illustration of the salvation experience. In this view, saving faith is pictured as the result of a broken, defeated unbeliever who submits his life to the Lord. Concerning the moment in which Jacob clings to the Angel of the Lord, Fokkelman writes:

The old Adam has been shaken off, "Jakob" stays behind on one bank of the river. A new man, steeled and marked, Israel, has developed and he continues the journey on the other bank.²³

Howell interprets Jacob's submission in a similar fashion. In that submission "Jacob's true heart is borne out," and afterwards God establishes a new reality for Jacob, which includes a new name and character. God sees the commitment that Jacob makes with Him.²⁴

This view of Jacob's wrestling with God finds a willing partner in a popular understanding of the gospel of spiritual salvation today.

²² Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Haysville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 2006), 231.

²³ Jan Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 222.

²⁴ Howell, "God's White Flag," 46.

In that gospel presentation, commitment and surrender are necessary components in order to experience that salvation. John MacArthur falls into this camp by his definition of saving faith. Faith is more than simply believing something is true. It also involves a turning from sin and surrendering to God.²⁵

However, using the metaphor of surrendering in a wrestling match as a picture of receiving eternal salvation presents problems. If one says that salvation is by faith alone (Eph 2:8-9), then the metaphor requires a complex definition of faith that now includes the concept of surrender. Jacob's grandfather Abraham received eternal life without any kind of wrestling match or struggle with God (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-4).

Hodges discusses the meaning of faith in the case of Abraham in Genesis 15:

Abraham's "faith was imputed to him as righteousness." The word rendered *as* is the Greek preposition *eis* and we could equally well render the statement: it was accounted to him for righteousness. Abraham's faith became a substitute for the righteousness he otherwise lacked. For Paul, when "Abraham believed God," the transaction called justification occurred in the absence of works of any kind. For this event, only faith mattered.²⁶

In addition, if we take the metaphor at face value, God is involved in the fighting. Matthews observes that, "the idea of the Lord attacking Jacob is puzzling to commentators."²⁷ It would be very strange to picture the process of receiving eternal life in this manner. Instead, it is better to see this as the discipline of the Lord in Jacob's life. God is teaching him some truth. God does this with His children (Heb 12:5-7; Rev 3:19).²⁸

²⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 31.

²⁶ Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 114.

²⁷ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, the New American Commentary, vol 1B (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 559. Matthews makes an analogy with Moses in Exod 4:24-26. God comes to do battle with Moses. In the case of Moses, we see that when God struggles with a person, it is not a good illustration of spiritual salvation. Moses was already saved.

²⁸ Yates, *Hebrews*, 193-97.

Simply put, receiving eternal life is a free gift by God's grace through simple faith. To use the example of a wrestling match and surrender as an illustration of such a transaction is an attempt to import a gospel of works into an OT character.

B. Jacob's "Confession"

In the account of the patriarch at Peniel, Jacob's name plays a major role. Some have taken the use of his name as a confession. Gerhard von Rad maintains that the mention of the name is an important factor:

In the entire section which follows one must bear in mind that the ancients did not consider a name as simply sound and smoke. On the contrary, for them the name was closely linked with its bearer in such a way that the name contained something of the character of the one who bore it.²⁹

Those who hold this view believe that Jacob's very name is tied to sin and his status before God. The name Jacob has the basic meaning of "deceiver." It follows then that when the Lord asks Jacob to give his name, Jacob, by complying, confessed that he is a sinner. For some this is a necessary step to receive salvation.

MacMillin is an example of this view. He says that when God asked Jacob what his name was, God already knew. But God wanted to compel Jacob to "utter its dread syllables with its awful sound." The sinner must see the "full import of his utter sinfulness." It is only then that the sinner can throw himself on the infinite mercy of God.³⁰

This confession of sin, for some, also involves repenting of sin as well. Jacob wants to leave a sinful lifestyle behind. Ross takes this view even though he does not think this was a requirement for Jacob to experience eternal salvation:

When one remembers the significance of names, the point becomes clear: a well-established nature, a fixed pattern of life must be turned back radically! In giving his name, Jacob had to reveal his nature. This name, at least for the narratives, designated its owner as a crafty overreacher.

²⁹ von Rad, *Genesis*, 321.

³⁰ Walter F. MacMillin, "Jacob at Peniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Jul 1934): 297-98.

Here the “heel-catcher” was caught and had to identify his true nature before he could be blessed.³¹

However, there is a failure to prove the idea that giving a name is a form of confession. While the meaning of names is significant in certain OT passages, there is no other account that is used to support the idea that a person's name is a form of confession of sin. There is an unjustified attempt here to impregnate Jacob's mention of his name with complex spiritual themes such as sin, confession, repentance, and ultimately his standing before God.

There is nothing in the passage itself that leads the reader to conclude that Jacob is confessing his sinful lifestyle when he tells the Lord his name. While Esau remarks on the meaning of Jacob's name prior to Jacob's flight to Laban (Gen 27:36), there has been no other reference to it since. The absence of such a connotation, especially in the Peniel episode, seems strange if the reader is expected to read repentance and sorrow into the account.

In addition, there is once again an attempt to apply unstated intent into Jacob's actions. The text does not state that Jacob, when asked by the Lord to give his name, considered this a form of confession. Jacob simply responds by giving his name. Its purpose is to pave the way for a new name.

Lastly, even if Jacob's name is a form of confession, this is not relevant to the issue of Jacob's salvation. Confession of sin is something a *believer* does in order to be in fellowship with the Lord.³² The Bible never makes it a requirement to receive eternal life.³³

Bryant rightly points out the purpose of the confession of sin. Commenting on 1 John 1:9, he states:

Who needs to confess sins? “We do!” John says, referring to himself, the other apostles, and his believing readers. Secondly, John's Gospel was specifically written to tell us how to receive eternal life and never is confession of sins

³¹ Allen P. Ross, “Studies in the Life of Jacob Part 2: Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Oct 1985): 345.

³² Being a believer and being in fellowship with the Lord are not the same thing. Fellowship refers to intimacy. Some believers are in fellowship with the Lord; others are not.

³³ While some appeal to certain verses in the NT to insist on the necessity of confession of sin for eternal life, these verses are taken out of context. One such passage is Rom 10:9-10. But these verses do not mention the confession of sin. In addition, the salvation in Romans 10 is salvation from the effects of sin, not salvation from hell. See Hodges, *Romans*, 298-99.

mentioned as a condition. Thirdly, Jesus taught believers to confess sins when He gave the model prayer, telling the disciples to pray, “Forgive us our sins.”³⁴

C. Jacob’s New Name

The climax of Jacob’s encounter at Peniel is that the Lord gives him a new name— Israel. This new name is significant. Vawter says there is a consensus among scholars that the giving of the name involved more than simply obtaining a new title. Keil and Delitzsch, as well as Leupold, say it signifies a faith that Jacob did not have before the encounter.³⁵ Curtis says the new name even proclaimed a change in how Jacob lived his life.³⁶

Once again, to read an experience of spiritual salvation into Jacob’s new name is importing something into the text that is not there. That is not what receiving a new name signifies in Genesis. Abram receives a new name, as does Sarai (Gen 17:5, 15). Abraham was justified by faith in chapter 15, but receives a new name many years later. When the grandparents of Jacob receive their new names, it has nothing to do with eternal salvation. Wenham agrees with this assessment. The significance of Abraham’s new name involves a covenant God made with Abraham. This covenant,

...involves changing Abram’s name to Abraham, and Sarai’s to Sarah and the introduction of the rite of circumcision as a mark of belonging to the covenant people... Their new names, “Father of a multitude” and “Princess,” are an assurance that Isaac would indeed be born, and that Abraham would not simply become a great nation, but father of many nations.³⁷

It is also interesting to observe how the name “Israel” is used throughout the Bible. Fairchild points out that the names Jacob and Israel are interchangeable. One would not expect this to be the case if the name Israel meant the man was spiritually saved at that point.

³⁴ Bob Bryant, “Confessions of Sins in the Spirit-Filled Life,” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2001): 54.

³⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 306-307; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1950), 195.

³⁶ Edward M. Curtis, “Structure, Style and Context as a Key to Interpreting Jacob’s Encounter at Peniel,” *JETS* 30.2 (June 1987): 135.

³⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 43.

This would be especially true if the name Jacob represented who he was prior to salvation. God refers to Jacob by that name, for example, at the burning bush (Exod 3:14-16), centuries after Peniel. It is also used that way in the NT (Matt 22:31-32).³⁸

In the passage of the burning bush, Jacob is called Jacob. However, God tells Moses to call together the elders of "Israel." It seems that the name Jacob is used for the individual, while in this passage the name Israel has special significance for the nation. McMillin is certainly incorrect that after Peniel the name of Jacob no longer exists.³⁹

It seems, then, that the name Israel carries with it more of a corporate significance. There is meaning in the change of Jacob's name for the nation at large. It is evident that when Abraham had his name changed it pointed to the impact he would have on nations. This is deserving of more study. In any case, we cannot conclude that Jacob's receiving a new name at Peniel is an indication that this new name signified a new nature or new life for Jacob.

V. CONCLUSION

Many think that the account of Jacob in Genesis 32 teaches the readers about the spiritual condition of Jacob. Some say we see the man gain spiritual maturity. Others say Jacob receives eternal life in his encounter with God. This is due, in part, to the difference between the Jacob of Genesis 32 and the Jacob of Genesis 28.

However, there is reason not to see such a distinction in the two accounts. The two stories have much in common. In both, Jacob is at the border of the Promised Land. In both, he is dealing with a threat from Esau. He also meets an angel in both, and both use the same word for "encounter/meet."⁴⁰ Both occur at night, and Jacob is alone. In certain ways, Jacob comes across in a negative light in each encounter.

It seems that the two meetings Jacob has with the Lord are to be seen as a unit. This article has suggested that to focus on the issue of Jacob's salvation or spiritual maturity is misguided. Vawter agrees, saying that the main point is that God is going to accomplish His

³⁸ Arthur B Fairchild, "Jacob and Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Oct 1905): 698-712.

³⁹ McMillin, "Jacob at Penuel," 299.

⁴⁰ Curtis, "Structure," 135.

goals even if His people (Israel) are uncooperative.⁴¹ God is going to bring the nation of Israel back to the land. This is indicated in both Genesis 28 and 32.⁴² This would have been very applicable to the people to whom Moses wrote the Book of Genesis.

Ross makes this point when he writes concerning Jacob's wrestling match with God at Jabbok:

The point of the story for the nation of Israel entering the land of promise is clear: Israel's victory will come not by the usual ways nations gain power, but by the power of the divine blessing. And later in her history Israel would be reminded that the restoration to the land would not be by might, nor by strength, but by the Spirit of the Lord God who fights for His people.⁴³

Ross also says that the fight that Jacob engages in is a metaphor for the struggles that the *nation* will have both with God and with men/nations.⁴⁴

The worst interpretation of Genesis 32 occurs when one tries to see in Jacob's struggle an illustration of how a person receives eternal life. Perhaps we cannot be dogmatic about when Jacob became a believer.⁴⁵ But, the exegete can be sure it did not occur when Jacob confessed his sin by stating his name. It did not occur when he gave up fighting with God and surrendered to Him. The proof of his spiritual salvation was not in a transformed life. Such arguments are an attempt to force an erroneous NT view of how a person receives eternal life back into the life of Jacob.

Instead, Jacob received spiritual salvation the same way his grandfather did. He believed in the coming Messiah for eternal life (Gen 15:6). That is what the NT teaches as well (Rom 4:1ff).

⁴¹ Vawter, "Jacob's experience at Jabbok," 45

⁴² Tremper Longman, III and David Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 239.

⁴³ Ross, "Jacob Part 2," 351.

⁴⁴ Ross, "Genesis," 81.

⁴⁵ In this writer's opinion, Jacob had believed in the coming Messiah and His kingdom when he desired the blessing of the firstborn as recorded in Genesis 25. Certainly Abraham and Isaac had passed down to Jacob the promises God had made to them. This is why Jacob valued the birthright.

IS FAITH EVEN A TINY PART OF GOD'S GIFT (EPHESIANS 2:8-9)?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Is faith the gift of God? John MacArthur gives a standard Reformed statement that it is:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast (2:8–9). Our response in salvation is faith, but even that is not of ourselves [but is] the gift of God. Faith is nothing that we do in our own power or by our own resources. In the first place we do not *have* adequate power or resources. More than that, God would not want us to rely on them even if we had them. Otherwise salvation would be in part by our own works, and we would have some ground to boast in ourselves. Paul intends to emphasize that even faith is not from us apart from God's giving it.¹

MacArthur then takes the direct route to faith as God's gift when he claims that God gives unbelievers that faith. God does so in order that they can believe. That is, faith *is* the entirety of God's gift. Most grace people assume that refuting the direct route closes the door on faith as God's gift. But that is not so. Three interpretive options that allow the *faith-as-God's-gift* theory have already appeared in the literature. These views take *kai touto* ("and this/that" in Eph 2:8) in one of three ways. The first is that *this* refers to faith as God's gift. The

¹ John F. MacArthur, *Ephesians*, MacArthur NTC (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1986), 60f. MacArthur goes on to invoke the Kühner-Kuyper-Countess argument. This article will show that this weak argument proves nothing.

second is that *this* refers to faith as one of God's three gifts. The third is that the phrase *and this* is used adverbially and introduces faith as God's gift.

This article argues against all three views, closing the door on the notion that faith is even a tiny part of God's gift in Eph 2:8. Finally, the correct alternative will be given. This approach stays true to this passage's actual subject: eternal salvation is by grace.

II. VIEW 1: *TOUTO* ("THIS") REFERS TO FAITH AS GOD'S GIFT

Despite being popular among Calvinists, this view faces huge hurdles. First, it disrupts the passage's flow with a parenthesis. Second, it abandons Paul's normal usage of neuter singular forms of the demonstrative pronoun *houtos* ("this").

A. Distortion #1: Being Made Alive Precedes Faith

Few realize that treating faith as God's gift makes part of Eph 2:8 parenthetical. James Candlish admitted this in 1895:

...the majority of modern interpreters, including Calvin,² refer it ["this is not of yourselves"] to salvation. The chief reason for this latter opinion is that the following clause (ver. 9), "not of works," can hardly be connected with faith, but must refer to salvation. But it is quite in Paul's style to interrupt the direct connection of his thoughts by a parenthetical clause such as this, so that the construction would be: "by grace ye have been saved through faith... not of works"; while the words, "and that not of yourselves, God's is the gift," come in as a parenthesis [explaining the source of faith].³

²Notably, John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. W. Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1864), 227, treats salvation, not faith, as God's gift in 2:8. Calvin states, "When, on the part of man, the act of receiving salvation is made to consist in faith alone, all other means on which men are accustomed to rely, are discarded. Faith, then, brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ." On this, Calvin is far closer to the truth than most Calvinists.

³James S. Candlish, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians with Introduction and Notes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), 58. The ellipsis within his citation of Eph 2:8-9 originated with him.

Treating faith as God's gift requires a parenthetical interruption.⁴ Abraham Kuyper embraced this idea. He explicitly inserts parentheses:

For then it reads: "You are saved by mere grace, by means of faith. (Not as tho[ugh] by this means of faith the grace of your salvation would be partly *not* of grace: no indeed not, for even that faith is *not of yourselves*, it is the gift of God.) And, therefore, saved through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast, for we are His workmanship."

But then this creates a parenthesis, which is perfectly true; but even this is truly Pauline (emphasis in original).⁵

Like Kuyper, Candlish claimed to expect a parenthesis here: "...it is quite in Paul's style to interrupt the direct connection of his thoughts by a parenthetical clause such as this." Though Paul is not averse to inserting parentheses, Candlish did not know that the hallmark of parentheses is that they lack "proper syntactical connection," as A. T. Robertson's introduction to that topic contends: "Such a clause, inserted in the midst of the sentence without proper syntactical connection, is quite common in the N. T."⁶

Ephesians 2:5f illustrates Robertson's point that parenthetical portions are "without proper syntactical connection." Specifically,

...He [God] made alive together with Christ [third person main verb]
(by grace you have been saved)⁷ [parenthetical second person verb]
and He raised together and seated together... [third person main verbs]

The phrase "By grace you have been saved" in 2:5 is parenthetical because the second person verb is "without proper syntactical connection." Parentheses belong in 2:5f because part of the sentence lacks proper syntactical connection. However, that does not apply in 2:8.

⁴He invented a parenthesis to prevent the text from saying that salvation results from works, since it hardly makes sense (under any view) that faith results from works. Actually, the text does not need a parenthesis in the first place, because God's gift is not faith.

⁵Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. H. DeVries (New York and London, 1900), 2:414.

⁶A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923; reprint, Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934), 433.

⁷Some translations (e.g., NET, NIV, NJB, NRS) use em-dashes ("—") here to denote the parenthesis.

Even Candlish admits that the phrase “and that not of yourselves” has a proper syntactical connection: “Whether the following clause, ‘and that not of yourselves,’ refers to faith, or to ‘ye have been saved,’ is a doubtful question; for *both interpretations are grammatically possible...*” [emphasis added].⁸

Candlish fractures Paul’s thought here with a theologically motivated parenthesis. Apparently, he embraced the Calvinistic supposition that “dead” (Eph 2:1 and 5) denotes inability. However, Paul’s grammar precludes such a definition for *dead*: People are saved (made alive) through faith. Timothy Nichols argues persuasively in that:

In their own chosen terminology, what each commentator [Lincoln, Wood, Alford, Lenski, Eadie, Anders, Bruce, Martin, Hoehner, Beare and Wedel, Simpson, Abbott, Hodge, and Robertson] affirms is this: faith is the *instrumental cause* of salvation, but grace is the *principle cause* [emphasis in original].⁹

Instrumental cause must precede (by at least a split second) the action that is effected. A simple, but profound implication is that instrumental means must precede (even by a millisecond) the action for which it is a means. An illustration may help:

The car started through Mr. Smith’s turning the key. (Key turns, then car starts.)

Ephesians were made alive (saved) through faith. (Faith first, then one is made alive.)

Both underlined phrases preceded the italicized ones.¹⁰

⁸ Candlish, *Ephesians*, 58.

⁹ Timothy R. Nichols, *Dead Man’s Faith: Spiritual Death, Faith, and Regeneration in Ephesians 2:1-10* (Headwaters Christian Resources, 2016), 67. In footnote 78 on the same page, Nichols includes the references for each listed commentator affirming that faith is the instrumental cause, and grace is the principle cause. The book by Nichols derives from his 2004 Th.M. thesis by the same title at Chafer Seminary, for which the present writer was the advisor.

¹⁰ How did Paul describe the condition of the Ephesians when they were unbelievers? They were spiritually dead. The following is the sequence:

1. They were spiritually dead unbelievers.
2. They believed the message of life.
3. A millisecond after believing, they were made alive spiritually.

Alert readers will note that if people believe while spiritually dead, Paul could not define “dead” under the rubric of total inability. That said, Eph 4:17-18 defines “dead” as *separated from the life that God gives*, not an inability to believe:

Ephesian Gentiles are not to walk in futility of mind, as other Gentiles do (e.g., unbeliev-

The Calvinist model is akin to the car starting before one turns the key. It reverses the sequence which Paul's grammar requires. That is not this view's only distortion.

B. Distortion #2: *Touto (This) Refers to Pistis (Faith)*

New Testament statistics strongly deny that *touto* refers to *faith*. Viewing faith as God's gift here also runs afoul of Paul's usage of neuter singular forms of the demonstrative *houtos*. Paul simply does not use neuter forms of *houtos* to refer to feminine nouns, such as *pistis* (*faith*).¹¹ In the Majority Text, Paul uses 139 neuter singulars of the word *houtos*, usually translated as *this*. One hundred of those refer to multiple-word conceptual units:

- 13 uses referring to a paragraph (a neuter referent)
- 20 to a sentence (a neuter referent)
- 66 to a clause (a neuter referent)
- + 1 to a phrase (a neuter referent)
- 100 uses referring to multiple-word conceptual units

He uses neuter singulars thirty-nine (39) times to refer to or modify neuter words.

- 9 uses referring to a neuter relative pronoun
- 5 uses referring to another neuter word
- + 25 uses as an attributive adjective modifying a neuter word
- 39 uses referring to or modifying a neuter word

The main take-away is that Paul simply does not refer to masculine or feminine nouns via neuter forms of *houtos*.

Some may find comparing the nominative singular forms of *houtos* with a masculine, a feminine, and a neuter noun helpful:

Masculine: *houtos*: houtos *ho anthrōpos* = this man (*anthrōpos* is masculine)

Feminine: *hautē*: hautē *hē pistis* = this faith (*pistis* is feminine)

Neuter: *touto*: touto *to arnion* = this lamb (*arnion* is neuter)

ing Gentiles (4:17). Other Gentiles walk in futility of mind, because their understanding is darkened (4:18a). The understanding of other Gentiles is darkened, because they are alienated from the life of God (4:18b).

¹¹ See this article's appendix.

These forms are quite distinct. Only *hautē* would point to a feminine antecedent. In Eph 2:8, Paul uses *touto*. The standard Calvinist approach has an insurmountable hurdle.

1. Per Raphael Kühner, gender-mismatch of referents is infrequent.

Some modern writers claim that the neuter of *houtos* frequently refers to masculine or feminine nouns. Detective work is needed, because those claims come from secondary and/or unattributed secondary sources.

John MacArthur does not credit the originator of the notion that the neuter pronoun might refer to faith (*pistis*, a feminine Greek noun):

Some have objected to this interpretation, saying that *faith* (*pistis*) is feminine, while *that* (*touto*) is neuter. That poses no problem, however, as long as it is understood that *that* does not refer precisely to the noun *faith* but to the act of believing [the argument ultimately traces back to Raphael Kühner].¹²

Robert Countess mentions Abraham Kuyper and his source, Raphael Kühner:

...there is ample precedent in Greek syntax for viewing *pistis* [*faith*], *touto* [*this*] as is herein being done. In Abraham Kuyper's *The Work of the Holy Spirit* reference is made to Kü[h]ner's *Ausführliche Grammatik der Griech. Sprache* (II, 1, p. 54).

Kuyper's translation runs thus:

A neutral demonstrative pronoun is frequently used to refer to a preceding masculine or feminine noun, when the meaning expressed by this word is taken in a general sense [etc] (Kuyper, p. 412).¹³

¹² MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 61.

¹³ Robert H. Countess, "Thank God for the Genitive," *JETS* 12 (Spring 1969): 120. See Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. H. DeVries (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 2:412. Kuyper cited the 1870 edition of Kühner. I only have access to the third edition: Raphael Kühner with Bernhard Gerth, *Satzlehre* [*Syntax*], vol. 1.2 of *Ausführliche Grammatik der Griechischen Sprache*, 3rd ed. (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1898), 60 (§361).

Kuyper's rendering (parroted by Countess and echoed by MacArthur) might give the false impression that neuter demonstrative pronouns frequently have masculine or feminine antecedents. In giving that impression, Kuyper missed the context for Kühner's assertion about demonstratives with masculine or feminine antecedents. The original context deals with *exceptions*, not normal practice. It would be helpful to summarize sections from Jelf's translation of Kühner,¹⁴ which is more accessible to this journal's readers than Kühner's German.

In Jelf, §377 (p. 36; § = section) starts with a general rule: "... the predicate... agrees with its subject in gender, number, and case..." Several of his following sections (§378: pp. 36f; §379: pp. 37f; §380: pp. 38f; §381: pp. 39-41; §382: p. 41; etc.) have as their introduction this statement (p. 36): "...it will be convenient not to confine ourselves to the *predicative exceptions*, but to consider at the same time *all cases of this sort* which spring from the same principle" [emphasis mine].

Note that §381 (= Kühner §361, from which Kuyper translated) deals with various *exceptions*. Kühner did not mean that writers regularly used neuter demonstratives with masculine or feminine antecedents. *Rather, it is a rare exception*. Kühner claimed that this rare exception typically involved conceptual masculine/feminine nouns.

An illustration may clarify. Consider the following statement:

Frequently, lottery grand-prize winners soon end up penniless.

The question that needs to be asked is thus: what frequently happens?

1. Is it that a high percentage of lottery-ticket buyers are grand-prize winners?
2. Is it that a large proportion of the small number of winners soon goes broke?

Number 2 is correct. Millions buy tickets, but an infinitesimally small percentage of buyers win big. A tiny minority of that little number successfully hang onto their wealth.

¹⁴ William Edward Jelf, *Syntax*, vol. 2 of *A Grammar of the Greek Language: Chiefly from the German of Raphael Kühner*, 3rd ed. (Oxford and London: Henry and Parker, 1861).

Similarly, Kuyper's translation of Kühner misleadingly starts with, "A neutral demonstrative pronoun is frequently used to refer to a preceding masculine or feminine noun..." It might sound as though Kühner discusses a common feature (neuter demonstratives with masculine or feminine antecedents). Not at all. It is rare, even in classical Greek.¹⁵ Kühner's actual point is that a certain feature tends to be present when this exceptional pattern occurs: the noun in question is abstract. The next section will show it to be even rarer than Kühner thought.

William Jelf wrote a Greek grammar that was largely (but not totally) a translation of Kühner. He translates Kühner's statement, "Besonders häufig steht das Neutrum eines demonstrativen Pronomens in Beziehung auf ein männliches oder weibliches Substantiv, indem der Begriff desselben ganz allgemein als blosses Ding oder Wesen oder auch als ein ganzer Gedanke aufgefasst wird" as: "The neuter demonstrative also is joined with a masculine or feminine substantive when this expresses a general notion, as is most frequently the case in abstract substantives."¹⁶

Jelf's translation clarifies that gender mismatch is uncommon. Although Kühner's sentence starts with "*Besonders häufig*" ("most frequently"), his point was not that masculine/feminine antecedents for neuter demonstratives are common. Rather, the common denominator for this exception is that an abstract noun is present.

2. Gender-Mismatch of referents is even rarer than Raphael Kühner thought.

The latest edition of Jelf's translation cites Kühner's first edition (1834-35). Grammarians had not yet recognized Koinē Greek (330 BC–AD 330) as a distinct stage of the Greek language. Kühner focused on the classical (pre-330 BC) period, not upon the Koinē of the NT. Classical usage has minimal relevance for Paul. Most Pauline referents for neuter singular uses of *houtos* are multi-word conceptual

¹⁵ Kühner, *Satzlehre*, §361, only adduced a few examples; Kuyper, *Spirit*, 2:412, listed a few more. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 334, n. 51, says, "the usage is not at all frequent." He notes that some examples cited by Countess have conceptual multi-word antecedents. Kühner, Kuyper, and Countess seem not to have considered the possibility of multi-word conceptual antecedents.

¹⁶ Jelf, *Grammar*, 2:40 (§381).

ones. The rest are to neuter nouns.¹⁷ He simply does not give evidence of the type of gender-mismatching that many Calvinists foist upon Eph 2:8.

In this regard, Dan Wallace critiques Countess (whose list derives from Kühner) in two ways: (1) the examples are not from the NT, and (2) Countess (and Kühner) seem unaware of the possibility of a conceptual (multi-word) antecedent (Paul's most frequent usage of the neuter singular):

He [Countess] lists three examples from Attic Greek, arguing that such a phenomenon occurs frequently in Greek literature (120). His approach has weaknesses, for not only does he cite no NT examples, but two of his classical illustrations are better seen as referring to a concept than to a noun. Further, the usage is not at all frequent and in every instance requires explanation.¹⁸

The appendix shows that the multi-word conceptual antecedent is Paul's most frequent category. He simply does not refer to masculine or feminine antecedents via neuter demonstratives.

C. Summary of the Argument Against Faith as God's Gift

Those taking faith as God's gift must treat part of the passage as parenthetical, sometimes admitting that Paul finishes by saying that by-grace salvation is not of works. That is, no reason exists for saying that faith is not of works. The only justification for a parenthesis is to rescue Calvinism. The arguments are not text-based.

Paul (in his 139 uses) does not refer to masculine or feminine nouns via neuter singular demonstrative pronouns. Various Calvinists have twisted Kühner's assertion to claim that gender criss-crossing of demonstrative pronoun referents is frequent. Not only is it not frequent in Paul, but none of his neuter singulars of *houtos* do so.

¹⁷ See the appendix.

¹⁸ Wallace, *Grammar*, 334, n. 51.

III. FAITH AS ONE OF THREE GIFTS

This article has argued for a conceptual multi-word referent for *touto* in Eph 2:8. Markus Barth derives three distinct gifts from Eph 2:8a (For by grace you have been saved through faith). At first glance, his view might seem to take 2:8a as a conceptual referent. That is not the case. Barth ultimately argues for three gifts of God here.

The neuter pronoun ‘this’ may refer to one of three things: the [1] ‘grace,’ the verb [2] ‘saved,’ the noun [3] ‘faith.’ It is Augustine’s merit to have pointed out that the *gratia gratis data* [“freely given grace”] includes the gift of [3] ‘faith’ to man...¹⁹ Still, the pronoun ‘this’ in Eph 2:8 need not have the restricted 20 (anti-Pelagian) meaning [e.g., word #3, faith]. It may also refer to the eternal election by grace and the ‘outpouring’ of [1] grace mentioned in 1:4-8, and to the preaching of the ‘true word, the message that [2] saves’ (1:13) [underlining mine].²¹

Barth appropriates Augustine’s view that faith here is a gift of God. Then, in the underlined words, he claims that the gift extends beyond faith. He then proceeds to add grace and salvation as gifts. He imagines three gifts here.

This is not a conceptual referent. Barth thinks Paul was speaking of three gifts. But if Paul meant that, the text should have a feminine plural demonstrative *hautai*. Instead, it reads *touto*.

IV. AN ADVERBIAL NON-ANTECEDENT

Some try to cut the Gordian knot. Wallace cites Blass-Debrunner-Funk and BDAG to suggest that there might be no antecedent.²² Each suggests the translation of *kai touto* as “and especially.” In a course paper,²³ Nichols raised several objections to Wallace’s proposal:

¹⁹ Augustine detailed his views in *De Dono Perseverantiae* (*On the Gift of Perseverance*), which he wrote in 428 or 429, shortly before his death in 430.

²⁰ *Restricted* refers here to following Augustine’s view, that God’s gift is confined to *faith*. Barth seems to view faith as one aspect of the gift.

²¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, AB, vol. 34, W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman, gen. eds. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 225.

²² Wallace, *Grammar*, 335, n. 54, cites BDF, 151 (§290.5), BAGD, s.v. *houtos* 1.b.g. (The reference in BDAG is the same as in the earlier edition Wallace cited).

²³ Ann Marshall and Timothy R. Nichols, “The Neuter Uses of *Houtos* in Paul,” (paper

...[1] the adverbial use of *kai touto* would be rare, requiring considerable validation that it is, in fact, adverbial here. Furthermore, Wallace's case for this category is shaky at best. [2] Three of his four examples [Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 6:6, 8—the last of which differs in the *Majority Text*] have a clear conceptual referent, and [3] the last one [3 John 5] (problematic, but very possibly adverbial) is outside of Paul. [4] In fact, every neuter use of *houtos* in Paul has a referent (usually conceptual) in the context. Wallace appeals to a category of usage for *touto* which Paul simply does not evidence.²⁴

Blass-Debrunner, BDAG, and Wallace may like a no-antecedent view, but they all fail to validate it.²⁵ This leaves only the multi-word referent options.

V. MULTI-WORD CONCEPTUAL ANTECEDENT

A contextual conceptual referent exists in Eph 2:8a. Is *through faith* part of *touto's* referent? Two options exist:

1. By grace you have been saved through faith: by grace through faith salvation.
2. By grace you have been saved: by grace salvation.

A. The by-Grace-through-Faith Kind of Salvation

Harold Hoehner says, "...*touto* refers back to 2:4-8a and more specifically 2:8a, the concept of salvation by grace through faith."²⁶ This view sees a conceptual reference to an entire clause. Thus, it accounts for *touto* being both singular and neuter.

B. The by Grace Kind of Salvation

Timothy Nichols argues that Paul, through repetition, identifies the central topic of Eph 2:8:

submitted for 305 Advanced Greek Grammar, Chafer Theological Seminary, Fall 2000).

²⁴ Nichols, *Dead Man's Faith*, 84.

²⁵ Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, ICC, J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton, gen eds. (London and New York: Clark, 1998), 226, argues for conceptual referents for 1 Cor 6:6 and 6:8 (in the critical text NA; *Majority Text* has a different reading).

²⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 343.

Paul's own summary of his main thought in 2:1-7 is *chariti este sesōsmenoi* (by grace you are saved) [2:5]. Paul reintroduces this clause at the beginning of 2:8 as his continuing topic of discussion to add the new information that by-grace salvation occurs *dia tēs pisteōs* (through faith). The continuing topic of discussion, then is *chariti este sesōsmenoi* [by grace you are saved], i.e., by-grace salvation.²⁷

Ephesians 2:8 contains the one and only use of the word *pistis* (“faith”) in the entire paragraph (2:1-10). This reinforces the point that Paul's topic is by-grace salvation.

VI. IS “THROUGH FAITH” PART OF THE REFERENT OF *TOUTO*?

Paul's continuing topic is by-grace salvation. Note the restatements of this topic in context:

Dead people being made alive with Christ... (2:5)

By grace you are saved (2:5)

By grace you are saved (2:8)

Making people alive by grace is the type of salvation that both 2:5 and 8 discuss. God graciously made formerly dead people (with nothing good about them) alive. That is the over-riding topic. Paul's one-time clarification that by-grace salvation happens through faith does not change the topic. It is still the by-grace salvation. The referent for *touto* (“this”) in Eph 2:8 should be by-grace salvation, not by-grace-through-faith salvation.

A parable may help: Once upon a time, someone gave Jack a computer mouse. Its heavy, clear-plastic blister-packaging defied being opened with bare hands, so he used a pair of scissors. Then Jack connected the mouse to his computer and began using it.

What was the gift? The mouse. What was the role of the scissors? It was the instrument by which Jack avails himself of the gift—crucially, not part of the gift itself. From where did the scissors come? The story does not say. It focuses on the mouse as a gift. Likewise, faith is the instrument by which one accesses the gift of the by-grace-kind-of-salvation (cf. John 4:10-14; Acts 10:45; 11:17; Rom 6:23; Heb 6:4;

²⁷ Nichols, *Dead Man's Faith*, 87f.

Jas 1:17). The passage does not say from whence faith comes. Some theological systems are tempted to insert their supposition that God gives the faith, but that is not exegesis. The text is silent on that issue.

VII. CONCLUSION

Allowing faith to be even part of the gift of God in Eph 2:8 is like letting a camel put its nose into a tent. Before long, the whole camel is inside. Paul's grammar does not allow that the gift of God is faith (standard Reformed view). Neither does it permit saying that faith is one of God's three gifts, as Markus Barth argues. The non-antecedent adverbial "and especially" model of BDAG, BDF, and Wallace is a sneaky, but untenable, way to make faith God's gift. Nor should anyone say that the "by-grace-through-faith kind of salvation" is the gift. Paul wants believers to know that the "by-grace kind of salvation" is God's gift. We should not concede that faith is even the tiniest part of God's gift in Eph 2:8-9, because Paul does not say that.

VIII. APPENDIX

This appendix does not classify all uses of *houtos* in the NT. It classifies Paul's uses of neuter singulars (whether they are demonstrative pronouns or demonstrative adjectives). Ephesians 2:8 is an example of a neuter-singular demonstrative pronoun that refers to a clause, Paul's most common usage (66 times).

The statistics are for the Majority Text, but bracketed references are from Nestle-Aland. Underlined references indicate when Nestle-Aland lacks a neuter singular form of *houtos*.

1. 114 Uses as a Demonstrative Pronoun

A. 100 References to Multiple-Word Conceptual-Units

- i. **Thirteen (13) refer to a paragraph:** Rom 1:26; 4:16; 5:12; 13:11; 1 Cor 11:17; Eph 1:15; 3:1, 14; Phil 1:19; Col 1:9; 2:4; 1 Th 2:13; 3:7.
- ii. **Twenty (20) refer to a sentence:** Rom 13:6; 15:9, 28; 1 Cor 4:17; 7:6; 9:23; 11:10, 22, 30; 2 Cor 4:1; 7:13; 13:10; Eph 5:5, 17, 31; 6:13; Phil 1:25; 1 Th 3:5; 2 Th 2:11; 1 Tim 2:3.

iii. **Sixty-six (66) refer to a clause:** Rom 1:12; 2:3; 6:6; 7:18; 9:8; 10:6, 7, 8; 12:20; 14:9, 13; 1 Cor 1:12; 4:4; 5:3; 6:6; 7:26, 29, 35, 37; 9:17; 11:24b, 25b; 12:15, 16; 15:50; 2 Cor 1:17; 2:1, 9; 5:14; 8:10ab, 20; 9:6; 10:7, 11; 12:8; Gal 3:2, 17; Eph **2:8**; 4:17; 6:1; Phil 1:7, 9, 18, 22, 28; 3:15ab; Col 3:20; 1 Th 3:3; 4:3, 15; 5:18; 2 Th 3:10; 1 Tim 1:9, 16; 4:10, 16; 5:4; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:10; 3:1; Tit 1:5; Phlm 12 [verse 11 in N-A], 15, 18. [N-A adds Rom 14:18; 1 Co 6:8].

iv. **One (1) refers to a phrase:** 2 Cor 13:9.

B. Fourteen (14) References to a Neuter Word

i. **Nine (9) refer to a neuter relative pronoun:** Rom 7:15ab, 16, 19, 20; 11:7; 1 Cor 7:24; Gal 6:7; Phil 2:5.

ii. **Five (5) refer to a neuter word:** 1 Cor 10:28 (*to pōloumenon* = something sold in v 25); 11:24a (*mou to sōma* = My body); 2 Cor 5:2 (*skēnous* = tent in v 1); Eph 6:8 (*agathon* = good).

2. Twenty-Five (25) Neuter Uses as a Demonstrative Adjective Modifying a Neuter Word

Rom 7:24; 9:17; 11:25; 13:6; 1 Cor 5:2; 11:25, 26; 15:53ab, 54ab; 2 Cor 2:3; 3:10; 5:5; 7:11; 9:3; 13:1; Gal 2:10; Eph 5:32; 6:12, 18, 22; Phil 1:6; Col 1:27; 4:8. [N-A adds 2 Cor 12:14.]

JESUS' INTERVENTION IN THE TEMPLE: ONCE OR TWICE?

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The Gospel of John has Jesus intervening dramatically in the Temple (John 2:13–22) before he begins his public ministry in Galilee (John 3:24; 4:3; cf. Mark 1:14). However, the only such event reported in the Synoptics occurs at the end of Jesus' ministry (Mark 11:15–18 and parallels). What are we to make of this discrepancy?

Logically, there are four possible explanations:

1. The Synoptics are right about when the event took place—so that John has moved it to the beginning of the ministry, presumably for theological reasons. This is the view of the overwhelming majority.
2. John is right about when this happened—so the Synoptic Gospels have moved it to the end of Jesus' ministry (again, presumably for theological reasons).²

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² See, e.g., Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (LNTS 321; London: T&T Clark, 2006) 158–61; F. M. Braun, "L'expulsion des vendeurs du Temple (Mt., xxi, 12–17, 23–27; Mc., xi, 15–19, 27–33; Lc., xix, 45–xx, 8; Jo., ii, 13–22)," *RB* 38 (1929) 188–91; R. A. Edwards, *The Gospel according to St. John: Its Interpretation and Criticism* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1954) 37–38; A. H. N. Green-Armytage, *John Who Saw: A Layman's Essay on the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952) 111–12; M. J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean* (Ebib; Paris: Gabalda, 1925) 64–65; Francis J. Moloney, "The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History," *NTS* 46 (2000) 55–57; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Jesus and the Money-Changers (Mark 11:15–17; John 2:13–17)," in *Keys to Jerusalem: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 68, 71–74 [this is an expanded version of this article in *RB* 107 (2000) 42–55]; J. A. T. Robinson, "'His Witness is True': A Test of the Johannine Claim," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (ed. Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 455–60; idem, *The Priority of John* (ed. J. F. Coakley; London: SCM, 1985) 128–31; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (2d ed.;

3. Neither the Synoptics nor John have got it right, because no such event occurred.³
4. Both accounts are right, because two such episodes took place, one at the beginning and one at the end of Jesus' ministry. This was the dominant view until the modern era, and it still has the support of some scholars.⁴

The purpose of this article is to make a case for the fourth of these explanations. We should note at the outset that there is little sympathy for this view, which has been dismissed in rather scathing terms: "the familiar argument of two cleansings is a historiographic

London: Macmillan, 1966) 461–62.

³ So, e.g., Jürgen Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998) 333; George Wesley Buchanan, "Symbolic Money-Changers in the Temple?" *NTS* 37 (1991) 280–90; Ernst Haenchen, *John* (2 vols.; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 1:187–90; Robert J. Miller, "The (A)Historicity of Jesus' Temple Demonstration: A Test Case in Methodology," *SBLSP* 30 (1991) 235–52; David Seeley, "Jesus' Temple Act," *CBQ* 55 (1993) 263–83; Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannes-evangelium* (2d ed.; THKNT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004) 1:116–18. Doubting the event without actually denying it is Paula Fredriksen, "The Historical Jesus, the Scene in the Temple, and the Gospel of John," in *John, Jesus, and History*, vol. 1: *Critical Appraisals of Critical Views* (ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher; SBLSymS 44; Atlanta: SBL, 2007) 265–67. A careful case for historicity is made by Jostein Ådna, *Jesu Stellung zum Tempel: Die Tempelaktion und das Tempelwort als Ausdruck seiner messianischen Sendung* (WUNT 2/119; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 300–33; idem, "Jesus and the Temple," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter; 4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 3:2638–54; and Klyne R. Snodgrass, "The Temple Incident," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 429–39.

⁴ Paul Barnett, *John: The Shepherd King* (Sydney South: Aquila, 2005) 32–34; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (2d ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007) 217–19; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2: *9:51–24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 1576–77; Jakob van Bruggen, *Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 135–37; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 177–78; idem, "Matthew," in *EBC*, vol. 9: *Matthew–Mark* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 497–98; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013) 62–64; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 166–69; Robert H. Mounce, "John," in *EBC*, vol. 10: *Luke–Acts* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 391–92; Grant R. Osborne, "The Gospel of John," in *The Gospel of John, 1–3 John* (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 13; Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2007) 46–47; David Secombe, *The King of God's Kingdom: A Solution to the Puzzle of Jesus* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002) 145–46, 506–8; R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; London: Tyndale, 1960) 61; Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John" in *EBC*, vol. 9: *Luke–John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 44; David L. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 502; Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, "Mark," in *EBC*, vol. 9: *Matthew–Mark* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 888; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 689–90.

monstrosity that has no basis in the texts of the Gospels.”⁵ C. H. Dodd went so far as to call it a “puerile expedient,”⁶ although he used slightly less caustic terms in his subsequent study of John: “The suggestion that the temple was twice cleansed is the last resort of a desperate determination to harmonize Mark and John at all costs.”⁷

One reason for mounting this case is to show that such dismissals are unwarranted, because we get to two Temple interventions on the part of Jesus as a result of carefully assessing the evidence. What follows seeks to demonstrate that John is reporting a different event from the Synoptics, and that there were thus two of these incidents, one at each end of Jesus’ ministry. We will make this case in five steps.

I. COMPARING THE ACCOUNTS

Our first step involves demonstrating that the Synoptic accounts and John’s account are simply not similar enough to be different versions of the same event. Our starting point is to note the obvious fact that there are both similarities and differences in their accounts. When the assumption is made that only one such event took place, there is a tendency to treat the data without sufficient care. So it is not uncommon for discussions to downplay the extent of the differences, implying that they are relatively minor in both number and kind.⁸ The number of similarities is also often overstated.⁹ Those who are more

⁵ Gerald L. Borchert, *John* (2 vols.; NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996, 2002) 1:160. Note also the claim that the occurrence of two such events “is about as probable as that the Normandy landings took place both at the beginning and the end of the Second World War” (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] 438 n. 34).

⁶ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 448.

⁷ *Ibid.* 157 n. 2.

⁸ Dodd, for example, claims that John’s account involves “little substantial difference from the Marcan version” (*Interpretation* 300). In similar vein, Étienne Trocmé says that the differences between Mark and John boil down to three (“ces différences se ramènent à trois”; “L’expulsion des marchands du Temple,” *NTS* 15 [1968–69] 8). As we are just about to see, these judgments are wide of the mark.

⁹ Raymond E. Brown claims that there are “many” similarities, but then can list only four (*The Gospel according to John* [2 vols.; AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970] 1:119). Note also Ben Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 86 (“far too similar, even down to some details”).

impressed by the similarities argue that John is reworking Mark or the Synoptics in general,¹⁰ or that John and the Synoptics are drawing on a common source.¹¹ Others give more weight to the differences, and thus argue for John's independence: "The discrepancies...are not such as to demand different events, though they are enough to suggest that there is no literary dependence but that another channel of tradition is present."¹² In order to test this conclusion, we need a clear idea of what these "discrepancies" are: how many are there, and of what kind?

We can begin with the work of Leon Morris. In the course of mounting a general case for John's independence, he argued that his account of the Temple incident is not derived from the Synoptics. He based this conclusion on the following observations:¹³

- The most obvious difference is the fact that they locate the event at opposite ends of Jesus' ministry.
- There are only 5 words in common between the accounts (ἐξέβαλεν, κολλυβιστῶν, τραπέζας, παλοῦντας, περιστεράς).
- John's account has 5 distinctive features: the sheep and oxen; the whip; the word κερματιστής for money-changers; the "pouring out" of the money; and the command, ἄρατε ταῦτα ἐντεῦθεν.
- Only the Synoptic account has a reference to Jesus prohibiting the carrying of vessels through the Temple area (Mark 11:16).
- In the Synoptic account, Jesus quotes from Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 to explain his actions, but in John Jesus does not quote any scriptural text. Instead, the disciples recall Ps 69:9.

¹⁰ See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (2d ed.; London: SPCK, 1978) 195–96; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2005) 143; John Marsh, *The Gospel of Saint John* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1968) 163; Seeley, "Temple Act" 272–73.

¹¹ See, e.g., Brown, *John* 1:119; Ivor Buse, "The Cleansing of the Temple in the Synoptics and John," *ExpTim* 70 (1958) 22–24; J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St John* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1968) 121.

¹² Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (3 vols.; New York: Seabury, 1968, 1980, 1982) 1:353; see also, e.g., Ådna, *Stellung* 179–90; Dodd, *Historical Tradition* 161–62; P. Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938) 14–15; Matson, "Contribution" 495–99; Snodgrass, "Temple Incident" 443–44.

¹³ Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1969) 26–27.

- In the Synoptics Jesus is objecting to dishonest conduct, but in John to the provision of animals and money-changing as such.
- A more recent work notes two other distinctive items in John's account:
- The confrontation between Jesus and the "Jews" that results immediately (John 2:18–20).
- The Temple logion, which is uttered by Jesus (John 2:19), rather than by false witnesses (Mark 14:58) and scoffers (Mark 15:29).

This work also observes that only John mentions the presence of the disciples (John 2:17, 22).¹⁴

There are several more differences to be noted, which are best seen by comparing Mark's account with John's. The tally also needs to include the following:

- Mark uses καταστρέφω for the overturning of the tables, while John uses ἀνατρέπω.
- While both accounts refer to τοὺς πωλοῦντας, only Mark refers to τοὺς ἀγοράζοντας as well (Mark 11:15).
- Only Mark reports that Jesus overturned τὰς καθέδρας of those selling doves (Mark 11:15).
- Only in John does Jesus refer to the Temple as "my Father's house" (τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρός μου, John 2:16).
- John's account specifies the reactions of both the disciples and the "Jews" (John 2:17–18), with the latter addressing Jesus directly; in Mark, however, the reactions noted are those of the leadership (the chief priests and scribes) and the crowd (Mark 11:18)—and the leaders do not address Jesus personally.

Some of these differences are admittedly quite minor, such as the choice of different verbs for the overturning of the tables. But most have more substance, and there are too many of them to discount. There is, in fact, very little in common between the accounts. They share only seven words, and "it would be practically impossible to tell a story of temple cleansing without them."¹⁵

¹⁴ Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001) 65.

¹⁵ Morris, *Studies* 26. His claim that there are only five words in common overlooks τὸ ἱερόν and ὁ οἶκος.

The belief that there was only one Temple event is so widely accepted, however, that merely listing differences between the accounts is unlikely to be sufficient. Perhaps the following way of recording the differences will prove to be more effective in demonstrating the weaknesses of the majority view. As the longest of the Synoptic accounts, Mark's story has been chosen for comparison with John's. (The table focuses only on the actual pericopes [Mark 11:15–18; John 2:13–22], and does not consider other differences to do with their setting in their respective narratives.)

Chart 1: Comparison between the Markan and Johannine Accounts of the Temple Cleansing

| The Markan Account | The Johannine Account |
|--|--|
| Jesus entered the Temple | Jesus found in the Temple sellers of cattle, sheep and doves, and money-changers |
| He drove out the sellers and buyers | He made a whip, and drove out all the animals |
| | He poured out the money-changers' money |
| He overturned the money-changers' tables | He overturned their tables |
| [He overturned] the dove-sellers' seats | He told the dove-sellers to remove their goods |
| He prevented anyone from carrying vessels through the Temple area. | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>In his teaching he said, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."</p> | <p>[He told the dove-sellers], "Stop making my Father's house a market."</p> |
| | <p>His disciples recalled that it is written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."</p> |
| <p>When they heard this, the chief priests and scribes were looking for a way to destroy him. They feared him, because the crowd was astounded at his teaching.</p> | <p>The "Jews" said, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"</p> |
| | <p>Jesus gave an enigmatic response, referring to the destruction and raising of "this Temple"</p> |
| | <p>The "Jews" reply in a way that shows they have misunderstood the point of Jesus' words</p> |

In summary, what the accounts have in common is this: at Passover, Jesus entered the Temple area, and dramatically interrupted the activities that enabled pilgrims to the festival to procure sacrificial animals or birds and to change their money for payment of the Temple-tax.

The differences between the accounts are considerable, and can be summarized as follows. The actions Jesus took

- affected different *groups*: sellers and buyers *versus* sellers;
- by different *methods*: expelling sellers and buyers *versus* driving out animals with a whip;
- affected different *objects*: tables and chairs *versus* money and tables;

- involved different *bans*: prohibiting anyone carrying any vessel through the Temple courts *versus* instructing dove-sellers to remove their goods;
- were accompanied by different *complaints*: the house of prayer for all nations turned into a robbers' den *versus* his Father's house turned into a market; and
- were linked with different *biblical texts*: Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 *versus* Ps 69:9.
- In addition, Jesus' actions and words
- had a different *impact*: planning to destroy him (leaders), and stunned by his teaching (crowd) *versus* recalling a Scripture text (disciples), and demanding a sign (the "Jews");
- on different *groups*: the leaders and the crowd *versus* his disciples and the leaders (the "Jews").

Comparing the two accounts in this way makes it clear that despite many claims to the contrary, they have not much in common, and a great many differences. The most likely explanation for such a combination is not that two independent sources are reporting the same event from different perspectives, but that two different events are being reported.¹⁶

This conclusion leads to an obvious and important question: do these episodes have the same significance? The widespread assumption that this event occurred only once means that this question does not usually come up for consideration. It also means that there is a tendency to read John's account through the lens of those in the Synoptics, with the result that the differences are largely overlooked. Yet if Jesus interrupted activities in the Temple at the beginning of his ministry and also at the end, it is more likely than not that whatever their similarities, the two events were also intended to convey somewhat different messages. We will return to this point when we come to the fourth step in our argument, but for now will make just one observation. It seems clear that whatever else it may mean, the

¹⁶ After setting out all the differences carefully, Matson ("Contribution" 499) concludes that "despite the differences ... they describe the same event." We see much the same in Jacob Chanikuzhy's discussion (*Jesus, the Eschatological Temple: An Exegetical Study of Jn 2,13–22 in the Light of the pre–70 C.E. Eschatological Temple Hopes and the Synoptic Temple Action* [CBET 58; Leuven: Peeters, 2012] 97–99). This shows how strong the belief is that there could only have been one Temple event. One is left wondering what amount of evidence would be required to produce the conclusion that different events were involved.

event the Synoptics report is a symbolic enactment of judgment on the Temple.¹⁷ Three factors point us in this direction: Jesus' allusion to Jeremiah's judgment oracle against the Temple (Mark 11:17, alluding to Jer 7:11); what he does in conjunction with this event (Mark 11:12–14 and parallels); and what he teaches in this period (Mark 13:1–2 and parallels; Luke 19:41–44). It is difficult to understand why Jesus would speak and act against the Temple in this way if this was the first visit of his ministry. How can such condemnation be warranted if Jerusalem and its leadership have had no opportunity to respond to him and his message? But his stance is understandable if he has met rejection there previously. We will come back to this point below.

II. EXPLAINING THE JOHANNINE SETTING

The second step in our argument involves challenging the widely held view that John had theological reasons for moving this event to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Scholars generally see no problem here, on the grounds that the Gospel writers often arrange material thematically rather than chronologically.¹⁸ That this occurs in the Gospels is obvious enough—but is there any parallel for such a major departure from the actual order of events? It is one thing to recognize, for example, that Matthew has grouped together a series of miracle stories without any regard for their precise chronological setting (Matt 8:1–9:34). This is only a matter, first, of not recording specific dates and times for the events being reported, and second, of selecting representative incidents from the early stages of Jesus' ministry. All we get is a rough idea of when they happened—but a rough idea

¹⁷This is widely held, even though there are different ways of understanding the basis and implications of this judgment. Important examples of this interpretation are Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (LNTS 331; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 143–55; Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (SNTSMS 117; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 220–25; Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 371–76; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985) 61–76; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 414–24.

¹⁸See, e.g., Gary M. Burge, *John* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 95; John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1–4* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2009) 202; Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999) 82.

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

Such a conclusion is usually excluded in advance by a particular view of John's intentions: "the 'two cleansings' approach is fundamentally wrong-headed and fails to take into account the essentially *theological* agenda that John is pursuing throughout the compilation of his Gospel. The general agreement here is that the Evangelist has abandoned chronology in the interests of his Christology."¹⁹ Despite the frequency with which such a view is expressed, it involves some significant problems. First, where else has John "abandoned chronology" so completely for obviously theological reasons? If he believed that theology trumps chronology in this way, and took this approach "throughout the compilation of his Gospel," there is no obvious reason why he would have treated only one episode in this fashion. But are there any other instances of such major departures from the actual course of events?²⁰ This raises the question, if John has not done this anywhere else, has he done it at all? That is, can we be sure that this episode does not belong where John has put it?

This brings us to a second problem with this approach. If this is the only part of the Jesus story that John has used in this way, there must be something about it that made it especially suitable for such treatment. But what is that? What theological point does John see in this episode that made him regard it as an ideal introduction to the story of Jesus' public ministry? Perhaps the most common answer has to do with the fact that the Temple incident foreshadows Jesus' death and resurrection, telling us that the whole of his ministry must be read

¹⁹ Larry J. Kreitzer, "The Temple Incident of John 2.13–25: A Preview of What is To Come," in *Understanding, Studying and Reading: NT Essays in Honour of John Ashton* (ed. Christopher Rowland and Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis; JSNTSup 153; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998) 94 (*italics his*).

²⁰ John is widely held to have brought the crucifixion forward by a day, again for theological reasons. This is very different from bringing an event forward by several years. (It is by no means certain, however, that John has altered the date of the crucifixion: see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* [Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2001] 187, 237–39, 246–47; Carson, *John* 455–58, 475, 589–90, 603–5, 622; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004] 400 n. 1, 401–2, 524, 537–38.)

in the light of the Passion narrative.²¹ Another view sees the incident as “programmatically to the Johannine presentation of the relationship between Jesus and Judaism,” foreshadowing the way his whole ministry involved conflict between himself and the Jewish leadership—a conflict that ended in his death.²² A third approach focuses more on what Jesus meant for his Jewish environment. One version points to this event as introducing the theme of Jesus as the new Temple, where God is present and his glory revealed (John 1:14).²³ Another connects it with the way Jesus marks the beginning of a new age in which worship will not involve the Temple (John 4:21–24).²⁴ A third version

²¹ So, e.g., John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 338; Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (2 vols.; Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1979) 1:126–27; John Dennis, *Jesus' Death and the Gathering of the True Israel: The Johannine Appropriation of Restoration Theology in the Light of John 11.47–52* (WUNT 2/217; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 165–73; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003) 1:519; Kreitzer, “Temple Incident” 97–98; Marsh, *John* 162–64; Udo Schnelle, “Die Tempelreinigung und die Christologie des Johannesevangeliums,” *NTS* 42 (1996) 360–65; idem, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (3rd ed.; THKNT; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004) 75, 77; idem, “Cross and Resurrection in the Gospel of John,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (ed. Craig R. Koester and Reimund Bieringer; WUNT 222; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 137; Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 151; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 233–42; Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2d ed.; NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000) 60; Jean Zumstein, *L'Évangile selon Saint Jean (1–12)* (CNT; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014) 102, 107.

²² Kim Huat Tan, *The Zion Traditions and the Aims of Jesus* (SNTSMS 91; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 162; see also Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 427; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 150; Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 vols.; ZBNT; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2001) 1:77; Lincoln, *John* 142; Mark A. Matson, “The Temple Incident: An Integral Element in the Fourth Gospel's Narrative,” in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher; Louisville: WJK, 2001) 149–50; F. J. Moloney, “Reading John 2:13–22: The Purification of the Temple,” *RB* 97 (1990) 439; Gail R. O'Day, “The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” *NIB* 9:491–865 (“the challenge and threat that new life poses to the existing order,” 543); Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996) 186–87; Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannes-evangelium* (HNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 180.

²³ Coloe, *God Dwells* 81, 84; Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006) 116, 146; Schnelle, “Tempelreinigung” 367–71; Peter W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: NT Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 174–75.

²⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (2d ed.; WBC 36; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999) 39, 42; Dodd, *Interpretation* 303 (“a new order in religion”); R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) 114; Marsh, *John* 164; Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 120; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:356; Schnelle, *Johannes* 77; Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Readings; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 49.

sees this event as inaugurating “a theme of ‘replacement’ by Jesus in regard to Israel’s sacred space, feast days, and sacred objects.”²⁵

All of these explanations share the same difficulty: if John was looking for a suitable event to headline his account of Jesus’ public ministry, the Temple incident was not his only option. Other parts of his narrative offer good alternatives. If he wanted to show that the whole story is overshadowed by Jesus’ “hour,” he could have begun with the synagogue discourse in chapter 6 or the good shepherd passage in chapter 10. If he wanted to make it clear that this was going to be a story about conflict, with opposition from the Jewish leadership that would eventually lead to Jesus’ death, he could have begun with chapter 5 or chapter 8. If he wanted to show that the new age established by Jesus meant major changes for Judaism, he could have begun with the Nicodemus episode (John 2:23–3:21). The wine miracle at Cana (John 2:1–11) has already pointed us in this direction anyway. In each case, other parts of John’s narrative carry a similar meaning to that found in the Temple event, and could therefore have served the same purpose.

We can go further than this. If John felt free to construct his story this way, why did he not begin it with the raising of Lazarus? What a superb introduction to a narrative focusing on Jesus as the giver of life (John 1:4; 3:16; 10:10; 20:31)! If it be objected that the Lazarus story has to come where it does because this was the trigger that precipitated Jesus’ downfall, there is a fairly obvious reply. The Temple incident needs to stay at the end of the story because it had a lot to do with the ending of Jesus’ ministry! If John feels free to move the Temple story, why not the Lazarus story instead? Or what about chapter 9, with Jesus giving sight to a blind man and being opposed by self-styled “disciples of Moses”? What a great way to introduce the narrative of the “Light of the world” (John 1:4–9; 8:12; 9:5), the one who both fulfills and surpasses all that Moses said and did (John 1:17; 5:46). This would be particularly appropriate in view of the way the Prologue speaks of John as sent to witness to the Light (John 1:6–8). So chapter 9 could have been placed where chapter 2 is, after the account of John’s testimony and its repercussions (John 1:19–51). This would also be a very effective way of making it clear from the

²⁵ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 70; cf. Witherington, *John’s Wisdom* 37.

outset that Jesus would be fiercely opposed by Jewish leaders—an opposition that would eventually lead to his death. And so we could go on.

The more we read John's narrative from this perspective, the more obvious it becomes that there is nothing inevitable about using the Temple event to headline an account of Jesus' ministry. And this can only raise doubts about whether that is what John was doing.

III. SEVEN SIGNIFICANT DETAILS

We come now to the third step in our argument. This concerns the fact that there are details in the Gospels which make good sense if the incident recorded in John 2 occurred at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. There are seven to be considered, three of them in John's narrative.

The first is the reference to "forty-six years" (John 2:20). Evidence in Josephus enables us to date the commencement of Herod's building work on the Temple to 20/19 BC, and its completion a year and a half later to 18/17 BC.²⁶ If the statement made by the "Jews" means that the building work had been done forth-six years previously, this would date the incident John records to around AD 28.²⁷ If the statement means that the building work had been under way for forty-six years, this gives us a date a year or two earlier.²⁸ Either way, this puts the event early in Jesus' ministry and some years before the crucifixion. This results in what one study calls "a surprising corroboration of the Johannine chronology!"²⁹

²⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 15.380, 421.

²⁷ See Barrett, *John* 200; J. B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays* (1904; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 30–31; Robinson, *Priority* 130 nn. 18, 19; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:351; G. Schrenk, "τὸ ἔργον," *TDNT* 3:233. This way of translating the verse is argued by Daniel B. Wallace (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the NT* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996] 560–61).

²⁸ This is the way most understand the statement, but it relies on unusual uses of the aorist tense and the dative case.

²⁹ Antony Therat, *Jerusalem in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical and Theological Inquiry into Johannine Geography* (New Delhi: Intercultural, 1997) 72 n. 28. The claim that this dating "does not fit the facts" (Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* [SacPag; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998] 82) invites the rejoinder that the reference to forty-six years is one of the facts that our hypotheses must fit!

The second item is what Jesus says when he is called upon to produce a sign (John 2:18). His response is enigmatic, a *mashal* whose meaning is not self-evident (John 2:19).³⁰ With help from John (John 2:21), the reader knows what to make of it, but the “Jews” misunderstand Jesus (John 2:20). Here a comparison with the Synoptics is helpful. They, too, report an occasion in the early stages of Jesus’ ministry when he makes an enigmatic allusion to his coming death (Matt 9:15; Mark 2:20; Luke 5:35).³¹ However, things are very different when we come to his final week in Jerusalem. His references to his approaching death are much less indirect: he is the vineyard owner’s son who is to be killed by the tenants (Matt 21:37–39; Mark 12:6–8; Luke 20:13–15); he is the stone rejected by the builders but made by God into the cornerstone (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10–11; Luke 20:17). And the Jewish leaders are not puzzled by his words, but are in no doubt as to his meaning (Matt 21:45; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). The indirect and enigmatic reference in John 2:18–20 to Jesus’ death and resurrection thus fits an early date rather than a setting in the final week of his ministry.³²

The third matter is John’s report that the “Jews” were determined to kill Jesus (John 5:18). As a result of his violation of the Sabbath regulations, they began to take action against him (ἐδίωκον, John 5:16). Because he responded with a claim that they regarded as blasphemous (John 5:17), they were now looking to apply the death penalty. John’s wording (μᾶλλον ἐζήτουν, John 5:18) suggests that Jesus’ claim increased a determination they already possessed, as μᾶλλον is most likely functioning as an intensifier (“even more”).³³

³⁰ In the Synoptics, he makes a similarly cryptic allusion to his death and resurrection when asked for a sign (Matt 12:38–40; Luke 11:16, 29).

³¹ On the authenticity of Jesus’ predictions of his death and resurrection see Michael R. Licona, “Did Jesus Predict his Death and Vindication/Resurrection?” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010) 47–66.

³² Braun, “L’expulsion” 198–99.

³³ BDAG 613; Keener, *John* 1:647. Most commentators see μᾶλλον as meaning “rather, instead” and thus as serving to contrast the differing severity of the policies of vv. 16 and 18 (so, e.g., Lagrange, *Jean* 142; Morris, *John* 275 n. 52; Schnackenburg, *John* 2:462 n. 31; Wengst, *Johannes* 1:205; Westcott, *John* 84). One argument for taking it this way is that there has been no previous mention of the authorities seeking to apply the death penalty to Jesus (Edwin A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar* [London: Adam & Charles Black, 1906] 568). However, since they are reacting to exactly the same claim that Jesus has made already (John 2:16), it makes good sense to see μᾶλλον ἐζήτουν as looking back to that earlier situation. Anderson points out that the severity of their reaction suggests an earlier provocation

This raises an obvious question: why had they already decided upon this course of action? Where else had Jesus made what they would have regarded as a blasphemous claim? The only answer we get is in John 2:16, where Jesus spoke of the Temple as his Father's house. This makes it clear that he saw himself as entitled to exercise control over what happened there because he was the unique Son of Israel's God, sharing in his sovereignty.³⁴ This involves the same claim (*πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν τὸν θεόν*, 5:18) that appalled them subsequently. Why then is there no indication that the authorities were incensed at hearing blasphemy on the first occasion?

To answer this question we need a clear picture of the likely course of events. How would the "Jews" have known about what Jesus did? By οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (John 2:18), John is referring to the Jewish leadership, and especially to the Temple authorities.³⁵ While they were undoubtedly in or near the Temple complex, they were unlikely to have been present among the crowds. They had no need to keep watch over what went on. A cohort of Roman troops was stationed in the Antonia fortress overlooking the Temple, and during the festivals armed soldiers stood guard on the Temple porticoes.³⁶ Then there were the Levites who served as the Temple police, and who were stationed at the various gateways or patrolled the Temple courts.³⁷ These could be relied upon to bring any trouble to the attention of the authorities, especially

(*Fourth Gospel* 158).

³⁴ For evidence that claiming to share in God's unique authority would be seen as blasphemy, see Darrell Bock, "Blasphemy and the Jewish Examination of Jesus," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 618–22.

³⁵ Although there is much debate about the meaning of this term in John, there is good reason to understand it in this way here: see Johannes Beutler, *Judaism and the Jews in the Gospel of John* (Subsidia Biblica 30; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006) 148; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 124; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:348; Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *NTS* 28 (1982) 41–42, 47–48. In John 1:19 they are the Jerusalem-based authorities who send priests and Levites—and also Pharisees (1:24)—to question John. We also find this use of the term in John 5:10, 15, 16, 18; 7:1, 11, 13, 15; 9:18, 22; 18:12, 14, 31, 36, 38; 19:7, 14, 31, 38; 20:19.

³⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 20.106–7; *J. W.* 2.224; 5.244–45.

³⁷ Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1.156; *m. Mid.* 1.1. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the NT Period* (London: SCM, 1969) 160–63, 209–10; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)* (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Matthew Black; 4 vols.; rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–87) 2:277–78, 284–87.

the captain of the Temple, who was second in rank only to the high priest and had oversight of these guards and power of arrest.³⁸ So the “Jews” were unlikely to have witnessed Jesus’ intervention, but would have learned about it when they received a report of his conduct from their police. Their response (ἀπεκρίθησαν, John 2:18) was thus not an immediate reaction to what they themselves had seen and heard. It was more likely to have been based on what they had just been told.³⁹ What the police would have reported on was the disturbance, and that is why the authorities are focused on what Jesus did (ταῦτα ποιεῖς, John 2:18). They may not have learned about what he said (to the dove-sellers) until later on, when the merchants and money-changers lodged a complaint against him.⁴⁰ So their failure to react against what they would have regarded as a blasphemous claim (John 2:16) is due to the fact that it was not made in their hearing, but was probably brought to their attention only some time later.⁴¹ However, John implies that they have reached this conclusion by the time we get to the events in chapter 5, which serve to harden their resolve to take action against Jesus (John 5:18). The almost incidental way in which John makes this comment makes best sense if the Temple event belongs where he has located it.

The fourth detail is the unexplained emergence of very strong Jerusalem-based opposition to Jesus not long into his Galilean ministry. Mark 3:22 reports that a group of scribes from Jerusalem denounce Jesus as a tool and ally of demonic powers. No explanation is given of either their presence in Galilee or the severity of their condemnation of Jesus. One possibility is that like the crowds (Mark 3:8), they have come because they have heard about his activities and want to see what is going on. But they do not appear to be

³⁸ See Acts 4:1; 5:24, 26; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.131, 208; *J.W.* 2.409; 6.294.

³⁹ Note John 5:19, where ἀπεκρίνατο designates Jesus’ response. This, too, is not an immediate reaction to a particular statement or action; it is his answer to the policy the authorities have adopted and the actions that flow from it and make it evident.

⁴⁰ Schnackenburg, *John* 1:347; cf. Craig A. Evans: “His words and actions would eventually have been passed on to anxious temple authorities” (*Mark 8:27–16:20* [WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001] 167); Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, “Jesus’ Action in the Temple: A Key or a Puzzle?” *ZNW* 97 (2006) 8.

⁴¹ This is a more likely explanation than the claim that “John takes one thing at a time” (Barrett, *John* 198). He is bearing witness (21:24), not creating a narrative—and true testimony to the Word-become-flesh must involve more than valid insights; it must also include reliable reporting.

neutral observers, in the process of working out what to make of him. Instead, they are already opposed to him, and in the strongest possible terms.⁴² This would make sense if they had encountered Jesus in Jerusalem, where he acted in ways they have come to regard as completely intolerable. While it is possible to envisage other catalysts that might have led them to this view, the Temple incident reported by John fits the bill quite nicely.⁴³ The more the authorities reflected on what Jesus had said and done on that occasion, the more likely they were to be hostile toward him.

The fifth item is Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Matt 23:37–39; Luke 13:34–35). Although other possibilities have been suggested,⁴⁴ the most natural way of taking *ποσάκις ἠθέλησα* is that Jesus not only experienced this desire but also gave expression to it by visiting Jerusalem several times.⁴⁵ This is one of a number of hints in the Synoptics that he has been to Jerusalem prior to the visit that comes at the end of his ministry.⁴⁶ And while *ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν* could be

⁴² This hostile opposition continues throughout Jesus' ministry (Mark 7:1–13; 8:31; 10:33; 11:18, 27–28; 14:1, 43, 53; 15:1). These scribes are likely to be emissaries (or perhaps even members) of the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53, 55; 15:1), so that their pronouncement sounds rather like an official verdict. On scribes as members of the Sanhedrin, see Jeremias, *Jerusalem* 233–37; Schürer, *History* 2:213.

⁴³ This connection is made by Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011) 210; Lewis A. Muirhead, *The Message of the Fourth Gospel* (Crown Theological Library; London: Williams & Norgate, 1925) 47; Tasker, *John* 61.

⁴⁴ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr. list six possible interpretations (The Gospel according to Saint Matthew [3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–1997] 3:321). Another can now be added, according to which the saying refers to Jesus' preexistent activity throughout Israel's history (Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-Existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006] 210–21). This is less likely than a reference to previous visits to Jerusalem which Matthew has chosen not to report.

⁴⁵ "It would be strange if he who wept over the city had never sought to win it" (Henry Scott Holland, *The Fourth Gospel* [London: John Murray, 1923] 35). See also R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 883; Seán Freyne, *The Jesus Movement and its Expansion: Meaning and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 178; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 473; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 862. The claim that these cannot be the words of the historical Jesus because he was active in Jerusalem only once (Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005] 160) rather begs the question.

⁴⁶ On which see Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels* 215–16; Morris, *Studies* 43–44; Robinson, *Priority* 125–26; William Sanday, *The Authorship and Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel Considered in Reference to the Contents of the Gospel Itself: A Critical*

understood in several ways, in this context it is most likely a reference to the Temple.⁴⁷ The fact that this saying comes immediately after Jesus' ποσάκις ἠθέλησα saying implies that the Temple featured in his activities in Jerusalem. It also implies that Jerusalem's rejection of his message and ministry (οὐκ ἠθέλησατε) is the major reason why the Temple is now under judgment: the Shekinah has departed (hence ἔρημος), so that it is no longer God's house but only theirs. This explains why on his final visit Jesus both symbolized and announced the overthrow of the Temple. What he says here shows that this did not come out of the blue: it was the inevitable outcome of the rejection he had experienced on previous visits.⁴⁸

The sixth of these details is the disagreement between the witnesses at Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. In Mark's account of the trial, those who give evidence against Jesus cannot agree over what he actually said about the Temple (Mark 14:56–59). This is much more likely if they are referring to something he said a couple of years before, but difficult to understand if the words in question were spoken only a few days previously.⁴⁹ Mark does not in fact record a saying of Jesus that has any resemblance to the allegations made at the trial. The only basis for their words is the saying recorded in John 2:19, which therefore makes best sense where John has located it.

The seventh detail is the marked increase in "temperature" in the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' intervention in the Temple. Jesus' words (Mark 11:17) are more severely critical and confrontational than those in John 2:16. In addition, the reaction of the authorities is markedly different: in John 2, they demand a sign (v. 18); in Mark 11 they have determined to get rid of Jesus (v. 18). All of this fits a situation in which a largely unknown Jesus dramatically interrupts

Essay (London, Macmillan, 1872) 55–57.

⁴⁷ François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 330; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 3:322*; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 559; Tan, *Zion Traditions* 113–15; Wright, *Victory* 571 n. 120.

⁴⁸ It is just possible that Jesus' καθ' ἡμέραν (Matt 26:55; Mark 14:49; Luke 22:53) suggests other, earlier visits to the Temple in addition to the couple of days involved in the Synoptic accounts of this final visit (so, e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* [CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966] 437; Evans, *Mark* 426).

⁴⁹ Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels* 217–18; Braun, "Expulsion" 196–97; W. F. Howard, "The Position of the Temple Cleansing in the Fourth Gospel," *ExpTim* 44 (1933) 284; Morris, *John* 168; Robinson, *Priority* 128.

the business of the Temple, and several years later, a very well-known Jesus reappears for what both he and the authorities know will be the final showdown.

On their own, none of these details is conclusive, but together they give us good reason to ask whether John's report of an early Temple event might not be right.

IV. JESUS AND HIS MISSION

This brings us to the fourth step in our argument, which concerns the way John's location of the Temple incident can be seen to fit with Jesus' convictions about his mission to Israel. The best way into this matter is to consider how modern studies of the Gospels answer two fundamentally important questions: what sense of mission did Jesus have, and how did his ministry express it? Naturally, these require careful and extensive discussion, but in this context we will have to limit ourselves to just two examples.⁵⁰

The first is a major study of Jesus' aims which sees his "public career as a divine mission to Israel."⁵¹ It understands the Temple event at the end of his ministry in light of his gospel of the kingdom, arguing that what he did "epitomized in action the message 'The reign of God is at hand!' and the demand 'Repent!'" so as to bring "the imminence of God's reign abruptly, forcefully, to the attention of all. As proclamation, demand, and warning, it said what Jesus had always said."⁵² But it is difficult to see why he would say this throughout his ministry but wait until right at the end to say it in Jerusalem. Why would a "divine mission to Israel" involve only one final announcement and enactment of this gospel at the center of Israel's life? Why

⁵⁰ It is important to acknowledge that we cannot hope to do justice to these matters in such a brief discussion. Many of the issues involved are complex, and there is a very wide range of competing views. Even restricting our focus to the meaning of Jesus' intervention in the Temple faces us with what one survey refers to as an "almost limitless" multitude of interpretations ("nahezu grenzenlos": Christina Metzdorf, *Die Tempelaktion Jesu: Patristische und historisch-kritische Exegese im Vergleich* [WUNT 2/168; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003] 257). All we can do here is to sketch an approach that hopefully will commend itself by making sense of what the Gospels tell us.

⁵¹ Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979) 169. See also Steven M. Bryan, "Jesus and Israel's Eschatological Constitution," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3:2835–53; idem, *Israel's Traditions*.

⁵² Meyer, *Aims* 197.

would Galilee have plenty of opportunity to hear his gospel when Jerusalem received only what amounted to a last-minute ultimatum? This question becomes even more pressing when the fundamental importance of the Temple is acknowledged: “The temple was central not only to the cultic but to the political, commercial, financial, and social organization of national life.”⁵³ But if the Temple was so central to Israel’s life, and if Jesus had a mission to Israel, why would he ignore its center and focal point until the end of his ministry? This question becomes more pressing still when we recognize that “Israel” cannot be confined to the Jews who live in Palestine. If Jesus’ “divine mission” was to all the people of Israel, what better way of reaching those of them in the Diaspora than by coming to Jerusalem and the Temple at the great festivals? This, of course, is just what John shows him doing (John 2:13; 5:1; 7:10–14; 10:22–23; 12:12).

Our second example is a study of the place of the Zion traditions in Jesus’ ministry. This points out that Zion was “a tenacious and living national and eschatological symbol,” “the symbol of the life, beliefs and hopes of all Jews.”⁵⁴ It also notes that “Jerusalem was important to the historical Jesus.” The obvious connection between his gospel of the kingdom of God and Jerusalem’s status as “the city of the great king” (Matt 5:35) meant that it “exercised a pull on Jesus”: “Jerusalem was to Jesus a magnet.”⁵⁵ But if so, why would he resist this “pull” until the very end of his ministry? Why not announce and demonstrate the reign of the great king in his city—and do so early on? We are given a partial answer in the claim that “Jesus’ appropriation of the Zion traditions explains why he understood that the climax of his ministry and his death had to take place nowhere else except in Jerusalem.”⁵⁶ However, it is not clear why the Zion traditions would lead Jesus to conclude that it was only the climax and end of his ministry that should take place in Jerusalem. If Jerusalem was important to him, and if as Zion it represented “the life, beliefs and hopes of all Jews,” it is difficult to see why he would have avoided

⁵³ Ibid. 182.

⁵⁴ Tan, *Zion Traditions*, 50, 51. See also Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* (London: T&T Clark, 2004) 92–121.

⁵⁵ The quotations are from *Zion, Traditions*, 98, 99, but similar statements are made throughout (e.g. pp. 77, 126, 129–31, 155–57, 193, 231, 233). Tan devotes a chapter to a study of the authenticity and meaning of Matt 5:35 (pp. 81–99).

⁵⁶ *Zion, Traditions*, 235.

it throughout his ministry and gone there only at the end. Surely Zion as well as Galilee should hear his gospel (Isa 52:7).⁵⁷ And if the Zion traditions are a vital key to understanding Jesus' ministry, why would he not begin that ministry in the city which is the subject of those traditions?

For all their value, both studies involve a surprising omission. They generate an important question that they do not go on to answer: why did Jerusalem and the Temple feature only at the end of Jesus' ministry? It is not difficult to understand why Jesus would have expected his ministry to come to its climax in Jerusalem, with all of the momentous implications that this held both for himself and for Israel. But it is not at all obvious why he would have ignored Jerusalem until then. If he had "a national vision for Israel" and was engaged in "the eschatological reconstitution of Israel around himself," why would he confine his activities to Galilee and its environs?⁵⁸ If he had a mission to Israel, why would he not spend significant amounts of time in and around Jerusalem?⁵⁹ After all, Galileans in large numbers went to Jerusalem for the festivals.⁶⁰ As we have noted, the same is true of Jews from the Diaspora.⁶¹ So why would Jerusalem have to wait until the end? Indeed, in view of its fundamental importance in Jewish life, why would it not feature at the beginning? Is there any reason why, in launching his ministry, Jesus would not have gone "directly to Jerusalem, there to announce his message about the imminent arrival of God's kingly rule"?⁶²

⁵⁷ "That message must be preached and its content fulfilled in the heart of Jewry, Zion itself" (*Zion Traditions*, 192). Quite so—but why only at the end of Jesus' ministry? This question becomes more pressing when Tan accepts that Jesus visited Jerusalem on more than one occasion (pp. 155–56).

⁵⁸ The quotations are from Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teaching of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 10; Wright, *Victory*, 261.

⁵⁹ "If Jesus was concerned with Israel as a whole, it was indispensable for him to minister in the southern region as well" (Joachim Gnilka, *Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997] 191–92); cf. Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus" 274.

⁶⁰ Josephus, Ant. 17.254, 20.118; J.W. 2.43, 232. See Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (SNTSMS 118; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 54–55; Seán Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: A Study in Second Temple Judaism* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980) 287–93.

⁶¹ It has been estimated that 50,000 of these pilgrims would have been in attendance at Passover (Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* [JNTSup 220; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002] 40–42).

⁶² Freyne, *Jesus Movement* 139.

Because this question is seldom asked, it is difficult to find a study that gives a compelling answer. One that seeks to do so suggests that Jesus chose to focus his work in Galilee, the region of the lost northern tribes, because he was expecting the restoration of all Israel.⁶³ However, there is no obvious indication in the Gospels that points us in this direction. Another explanation looks to the Caesarea Philippi episode (Mark 8:27–9:1 and parallels): “once Jesus had been seen as the king-in-waiting, the natural decision was to go to the city which, since the time of David, had been irrevocably associated with Israel’s kings.”⁶⁴ But if Jesus had been aware of his “messianic vocation” since the time of his baptism, why did Jerusalem have to wait until the disciples recognized him as Messiah? Why withhold from Jerusalem the “messianic praxis” that characterized his ministry in Galilee?⁶⁵ Was this because a visit to Jerusalem was necessarily climactic, “the symbol and embodiment of YHWH’s return to Zion”?⁶⁶ But is there anything about this return that required all of its purposes to be accomplished at once? If the kingdom and salvation bound up with the return could be announced and demonstrated in Galilee before being finally enacted and accomplished in Jerusalem, is there any reason why Jerusalem could not have the same opportunity as that given to Galilee? That is, why could Jerusalem not be introduced to Jesus and his mission before the visit that brought everything to a decisive climax?

Here it is important to register that the evidence we have—explicitly in John along with various hints in the Synoptics—is of Jesus making several visits to Jerusalem.⁶⁷ To take this seriously is to make

⁶³ Ibid. 139–46. A similar answer has been given by Jens Schröter (“Jesus of Galilee: The Role of Location in Understanding Jesus,” in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective* [ed. James H. Charlesworth and Petr Pokorný; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009] 54–55).

⁶⁴ Wright, *Victory* 528–29.

⁶⁵ The quotations are from *ibid.* 537, 530.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 639 (italics his). He unfolds this theme on pp. 612–53. A similar approach is to be found in a study of Mark’s Gospel which argues that Jesus’ ministry is depicted in line with the new exodus envisaged by Isaiah, in which Yahweh leads his people back to Zion: Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (1997; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 4–6, 134–36, 370–74. This means that “Jerusalem and what happens there is the climax to which the ‘journey’ moves” (p. 132). It is important to note that what this tells us is not the pattern Jesus’ ministry had to follow, but the way Mark chose to present his selective account of it. Choosing to report only the final visit to Jerusalem made it possible to exploit the parallels Mark saw with the new exodus journey to Zion.

⁶⁷ Freyne, *Jewish Galilean*, 93, 115, 152–53. C. H. Dodd regards this as likely (The Founder

room for the seldom-asked question noted above. We can put that question this way: in view of Jerusalem's fundamental role in Jewish life and hopes, would it not make good sense for Jesus to launch his mission there? That is certainly how some earlier studies have seen it: "It was fitting that the Lord's public work should commence in Judaea and in the Holy City ... [and] not only at Jerusalem, but also at the centre of divine worship, the sanctuary of the theocracy."⁶⁸ The more seriously we take Jesus' conviction that he had a God-given mission to Israel, the more fitting such a beginning seems.

But we can go further than this. Jesus was unlikely to have had a sense of mission to Israel without also having had a clear sense of what that meant for his own status in Israel and significance for Israel. When we look at what the Gospels have to say about this, there is no evidence that this awareness dawned on him slowly. From the beginning of his ministry, he conducted himself with a sovereign authority that was certainly no less than messianic.⁶⁹ If anything

of Christianity [London: Collins, 1971] 126, 140, 142), while Dunn gives cautious acceptance to John's evidence for multiple visits, but does nothing with it (James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* [Christianity in the Making 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003] 324). See also n. 46 above.

⁶⁸ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St John* (London: John Murray, 1898) 40; cf. Samuel J. Andrews, *The Life of our Lord upon the Earth Considered in its Historical, Chronological, and Geographical Relations* (rev. ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892) 167–69; Marcus Dods, "The Gospel according to John," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (ed. W. Robertson Nicoll; 5 vols.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897) 1:710; Cunningham Geikie, *The Life and Words of Christ* (London: Cassell, 1887) 317–19; Holland, *Fourth Gospel* 35; Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. Francis N. Davey; rev. ed.; London: Faber & Faber, 1947) 192–93; David Smith, *The Days of His Flesh: The Earthly Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909) 58. More recently, Anderson has argued for the plausibility of such "an inaugural prophetic sign" (Riddles 210–11)—although as we are just about to see, "prophetic" does not go far enough.

⁶⁹ Michael F. Bird, *Are You The One Who Is To Come? The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009) 77–160; Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995) 63–72; Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the NT* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 146–55; Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Messianic Son of Man: Jesus' Claim to Deity," in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (ed. James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005) 326–31; Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 265–74; Wright, *Victory*, 530–38. This does not mean, of course, that Jesus conformed to any known set of Jewish expectations. In some ways, he was less than what many were looking for, and in other ways a great deal more than they could have hoped or imagined: see, e.g., Gathercole, *The Pre-Existent Son*; Sigurd Grindheim, *God's Equal: What Can We Know About Jesus' Self-Understanding in the Synoptic Gospels?* (LNTS 446; London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Aquila H. I. Lee, *From Messiah to Pre-existent Son: Jesus' Self-Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms* (WUNT 2/192; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 166–201.

came gradually, it was not Jesus' awareness of his status and mission but the extent to which he made this apparent.⁷⁰ Initially, he did so in ways that were often somewhat implicit or indirect, but these tended to become less veiled as his ministry progressed. So if he launched his public ministry in Jerusalem, it would not be surprising to find that he had given some less-than-explicit demonstration of his messianic status. And that is just what his intervention in the Temple seems intended to do.⁷¹

It is widely recognized that his actions there must be seen as symbolic, and it is common to understand them as akin to the symbolic deeds of Israel's prophets.⁷² But the OT suggests an even closer parallel. His actions are not prophetic so much as royal; they carry an implicit claim to be Israel's rightful king: "The purification of the temple...is an action which points to the authority of a messianic king, since, as the examples of David, Solomon, Jeroboam, Hezekiah and Josiah show, in ancient Israel the king was responsible for the sanctuary."⁷³ This messianic claim is in line with what happened on

⁷⁰ Ben F. Meyer draws attention to the unfolding process of Jesus' 'economy of revelation, or strategy of self-disclosure' ("Jesus' Ministry and Self-Understanding," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* [ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1998] 351; see also 343, 349). See also idem, *Christus Faber: The Master-Builder and the House of God* (Princeton Theological Monographs 29; Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1992) 74–75, 257–58; Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate about the Messianic Consciousness* (ed. Johannes G. Vos; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 92–94.

⁷¹ It is difficult to see why it is only the end of Jesus' ministry that is the "logical place" for a messianic gesture (as claimed by Cecil Roth, "The Cleansing of the Temple and Zechariah xiv 21," *NovT* 4 [1960] 176). If Jesus began a public ministry because he was convinced he had a mission to Israel, he must at some point make it clear why he was the one who had this mission. And since he must have had a clear sense of the answer to that question as he began his ministry, there is no obvious reason why he would not have given some indications of that answer from an early stage.

⁷² So, for example, Brown, *John* 1:121; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 75; A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London: Duckworth, 1982) 130–31, 134; Morna D. Hooker, *The Signs of a Prophet: The Prophetic Actions of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1997) 44–48; Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Dublin: Columba, 2003) 123–24; E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane, 1993) 253, 260–61.

⁷³ Otto Betz, *What Do We Know About Jesus?* (London: SCM, 1968) 91. See also Bird, *Messianic Question* 127–30; Lynn H. Cohick, "Jesus as King of the Jews," in *Who Do My Opponents Say That I Am? An Investigation of the Accusations against the Historical Jesus* (ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica; LNTS 327; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 120–21; Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (London: SPCK, 2010) 101–5; Wright, *Victory* 411, 427, 483, 491–92.

his final visit to Jerusalem and the Temple: "The entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple constituted a messianic demonstration, a messianic critique, a messianic fulfilment event, and a sign of the messianic restoration of Israel."⁷⁴ But the way John shows Jesus making this claim is less overt and less sustained, more what might be expected early in his ministry rather than at its climax. In contrast to that final visit, he does not enter Jerusalem on this occasion making a public claim to be the king of Israel.⁷⁵ As he came to the Temple this first time, there would be nothing to distinguish him from any of the other pilgrims. His dramatic intervention obviously carried a claim to authority, as the call for an authenticating sign (John 2:18) recognized. But at the time, his conduct would only be seen as regal by those who had other reasons for regarding him in messianic terms.⁷⁶ What we see here looks more like the beginning of Jesus' "economy of revelation, or strategy of self-disclosure" (to use Meyer's terms) than its final stage. The less severe response of the "Jews" to what he does (John 2:18; cf. Mark 11:18) also suggests that we are at an early point in his public ministry.

There is more in John's account that fits the early stages of Jesus' ministry. We have already observed that the way he refers to his death and resurrection (John 2:19) fits an early date better than his final visit to Jerusalem. We have also noted the likelihood that the event John reports had a significantly different meaning from the outwardly similar event at the end of Jesus' ministry. That event foreshadowed

⁷⁴ Meyer, *Aims* 199; see also Ådna, *Stellung* 381–83.

⁷⁵ On the historicity and messianic significance of Jesus' final entry to Jerusalem see Brent Kinman, "Jesus' Royal Entry into Jerusalem," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 383–427.

⁷⁶ As the disciples did. They discerned a parallel between Jesus and David (John 2:17, quoting Ps 69:9) because they were already expecting to find such parallels, convinced that he was the messianic ruler promised in Scripture (John 1:41, 45, 49; 2:11); see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John" in *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 431–34. Although most take John 2:17 as a reference to what the disciples realized subsequently, its difference from 2:22 implies that it is referring to what they grasped at the time; see Barrett, *John* 198; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928) 1:92, 97; Coloe, *God Dwells* 74; Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on John's Gospel* (1886; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978) 364; Hoskyns and Davey, *Fourth Gospel* 194; Köstenberger, *John* 107 n. 24; Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean, I: chapitres 1–4* (Parole de Dieu; Paris: du Seuil, 1988) 257–58; Moloney, *John* 77–78; Ridderbos, *John* 116; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:347; Westcott, *John* 41.

judgment and the downfall of the Temple—but what about this one? The activities Jesus dramatically interrupted were for the benefit of the pilgrims to the Passover festival. Without the provision of animals that met the rigorous standards laid down in the Torah, most would have been unable to offer any sacrifices. And without the money-changing facilities, they would be unable to pay the Temple tax which funded the operations of the Temple and especially the twice-daily *tamid* sacrifices.⁷⁷ Jesus' intervention thus amounts to much more than a "cleansing." His actions are a symbolic abolition of the Temple cult.⁷⁸

To signal the end of the cult was to raise a pressing question: how would sin be atoned for and cleansing provided? What would become of Israel if there were no *tamid* sacrifices, no Day of Atonement? These questions were also raised by what Jesus went on to do in his ministry, as he displayed a "radical religious independence" by forgiving sin and welcoming "sinners."⁷⁹ If forgiveness and restoration were available to such people, Jesus' contemporaries would expect it to be found only "through the officially established and authorized channels of Temple

⁷⁷ Neh 10:32–33; *m. Sheq.* 4.1–3. See Jostein Ådna, "Jesus' Symbolic Act in the Temple (Mark 11:15–17): The Replacement of the Sacrificial Cult by His Atoning Death," in *Gemeinde Ohne Tempel/Community Without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum* (ed. Beate Ego, Armin Lange, and Peter Pilhofer; WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) 467–69; idem, *Stellung* 253; Jacob Neusner, "Money-Changeers in the Temple: The Mishnah's Explanation," *NTS* 35 (1989) 288–89; E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992) 104–5, 156; Schürer, *History* 2:270–72.

⁷⁸ Ådna, "Jesus' Symbolic Act" 466–69; idem, *Stellung* 385, 412; idem, "Temple" 2670–72; Bernard, *John* 1:87–88; Chanikuzhy, *Eschatological Temple* 257, 265–66, 327–28, 404–5; Coloe, *God Dwells* 72–74; Dietzfelbinger, *Johannes* 1:76; Dodd, *Interpretation* 301; Tom Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking* (Biblical Interpretation Series 55; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 319, 321, 326; Hoskyns and Davey, *Fourth Gospel* 194; Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 83–84; Léon-Dufour, *Lecture* 255; Lincoln, *John* 137–38; Marsh, *John* 165; Mullins, *John* 122, 126; Neyrey, *John* 70; W. O. E. Oesterley, "Temple," in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (ed. James Hastings; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909) 2:712–13; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:356; Hermann Strathmann, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (11th ed.; Neue Testament Deutsch 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968) 61–63; Peter Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 151–52; Tasker, *John* 62–63; Wright, *Victory* 423.

⁷⁹ Matt 9:10–13; 11:19; Mark 2:5, 15–17; Luke 7:34, 48; 15:1–2; 19:5–7. The quotation is from Meyer, *Christus Faber* 257.

and priesthood.”⁸⁰ However, in this behavior Jesus simply bypassed the Temple cult, just as his forerunner John had done (Mark 1:4–5). Not only so, but he also pointed to himself as greater than both the Temple and its builder (Matt 12:6, 42). Such words and deeds sent a strong message: all that people had sought in the Temple they are now to find in Jesus himself.⁸¹ That is the message he is giving here as he speaks of himself as the true, eschatological Temple (John 2:19, 21).⁸² But the enigmatic way in which he does so fits the beginning of his ministry better than its climax.

The question still remains, although in a somewhat different form: if Jesus is to replace the Temple, where will atonement for the sins of Israel come from? The answer becomes clear later in his ministry, in the way that he speaks about his death (Mark 10:45; 14:24; and parallels). His message to the disciples is that “he himself was ready to take the place of the sacrifices ... and redeem the people of God from its guilt before God once for all with his life.”⁸³ Although this

⁸⁰ Wright, *Victory* 435; cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 786–88.

⁸¹ Wright, *Victory* 436 (“all that the Temple had stood for was now available through Jesus and his movement”); cf. Bird, *Origins* 159; Meyer, *Christus Faber* 261; Perrin, *Temple* 101–13.

⁸² On this Johannine theme see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 192–200; Ulrich Busse, “Die Tempelmetaphorik als ein Beispiel von implizitem Rekurs auf die biblische Tradition im Johannesevangelium,” in *The Scriptures in the Gospels* (ed. C. M. Tuckett; BETL 131; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997) 395–428; Coloe, *God Dwells*; Dennis, *Jesus' Death* 136–87; Kåre Sigvald Fuglseth, *Johannine Sectarism in Perspective: A Sociological, Historical, and Comparative Analysis of Temple and Social Relationships in the Gospel of John, Philo, and Qumran* (NovTSup 119; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 117–85, 251–84; Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (NovTSup 23; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 205–13; Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *NT Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1980) 110–21; Hoskins, *Fulfillment*; Kerr, *Temple*; Mark Kinzer, “Temple Christology in the Gospel of John,” *SBLSP* 37 (1998) 447–64; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* (Biblical Theology of the NT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 422–35; James McCaffrey, *The House with Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of Jn. 14,2–3* (AnBib 114; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988); Bill Salier, “The Temple in the Gospel according to John,” in *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004) 121–34; Benney Thettayil, *In Spirit and Truth: An Exegetical Study of John 4:19–26 and a Theological Investigation of the Replacement Theme in the Fourth Gospel* (CBET 46; Leuven: Peeters, 2007) 348–427; Stephen T. Um, *The Theme of Temple Christology in John's Gospel* (LNTS 312; London: T&T Clark, 2006) 151–88; Walker, *Holy City* 161–200. On Jewish expectations of an eschatological Temple, see Bryan, *Israel's Traditions* 189–206; Chanikuzhy, *Eschatological Temple* 8–43; Dennis, *Jesus' Death* 144–64; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* 77–90.

⁸³ Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53” 152; cf. Ådna, “Jesus' Symbolic Act” 471–72; idem, *Stellung*

message becomes explicit only later, it is already implied in what John reports. When Jesus' actions bring a symbolic ending to the Temple cult, his words point forward to his death and resurrection (John 2:19). This juxtaposition of his words and deeds gives a hint that he is already aware of how he will bring about the salvation that Israel needs. So his intervention is not, as some have claimed, a rejection of the sacrificial system as unworthy.⁸⁴ Instead, it implies that sacrifice will cease because it reaches its fulfillment in his death. He is not attacking the Temple cult but signalling its completion with the arrival of the new age that, as Israel's Messiah, he has come to announce and establish.⁸⁵

Although most discussions of this subject tend to assume that Jesus reached these conclusions about his death only late in his ministry, there are good reasons for reaching a different view. How he understood his vocation must have become an issue as early as his baptism, at which he was identified as God's Son and Servant (Mark 1:11 and parallels, referring to Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). For him to begin a public ministry meant that he had faced the question as to what this role would mean for him. One obvious place to find an answer was in Isaiah's discussion of the Servant's calling and ministry.⁸⁶ When

424–30; Wright, *Victory* 604, 605.

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Bernard, *John* 1:87 ("The killing of beasts ... was a disgusting and useless practice"); Kenneth Grayston, *The Gospel of John* (Epworth Commentaries; London: Epworth, 1990) 33 ("buying God's protection with sacrifices"); Haenchen, *John* 1:184 ("the delusion that man can buy God's favour with sacrifices"); Hoskyns and Davey, *Fourth Gospel* 194 ("a profanation of the worship of God").

⁸⁵ This reading of Jesus' intentions has been rejected on the grounds that it "would have made him virtually unique among his contemporaries" (Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus" 255). But that is surely the point of John's account of this event—and also of the rest of Jesus' ministry! It is only because their writers were convinced of his uniqueness that we ended up with the four Gospels. As the case of John the Baptist shows, it takes more than an "eschatological prophet" ("Historical Jesus" 275) to generate Gospels.

⁸⁶ For evidence that Jesus "understood his call and ministry in terms of the message of (Second) Isaiah" see Craig A. Evans, "From Gospel to Gospel: The Function of Isaiah in the NT" in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; 2 vols.; VTSup 70; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 2:671. See also Otto Betz, "Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom," in *The Gospel and the Gospels* (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 53–74; Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, "Jesus and Israel's Scriptures," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 281–335 (Jesus displayed "a marked preference for the book of Isaiah" [281]); Ben F. Meyer, "Appointed Deed, Appointed Doer: Jesus and the Scriptures," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Boston: Brill, 1999) 155–76 (in Isaiah he found "both his career as proclaimer of salvation and the essential burden of his proclamation")

it later emerged that he “applied Isaiah 43 and 53 to himself and his sacrifice,”⁸⁷ we are thus most likely seeing the fruits of the pondering that began no later than his baptism.⁸⁸ This suggests that we should see Jesus' convictions about his death in the same way we view his sense of his messianic status: it was not that he only gradually became aware of his approaching end and its meaning, but that he made his disciples and others aware of it little by little. This fits what we read in John. Jesus shows that he is aware of his coming “hour” (John 2:4). He is soon to tell Nicodemus that he must be “lifted up” like the serpent in the wilderness so that believers will have life (John 3:14–15). This is in line with the testimony that declared him to be the lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). And here we have this cryptic allusion to his death and resurrection (John 2:19), in a context which suggests that these events have eschatological and saving significance. All of this makes best sense if we are at the early stages of Jesus' ministry.

We have been arguing that for all of its outward similarity with the Temple event in the Synoptics, the one reported by John has a somewhat different significance. In a symbolic way both shut down the operations of the Temple cult in a display of messianic authority. The climactic intervention in the Synoptics does so to signal the downfall of the Temple in the judgment that is soon to fall upon Israel. But in John's account, Jesus is putting himself at the center of Israel's life, as the Messiah and the Father's Son. His words and deeds indicate that his death and resurrection will mean the end of the Temple and its sacrifices and will mark him out as the eschatological Temple. All of this is said and done in an indirect and veiled way

[171]).

⁸⁷ Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53” 161 (referring to Mark 9:31; 10:45; see pp. 150–51); see also Seyoon Kim, “The ‘Son of Man’ as the Son of God” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 52–61 (on Mark 10:45); Peter Stuhlmacher, “Jesus' Readiness to Suffer and His Understanding of His Death,” in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* 395–98. On the influence on Jesus of Isaiah 53 in particular, see Otto Betz, “Jesus and Isaiah 53,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. William H. Bellinger Jr. and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1998) 70–87; R. T. France, *Jesus and the OT: His Application of OT Passages to Himself and His Mission* (London: Tyndale, 1971) 110–32; Joachim Jeremias, *NT Theology, Part One: The Proclamation of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1971) 286–99; Kim, *Son of Man* 52–73; Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53” 149–53; Rikki E. Watts, “Jesus' Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: A Crux Revisited,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant* 125–51; idem, *New Exodus* 258–87, 349–65; Wright, *Victory* 601–4.

⁸⁸ Ådna, *Stellung* 416; France, *OT* 124, 130; Jeremias, *Proclamation* 53–55 (though his exclusion of Ps 2:7 is unwarranted; see Lee, *Messiah* 166–78); Kim, *Son of Man* 63.

that fits an early stage in his ministry. Such an inaugural visit to Jerusalem and the Temple makes a good fit with what we know of Jesus' messianic vocation and mission to Israel.

Arriving at these conclusions has involved adopting an approach to Jesus and his ministry somewhat different from the customary view. While this requires an appropriate degree of caution, therefore, it is important to recognize that we got there by attempting to ask the right questions and doing our best to see where the relevant evidence leads us. If there is a more convincing view, it will have to do justice to those questions and that evidence.

V. ARGUMENTS AGAINST AN EARLY TEMPLE EVENT

The fifth and final part of the case we are making is that the arguments against an early Temple event are not persuasive. There are three to be considered. The first claims that Jesus would not have been able to intervene like this when he was largely unknown and without popular support, since those who were affected by his actions would have resisted him strongly.⁸⁹ This misreads the situation John is reporting. Jesus' actions were sudden and unexpected, and they would have had people scrambling to round up their animals and retrieve their money. Those affected by what he did would have been too surprised and then too distracted to turn on him. He would only have faced resistance if he attempted to shut down their activities rather than just disrupting them. But this was no takeover bid, no occupation of the Temple: "it was a prophetic or symbolic act, limited in area, intent, and duration."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Bernard, *John* 1.88.

⁹⁰ Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (rev. ed.; Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1998) 182; cf. Wedderburn, "Jesus' Action" 8; Wright, *Victory* 424 ("a swift and striking symbol"). Some discussions of this incident think that Jesus emptied the whole of the outer court (e.g. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple: A Study of the Relation between Cult and Gospel* [Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961] 36), but it is difficult to see how he would have accomplished this, and a disturbance on such a massive scale would surely have invited the intervention of the Temple guards and the Roman troops. The opposite extreme, according to which Jesus' gesture "would simply have been swallowed up" (Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus" 266), does not give enough weight to the fact that he drove all of the animals away and overturned the tables of the money-changers (John 2:15). The disruption involved would have been significant enough to be noticed by more than a few but not wide enough or protracted enough to cause those on guard to step in. Borg's interpretation

Second, there is the claim that Jesus could hardly have got away with an initial demonstration of this kind, because the Temple authorities would have taken strong measures to put a stop to his activities: "if the event took place early in the ministry it would have proved an obstacle to Jesus' continuing his ministry especially in Jerusalem and above all in the Temple area."⁹¹ Their failure to take such action can only be explained by the huge popular support shown for Jesus at his entry into Jerusalem: that is, this event happened at the end of his ministry.⁹²

There are two problems with this view. It probably overestimates the power of the authorities. As their complex maneuvering in the Synoptic accounts of the final week shows, they could not impose their will whenever and however they chose. Moreover, in contrast to those final events, Jesus' intervention here would have taken them by surprise. As a result, they would not have been ready to take strong action against him even if they thought this was warranted. Second, this view overlooks the fact that what happened was not a major upheaval, like a riot. It would have been over quite quickly, and would have left no significant damage. The "Jews" might well react negatively to the implicit claim to authority over their domain (John 2:18). The strange response they received (John 2:19) gave no indication that they were facing someone who had to be stopped or a movement that had to be shut down.⁹³

seems to strike the right balance.

⁹¹ Mullins, *John* 122; cf. Keener, *John* 1:518–19; Tan, *Zion Traditions* 161; Witherington, *John's Wisdom* 86.

⁹² G. H. C. MacGregor, *The Gospel of John* (MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928) 64; Thettayil, *In Spirit and Truth* 384–85; Alfred Wikenhauser, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (RNT; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1961) 83.

⁹³ It has been argued that Jesus' initial intervention in the Temple was staking a claim for honor, that his response to the challenge it elicited (John 2:18–19) was so inadequate that he was shamed in the eyes of the leaders and the crowds, and that his shaming was the reason the leaders did not need to take further action against him (E. Randolph Richards, "An Honor/Shame Argument for Two Temple Clearings," *TrinJ* n.s. 29 [2008] 19–43). This is doubtful: (1) It maintains that the crowds judged his response as inadequate (p. 34), but the only reference to the crowds indicates that they responded favorably to Jesus (John 2:23). (2) It claims that the disciples thought he had lost the contest for honor and only believed when his resurrection showed the real weight of his response (pp. 33–34, 38), but they are nowhere portrayed as disappointed in Jesus or ashamed of him, and they do not go from embarrassment to acceptance but from not comprehending to believing. (3) It maintains that the reason the Synoptics do not report this Temple event is that they did not understand it (pp. 38, 39, 41), which is hard to believe if it involved the kind of honor

The third argument maintains that there is little likelihood that Jesus could have intervened in the Temple on a second occasion, because the authorities would ensure that it was not repeated.⁹⁴ This means that he cannot have done this early in his ministry. This is hardly a convincing argument. If there were two such events, they were separated by several years. During that interval Jesus visited Jerusalem a number of times, without engaging in any disruptive activity of this kind. And the authorities could not be expected to be on their guard against him indefinitely.⁹⁵ In addition, it would have been extremely difficult to keep him under surveillance during the festivals. The crowds of pilgrims in Jerusalem were immense, as were the throngs that entered the huge area of the Temple complex.⁹⁶ It would have been very easy to find anonymity in the crowds (John 5:13)—and very difficult to track down a single individual or small group (John 11:57). And even if the authorities had intended to thwart any plans Jesus might have had to intervene again, the extent of popular support for him on this final visit would have made that difficult (John 12:12–13, 18–19).

VI. CONCLUSION

Our case for two Temple interventions by Jesus has involved five steps. We have argued that the Synoptic and Johannine accounts are simply too different to be versions of the same event. Then we have argued that the common explanations for John's relocation of this event are not very persuasive. Next, we have considered seven pieces

contest that was fundamental to the way their society worked. (4) Two other treatments of the event from this perspective see Jesus as winning the contest involved (Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998] 74–75; Neyrey, *John* 71–72).

⁹⁴ Brown, *John* 1:117 (“it is not likely that such a serious public affront to the Temple would be permitted twice”); cf. Snodgrass, “Temple Incident” 445.

⁹⁵ Carson, *John* 178.

⁹⁶ It is difficult to be sure about the numbers involved, except that they were huge. One study concludes that up to one million pilgrims attended each of the major festivals (Wolfgang Reinhardt, “The Population Size of Jerusalem and the Numerical Growth of the Jerusalem Church,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 4: *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* [ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] 237–65). Another concludes that there were regularly something like 300,000 people in Jerusalem for Passover (Kerr, *Temple* 40–42). A third argues for a figure of 300,000 to 500,000 (Sanders, *Judaism* 126–28).

of evidence that fit an early Temple event. We have then argued that an early demonstration of messianic authority in the Temple is more likely than not when we consider Jesus' sense of his mission to Israel. Finally, we have pointed out the weaknesses of the arguments that have been advanced against an early Temple event.

Some of the arguments we have presented are admittedly stronger than others, but their cumulative effect is significant. They point to a straightforward conclusion: Jesus intervened dramatically in the activities of the Temple at both the beginning and the end of his ministry. By choosing to omit any account of Jesus' pre-Galilean ministry, the Synoptics can only report the second of these, although (as we have seen) they contain hints of earlier visits to Jerusalem. And what of John's decision to report only the first of these Temple events? Is there an external reason: he is intending to complement the Synoptics and can assume that his readers will have heard their story? Or is the reason internal: he wants to focus not on the way Jesus signals judgment for Israel but on the way he devotes his final hours to his ἴδιοι, the nucleus of the new Israel (John 13:1 cf. 1:11)? Or should we look in a different direction to find an explanation? While it is hard to be sure what his omission of the second intervention means, there is good reason to believe that John has got it right when he reports an intervention in the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. I think our study has shown that this conclusion is not the result of special pleading, but the product of weighing evidence carefully.

BOOK REVIEWS

Answers to the Most Important Questions about the End Times. By John Hart. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2016. 189 pp. Paper, \$10.99.

This easy to read book on eschatology starts off by asking the question: “Why should I be interested in Bible Prophecy?” (chapter 1). Hart points out that around 25% of the Bible contains predictions, and half of them have not been fulfilled yet (p. 12). Jesus’ teachings about prophecy “probably” cover more space than any other single topic He addressed (p. 16). Hart says if we study NT eschatology, it can impact us in many different ways. It can give us comfort, make us more generous, and help us avoid a judgmental attitude (p. 19).

Hart accurately explains how the “coming” of Christ involves a series of events. It starts with no signs and the Rapture of the Church. This event happens before the seven-year Tribulation that will engulf the world. At the end of the seven years, Christ will return to earth and set up His kingdom. He points out that those who try to set a date for the Rapture are in error (pp. 25-32).

The book has a good discussion on Daniel’s 70th Week. Hart follows a premillennial, dispensational framework on this important prophecy, as he does throughout the whole book. He also points out how the first 69 weeks in Daniel’s prophecy have already been fulfilled exactly as foretold. We can expect that the last week of the prophecy will be as well (pp. 42-48).

When it comes to the Book of Revelation, Hart says that we can indeed understand it. Many times the book interprets itself, and we should follow the principle that the correct interpretation is usually the plain, normal way of understanding the text. In addition, Rev 1:19 gives us an outline of the book (pp. 64-73).

Hart gives his opinion of issues about eschatology in which there are areas of disagreement. He believes that the Antichrist will be a Gentile from the area of the old Roman Empire. This person is also called the Beast and the Man of Sin in the Bible, and some believe that another man in the future, the False Prophet, is the one the New

Testament labels as the Antichrist. Whether the Beast or the False Prophet is the one called the Antichrist, the Beast will rule over this revived empire. Hart also thinks that this future world leader will actually be killed and raised from the dead (pp. 82-86).

According to Hart, there is a difference between Israel and the Church. The Tribulation period will be a time when the Jewish remnant will be purified and prepared to call upon the name of the Lord. At the end of the Tribulation, God will deliver the believing Jewish nation from their enemies after they call upon Him (p. 106).

There are, according to Hart, different resurrections. Church age believers will be resurrected at the Rapture. Old Testament believers will be resurrected after the Tribulation, along with those who became believers during the Tribulation. Unbelievers of all ages will be resurrected after the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Hart believes there will be a 75 day delay after the Second Coming of Christ before the Millennial Kingdom begins (pp. 152-55).

This reviewer appreciated Hart's presentation of the gospel. Those who believe in Jesus for eternal life are those who will go in the Rapture (p. 25). He quotes John 5:24 and says that the person who believes in Jesus already has eternal life. It is a present possession (pp. 20, 171, 188). Hart also recognizes that works in the Christian's life have no impact on having eternal life. The believer will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to determine his rewards in the kingdom. One of these rewards involves ruling with Christ in His kingdom. Not all believers in the kingdom will rule with Christ. The eternal life of the believer, however, is never in doubt (pp. 20, 173-74).

Any book on eschatology will contain details with which many others will disagree. However, if somebody is looking for a pretribulation, dispensational treatment of the topic for a layman, this is an excellent resource. An extra bonus is that it keeps the free offer of eternal life by faith alone in Christ separate from the need to do good works. Good works are important, but they deal with rewards. It is difficult to find all of these good points in a book today. It would make a good book to use in a Sunday school class on the end times. I highly recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Fishing For Life: Insights for Living from a Jerk at the End of a Line. By Charles C. Bing, Burleson, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 2020. 112 pp. Paper, \$8.

This title caught my eye. I am an avid fisherman who has fished for trout in the eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains my entire life. There are not many books written about fishing or that tell fishing stories. Since at least four of Jesus' disciples were fisherman by trade, the book's title also struck my interest.

Given that fishermen are stereotyped as being prone to lie, the test was on to see if there was any truth to be found in these pages by a writer who is both a fisherman and pastor. The premise of the book is that fishing and life go together. By life, he alludes to spiritual life too.

The book is a collection of stories about the writer's experiences on many different fishing trips over the span of his lifetime. The stories are easy to read and interesting. Each chapter tells a story about a fishing trip, and often there will be an observation that relates the story to life and sometimes spiritual life.

JOTGES readers are not going to find deep spiritual discussions in this book or an analysis of a Biblical text. But that is not the point of the book, either. Rather this is a testimony of sorts with the setting being fishing. If you are not interested in fishing, you may not enjoy this book. On the other hand, it could spur you to gain an interest in fishing.

Many may read the accounts with interest, comparing the writer's experiences with their own. I found myself comparing observations too!

The book has a mild evangelistic appeal. Scattered throughout the pages are references to the writer's own Christian experiences. For example, on p. 10 he describes when he became "born again" and began a new life. He says, "I believed in Jesus Christ as my Savior from sin and hell." He tells us on p. 37 that he was 19 years old when he believed in Jesus Christ. On pp. 68-69 he writes, "Then He rose from the dead to offer us the free gift of eternal life by simply believing Him for it."

On p. 74 he briefly mentions fishing for men. There he describes sharing spiritual truths during a fishing trip with a fishing pal. He

remarks, we “were buoyed by the opportunity to share what was really important to us with someone who really wanted to know. Jesus called it ‘fishing for men.’”

In chapter 20 he mentions rewards and relates them to hardships. The hardship described in the chapter is a trip on a very nasty stretch of river with rapids. His point is that the hardships are worth the rewards.

The Afterword ends the book, and in it he makes a direct evangelistic appeal. He is direct and straightforward in his approach. He writes, “In this book, I have tried not to preach, but let the stories speak and lead where they will. But since this is the end of the book I will say a few words about how you can also have eternal life and abundant life. If you don’t want to know, simply close the book now – we are done.”

He then proceeds to describe Jesus’ work on the cross and tells the reader he can have eternal life by believing in Jesus for it and that the reader can know for certain he has eternal life, p. 98.

If you fish, then I recommend this book! If you don’t fish, oh, well!

Brad Duskocil
Long Beach, CA

Doing Theology with the Reformers. By Gerald L. Bray. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 277 pp. Paper, \$23.99.

Bray is a professor at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. In this book he discusses how the various strands of theological thought in the Reformation of the sixteenth century were the basis of the different denominational confessions of today. These strands include the theology of Luther, the Zwinglians, the Calvinists, and the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists are represented today by the Mennonites, Hutterites, and the Amish, among others. Baptists are much closer to the Calvinists. The Anglicans are also basically Calvinists, but with their own specific characteristics (p. viii). Bray makes it clear that he does not want to discuss the Reformation as much as he wants to discuss the theology of the Reformers.

One of the problems with studying the theology of the Reformation is that the Reformers thought in Latin. In translating Latin into

English, the translator sometimes has the difficult task in determining which English word is the correct translation of the thought of the particular Reformer (p. 9). There is also a short but excellent discussion on how different countries were Catholic and others Protestant, and how that came about (pp. 11-13).

The Lord's Supper became a sharp point of contention. Bray points out that transubstantiation was first introduced in the ninth century. This made the priests indispensable. It, along with other sacraments, became a way to receive grace. Bray also discusses how other issues, such as purgatory, were developed by the Catholic Church, and how the Reformers addressed the issues (pp. 26, 30).

The discussion is of necessity short, but Bray does a good job of explaining the rise of the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. Bray says that the Vulgate is more accurate than the later *Textus Receptus* (p. 49). It is clear that Bray supports the Critical Text of New Testament Greek.

The Reformers also had to deal with allegory in the interpretation of the Scriptures since the Catholic Church had used it extensively (pp. 52-55). In addition, Catholic tradition often took the place of the Scriptures among Catholics. Bray says one of the biggest issues with the Protestants was the authority of the Pope. More than anything else, rejecting that authority is what defined a Protestant (p. 72).

The Reformers belonged to a culture in which it was taken for granted that baptism washed away sin and was necessary for salvation (p. 159). Different Reformers took different positions on the meaning of the sacraments.

Bray indicates that Luther had what would later be called a Calvinist view of salvation. He was a strong advocate of justification by faith but believed faith was given by God (pp. 168-69).

It was surprising for this reviewer that Calvin did not place a high value on the doctrine of the Trinity. He did not believe it was taught in the Bible but said that the orthodox teachings on the subject best reflected what we find in the Bible. It was not necessary to believe in the Trinity in order to be saved (pp. 98-99).

For the readers of the *JOTGES*, Bray has an interesting discussion on how the Reformers saw assurance of salvation (pp. 170ff). The Catholic Church spoke of the hope of going to heaven after a period of time in purgatory. Protestants claimed to know where they

were going. Bray says they had assurance. However, these men then contradicted themselves by saying that a believer had to be obedient to the commands of the Lord since justification and sanctification are inseparable (p. 179). Luther said good works are inevitable (p. 183). Bray says the difference between Catholicism and the Reformers is that Catholics said good works contribute to our salvation, while Protestants said they are the inevitable results. Most readers will recognize that practically there is no difference in those positions.

There is also an interesting discussion on how the civilian government of a particular state often determined the religion of the people (p. 191). The Reformation impacted politics and society as a whole (p. 202). Some Reformers after Luther wanted to punish sins with civil punishment, including the death penalty (p. 207).

Chapter six shows how denominational confessions developed from the theology of the Reformers. The concluding chapter lists the core doctrines of Protestantism. These are the radical nature of the fall of man, the radical nature of salvation, and the radical nature of the authority of the Bible.

The book is easy to read. It contains a great deal of information about how the Reformers dealt with the theological issues they faced in opposition to the Catholic Church and even how the Reformation greatly impacted society as a whole. It also clearly points out that there were many different views among the Protestants. These differences explain much of the denominational differences we see in Christendom today. I highly recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God. By Skye Jethani. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011. 121 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

This book is a rather skillfully disguised presentation of contemplative spirituality. Jethani cites Henri Nouwen a lot (pp. 119, 120, 161, 162, 165, 168, 193). He also cites other contemplative teachers, including Dallas Willard (p. 125), Richard Foster (p. 184), Eugene

Peterson (p. 185), Teresa of Avila (pp. 160, 161), and Brother Lawrence (p. 184).

Jethani defines faith in this way: “Faith is...the courage to surrender control” (p. 167). He explains, “If we return to Nouwen’s trapeze analogy, we can see the transient nature of both faith and hope. *Faith* is the courage to release the trapeze trusting that the Catcher will rescue us. *Hope* is the peace and assurance we experience as we soar untethered through the air knowing the Catcher will not let us fall. But once we are caught, once we are safely and fully in his grasp, faith and hope disappear” (p. 168). He may be suggesting that we go through this life surrendering control to God and hoping that we will be saved in the future. But until then, we are unsure of our eternal destiny.

However, the emphasis in the book, as seen in the subtitle, is how we relate to God, that is, how we *experience* eternal life right now: “The fact is, having been united with God through Christ, we are invited to experience LIFE WITH GOD *now*” (p. 111, small caps and italics his). He emphasizes the need Christians have “to experience his [God’s] presence in their lives” (p. 3). (Though he does say once that “eternal life begins *now* and will continue forever. The life we are now living with him will never cease,” p. 132, emphasis his. However, he is not clear what one must do to gain eternal life [see, for example, pp. 83-87].)

The author finds fault with four ways he thinks that Christians wrongly relate to God.

He chooses four prepositions to define these four views: over, under, from, and for. These four prepositions have nothing to do with the use of those words in Scripture. Instead, these are the ways in which Jethani chooses to characterize these four views.

For example, “Life *Over* God” (chap. 3) is the approach in which “God is abandoned in favor of proven formulas and controllable outcomes” (p. 6). “Life *Under* God” (chap. 2) “sees God in simple cause-and-effect terms—we obey his commands he blesses our lives, our family, our nation. Our primary role is to determine what he approves (or disapproves) and work vigilantly to remain within those boundaries” (p. 7). “Life *From* God” (chap. 4) occurs when “people... want God’s blessings and gifts, but they are not particularly interested in God himself” (p. 6). “Life *For* God” (chap. 5) believes that “the

most significant life...is the one expended accomplishing great things in God's service" (p. 7).

The correct approach according to the author, as his title suggests, is "Life With God" (chap. 6). Jethani says this approach "is different because its goal is not to *use* God, its goal *is* God...God himself becomes the focus of our desire" (p. 102). It is easy to see where contemplative spirituality comes in. Prayer is now not so much talking with God as it is *experiencing God*. The meaning of Scripture is not as important as the way in which it can cause us to *experience God*. Jethani says, "*Lectio divina* (divine reading) approaches the Scriptures not as a depository of principles and applications, but as the self-revelation of God and his people. The Bible is the Living Word of God through which he still speaks and communes with us" (p. 176). Why the either/or approach? Should we not find in the Bible principles for living? Should we not apply God's Word? And what does Jethani mean when he says that God "still speaks...with us"? Is this extra-Biblical special revelation received as we reflect on "a word, phrase, or sentence from the Bible reading" (p. 177)? And what does it mean to him for God to "commune with us"? Is that a feeling?

There is truth in what the author says about each of these four approaches. However, his explanations are a bit misleading as well. They are like caricatures of any view that is not contemplative.

It is true that some if not many pastors make decisions for their churches based on principles of church growth ("formulas and controllable outcomes"). And it is true that parts of the church growth model are inconsistent with Scripture. However, some of these pastors proclaim the free gift of everlasting life, love the Lord, and are watchful for His soon return. Few if any of them are guilty of *abandoning God*.

Similarly, there is much correct about what Jethani calls the *life under God* model. He presents it as rigid, legalistic, and divorced from love for God. But seeking God's approval and blessings is a good thing. If one loves God and seeks transformation from God's Word, this approach is not objectionable.

The same could be said for the *life from God* approach if one loves God and seeks Him in a Biblical manner.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to accomplish significant things for God (*life for God* approach). Again, if one loves God and

seeks the renewal of his mind through the work of the Spirit as we are taught God's Word, this approach is not objectionable.

The author never discusses two key texts on the Christian life, Rom 12:2 and 2 Cor 3:18. His approach is not that we grow by taking the Word of God and changing our worldviews with the result that our lives are transformed. He sees growth occurring by mystical contemplative practices.

I would think that if one wished to find a preposition which summarizes the key to Christian living, it might be the word *by*. We walk *by* faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). We live *by* faith (Gal 2:20). Remembering that we are justified and born again *by* faith in Christ, apart from works, is crucial in our fellowship with God (1 John 5:9-13). Living ever aware that we will be judged *by* the Lord Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ is a vital part of victorious Christian living (Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 4:3-4). A better one-word title would be *By*. Or maybe *In* (e.g., Rom 5:2, 3, 11; 8:9-11; 12:4-16; Gal 5:1, 16, 25; Eph 5:2). A concordance study might yield a more Biblical title.

There are no Scripture or subject indexes. Jethani rarely quotes Scripture, and when he does, he does not indicate where it is from in the text. (He did on p. 124 mention Psalm 23.) Instead, one must go to the notes at the end of the book to find out where the reference is from.

Jethani is a gifted writer and storyteller. However, what he is teaching is misleading and dangerous. I do not recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Paul & the Gift. By John M. G. Barclay. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. 656 pp. Cloth, \$117.99.

Barclay's work will be foreign to those who are not familiar with *the new perspective on Paul* (hereafter, NPP). Barclay's discussion of NPP (esp. pp. 151-182) presupposes that one is quite familiar with it.

The book is broken up into four parts: the multiple meanings of *gift* and *grace* (pp. 11-188), divine gift in Second Temple Judaism (pp. 189-328), Galatians: the Christ-gift and the recalibration of worth (pp.

331-446), and Romans: Israel, the Gentiles, and God's creative gift (pp. 449-574).

I love the title and the discussion of the words *gift* and *grace* in Scripture.

Barclay makes the interesting point that gifts have not always been understood as something freely given with no strings attached (e.g., pp. 183-84). In the Greco-Roman world, it was not uncommon to expect the recipient of a gift to reciprocate in some way, even if it is just the expression of gratitude. Of course, in such a situation, the gift would still be free.

Barclay argues that it is a Western idea that gifts are non-reciprocal (that is, that they do not require the recipient to reciprocate). We might quibble that even in the West, givers expect something in return. Most I know in the Western world expect something in response to the gifts they give (a thank you card, a verbal thanks, a return gift, etc.). I learned in my family that when someone gives you a gift, you write a thank you note, or, if you receive it in person, you overflow with hugs and expressions of gratitude (even if I didn't really want socks).

In the Scriptures, the gift of everlasting life (John 4:10; Eph 2:9) does not *require* the recipient to respond appropriately. However, it is a valid point that God *expects* the believer to respond with gratitude, worship, and a lifetime of service to God (e.g., only one healed leper returned to the Lord to give thanks, yet all were expected to do so by the Lord).

Second Temple Judaism refers to the Jewish teachings from the return from exile in 538 BC, when the second temple was built, until the destruction of the second temple in AD 70. There were five post-exilic canonical books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). Barclay, however, concentrates solely on non-canonical books (The Wisdom of Solomon, the works of Philo of Alexandria, the Qumran *Hodayot*, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, and 4 Ezra). The canonical post-exilic authors rarely used these words: *grace* occurs once in Ezra and three times in Zechariah; *gift* occurs once in Zechariah. (Barclay also does not consider what the thirty-four pre-exilic OT books say about *grace* and *gift*, which is surprising and disappointing.)

While it is true that the post-exilic Jewish writers cited by Barclay spoke of *grace* and *gift*, their concepts were not like those found in the NT. Most Jews misunderstood the OT and thought that entrance into God's kingdom required a lifetime of perseverance in faithfulness to Yahweh. However, Barclay seems to favorably cite E. P. Sanders's view that Jews did not believe in works righteousness (p. 151). Instead, he thinks that the OT and NT affirm that one remains in God's covenant family by obedience (p. 153) and by repentance when needed in order to maintain or restore one's status (p. 153). Barclay rejects the view of D. A. Carson that Second Temple Judaism taught "merit theology" (pp. 166-175, 379-80). But, of course, Barclay's own view is a form of merit theology.

For people today, Barclay sees the initiation of salvation as "unconditioned...without also being unconditional" once one is saved (p. 562). He points out that Second Temple Judaism was not united in whether God's grace is given "to the unworthy" or "to fitting recipients (pp. 562-65).

Barclay thinks that in Galatians and Romans, Paul was not expressing remorse over the Jewish view of salvation by works (e.g., p. 566-68). He wrote, "This is certainly not to return to the theologically pernicious contrasts between Pauline grace and Jewish works-righteousness; by contrast, we have demonstrated the significance of divine beneficence in a wide range of Jewish texts. Grace is everywhere in Second Temple Judaism" (p. 572). But that does not explain many texts where Paul is doing just that (Rom 4:1-8; 10:1ff.; Gal 2:16; 3:6-14).

The best feature in this book—and it is outstanding—is Barclay's repeated claim that "the gift carries expectations of obedience," (p. 569; see also pp. 47, 56, 60, 114, 518). Free Grace people are sometimes so concerned that we do not give the impression that perseverance in good works *must follow* saving faith that we fail to acknowledge that God *expects* perseverance in good works to follow saving faith. However, we can and should make that distinction.

Barclay, however, sees *what is expected*, a life of obedience, as also *the requirement* for what he calls *final salvation* (cf. pp. 174-75, 320, 377). Concerning Paul's writings on grace, he comments, "Judgment 'according to works' does not entail a new and incompatible principle of soteriology; it indicates that the incongruous gift has had its

intended effect in embedding new standards of worth in the practice of those it transforms” (p. 569).

In passing, it should be noted that Barclay considers Ephesians, 2 Timothy, and Titus as “deutero-Pauline,” that is, written by someone else who then put Paul’s name on the work (p. 571).

I recommend this book to NT scholars and those training to become NT scholars. Academically minded pastors might enjoy it as well. But most pastors, and certainly most laypeople, would find this book difficult to understand and a very slow read.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism. By Ken Wilson. NP: Regula Fidei Press, 2019. 121 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

I have known Ken Wilson for many years, having been his professor for five or six online classes, including four semesters of Greek (second- and third-year master’s level). He showed himself to be an outstanding student and researcher. He later went on to get M.Div. and Th.M. degrees. With those in hand, he then worked for and received a D.Phil. degree from Oxford University. This book is a very abbreviated and simplified version of his doctoral dissertation.

Wilson’s basic point is found in the title and the cover of the book. The cover has a picture of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. His point is that modern Calvinism, which he prefers to call Augustinian-Calvinism (cf. p. 110), is built on the foundation of the views of Augustine, particularly his deterministic and non-free-will views, and that the result is that Calvinism is a tottering system of theology.

His major point is the conclusion he draws from his studies on the influence of Augustine on Calvinist thought. He is suggesting that Calvinism is almost certainly wrong since it is based on the theology of Stoics and Manicheans who led Augustine to adopt determinism and non-free will.

Wilson points out that Augustine’s theology changed three times: “Stage 1.) the foreseen merit of works (386-394 CE), Stage 2.) no foreseen merit of works but only God’s foreknowledge of

faith alone, per Tichonius [sic] (395-411 CE), then finally, Stage 3.) Divine Unilateral Predetermination of Individual Eternal Destinies [DUPIED]—unilateral election devoid of foreknowledge or even faith (412-430 CE)” (p. 91). As can be seen here, Wilson prefers CE, Common Era, over AD, in the year of the Lord. He also prefers BCE, Before the Common Era, over BC, Before Christ. I assume he used those designations because leading theological scholarship today prefers CE and BCE.

A truly surprising suggestion by Wilson is that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was widely held and taught in the Church up until the time of Augustine. As proof, he cites a journal article by Daniel Williams entitled “Justification by Faith: a Patristic Doctrine” (p. 94, note 5). Wilson argues that justification by faith was widely taught in the early Church from the second through the fourth centuries.

I have often argued that justification by faith alone, while not found in the surviving writings of the Church fathers, was surely believed and taught by many in every generation from the time of the Apostles until the Reformation. God always has a remnant. However, while it would be great if there were some proof of that in Patristic writings, I did not find that in Wilson’s book. Wilson does not give a single quote from any Patristic writer to prove his point. Possibly such quotes are found in his larger dissertation.

The article by Williams is freely available online. I found the article. It does not prove what Wilson suggests. Instead, it proves the opposite. Williams showed that the Church fathers before Augustine taught Arminian Lordship Salvation (though Williams does not use that expression). They believed that one was *initially* justified by faith, not by works of the OT Law, but that in order to obtain final justification and in order to retain one’s salvation, one had to persevere in a life of good works.

Wilson often calls both the Church fathers and the Church people before Augustine “early Christians.” He does not simply mean people who called themselves Christians. He indicated that these were people who believed in justification by faith alone, apart from works. He cites four Patristic writers whom he says taught “unmerited grace without works” (p. 94). He was referring to “Hilary of Poitiers, Tichonius [sic], Victorinus, and Jerome” in their works “on Romans

and Galatians” (p. 94). This seems to be taken primarily from the article by Williams. However, Wilson gives no quotations to back up this claim. Instead, there is a footnote that refers to the article by Daniel Williams. While it is nice to have a reference to that article, it is frustrating that we are not given any quotes.

Of course, Roman Catholics have always taught justification by faith. What they never taught, and do not teach today, is justification by faith *alone, apart from works*. Nor did they or do they teach eternal security.

What is it that a person must do to have everlasting life? Wilson does not answer that question directly. But twice in the book he gives a hint of what his answer would be. In the conclusion to the last chapter before the overall conclusion, he writes, “Humans only needed to accept God’s gift of salvation in Christ through their own residual God-given divine image (i.e., free choice)” (p. 106). That is quite vague. Then in the final chapter, the conclusion, he says, “Early Christians taught GRACE: **G**od offers salvation equally, **R**esidual free choice response, **A**tonement universally, **C**onditional election based on foreknowledge, and **E**ternal life for those who respond in faith” (p. 116). There Wilson mentions the need to “respond in faith.” But he fails to say precisely what one must believe to have everlasting life. He then adds, “These concepts comprise the solid GRACE foundation championed by earliest Christians over against heretical and pagan deterministic DUPIED and the later Augustine’s TULIP. The Christian God of love sacrificially invited all humans to join him in eternal life” (p. 116).

Wilson believes in election to everlasting life, but he sees election as conditioned upon something God foresees in a person.

I appreciate the work that Wilson has done in pointing out the non-Christian roots of Augustine’s later theology. Non-Calvinists will likely much appreciate his work. However, I do not believe that this book provides much help in discussing these issues with Calvinists. Modern Calvinists cite Scripture to support their views. They do not cite Augustine. I recall Norm Geisler pointing out that you cannot reject a view because of its origins. He said that it does not matter that creation is found in the Bible. What mattered, he said, was whether the evidence supported creationism or not. The same is true with modern Calvinism. When I discuss these issues

with Calvinists, I discuss Scripture. I see no value in pointing out the Stoic and Manichean underpinnings.

I recommend *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* for pastors and theologians. Even lay teachers who are comfortable reading scholarly literature might find it profitable to read. It would probably not be of interest for most laypeople.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought. By Oliver D. Crisp and Kyle C. Strobel. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018. 232 pp. Paper, \$21.42.

Oliver Crisp is a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, and Kyle Strobel is a professor at Talbot School of Theology. Both are clearly experts on the topic of this book. It is called an “introduction” to Jonathan Edwards. However, this book is more advanced than the title suggests. It is not an easy read, as it combines both theology and philosophy.

Jonathan Edwards is considered by many to be one of the leading theological minds that America has ever produced. He lived in the 18th century and died before the Revolutionary War. He was also a leader of the First Great Awakening.

Edwards is considered a hero by most Reformed theologians. I was hoping that the book would discuss his views of soteriology. However, the book does not discuss his view of Biblical passages, and there are no examples of his exegesis.

The authors point out that Edwards was a thinker who engaged with “cutting-edge early modern philosophy” (p. 11). They add that he was an original thinker as a result. He had a high view of the Scriptures but also had a strong interest in spiritual experience (p. 12). When it came to the Scriptures, he felt that it is full of types and antitypes. It also contains numerous “signs” that are complex and can only be ascertained by immersing oneself in the text for years (p. 26).

It is clear that Edwards had a high intellect. At age 12, he entered what would become Yale College. Partly because of his abilities, he

was arrogant and aloof (p. 18). He was also critical of others and was known to delight in their misfortunes (p. 28). Not surprisingly, then, he often saw himself as better than others and had a sense of self-righteousness. To his credit, he saw how sinful this attitude was (p. 29).

Even though Crisp and Strobel maintain Edwards had a high view of the Scriptures, they point out that he also believed revelation could be found in other academic disciplines, such as philosophy. He was constantly studying the latest discoveries in other sciences to help understand the Scriptures (p. 27).

When the book turns to the theology and philosophy of Edwards, readers who are not immersed in philosophical thought will find the reading difficult. Some of the titles of the chapters will bear this out. Chapter three is titled “God and Idealism.” The sixth chapter is titled “Salvation as Participation.” Chapter seven is called “Becoming Beautiful.”

A few sentences from chapter six will give the reader an idea of the philosophical flavor of the thought of Edwards. Speaking of spiritual salvation, he says:

Sharing in the life of the Son, and seeing Him by faith in the illuminating presence of the Spirit, affectionately draws the believer away from selfishness to long for God in His beauty. In short, the creature now knows that he or she is called to be beautiful as Christ has revealed His beauty within His person and work. This beauty is the moral reality of life in Christ, who has revealed in Himself the deep wisdom of God and offered His people a participation of beauty itself. (p. 169)

The book points out that Edwards had some ideas that would be considered radical by many conservative Reformed theologians today. His writings can be used to support occasionalism, continuous creationism, and panentheism (pp. 94-101). Crisp and Strobel say that Edwards’s emphasis on the sovereignty of God would lead one to conclude that he felt God was responsible for sin (p. 120).

I do not recommend this book for anybody who is looking to see how a well-known Reformed thinker interpreted certain Scriptures or for those who are not accustomed to philosophical language. However, for those who are interested in how philosophy and reason

can be used to arrive at theological conclusions, this book has value. Of course, anyone who desires a more advanced study of the man who impacted both Puritan and Reformed thought will find in this book information not found in standard works on Edwards.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The State of the Evangelical Mind: Reflections on the Past, Prospects for the Future. Edited by Todd Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher Devers. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2018. 180 pp. Hardcover, \$23.87.

This book is comprised of eight essays by scholars in various fields, including journalism and philosophy. It is not an exegetical or theological book. The essays are in response to a book written by Mark Noll in 1994 entitled *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Noll made the point that there was a lack of intellectual prowess in the Evangelical world. He felt that the life of the mind and faith in Christ demonstrated by the love for fellow Evangelicals were often seen as being in opposition to each other (p. 1). Noll was calling for an intellectual renaissance (p. 3). In *The State of the Evangelical Mind*, the writers evaluate how things are today. The book looks at four areas: churches, parachurch organizations, universities, and Evangelical seminaries. Noll and others have called for Evangelicals to become leaders in fields other than theology, such as philosophy, the arts, history, literature, and mathematics.

The introductory essay defines what the book means by the word “Evangelicals.” These are people who stress four things. The first is conversion, which is defined as a need to change one’s life. The second is activism, which is putting the gospel in action. The third is Biblicism. The last is “crucicentrism,” which is a stress on the sacrifice of Christ (p. 5). At least some Evangelicals will feel that there is a strong ecumenical strand throughout the book. The gospel is not clearly presented.

In this book, Noll comments that Evangelicals have indeed made great strides in engaging the life of the mind in many different

disciplines. The secular academic world has taken notice. This has allowed Evangelicals to have closer ties with Catholics and mainline Protestants (pp. 35-36).

In relation to the Church, Jo Anne Lyon says in chapter two that we must beware of things like fundamentalism and nationalism and instead strive for works of love, mercy, and justice in society. These works will impact culture. Racism is a particular problem within Evangelicalism. By developing the Evangelical mind, we can be like the early Wesleyan movement in its opposition to child labor laws, tariffs that hurt the poor, and slavery. Today we can help feed the poor, provide free medical clinics for those in need, and reach out to illegal immigrants. (pp. 44-45). These things come from the prophetic tradition of the Scriptures. If we lose this tradition, Evangelicals will wind up promoting nationalism and a civil religion (p. 57).

David Mahan discusses in chapter three parachurch organizations, such as Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) and says that Evangelicals have made an impact on college campuses (p. 62). They have had to engage in intellectual pursuits and will play a large role in the future. On these campuses, Evangelicals come into contact with views that challenge their Christian commitments (p. 65). However, the chapter also says Evangelicals must carry these intellectual pursuits into the church. The minds of believers in the pew need to be developed as well (p. 99).

In chapter four, Timothy Larsen deals with Evangelicals and universities, including Christian ones. He calls for academic freedom in every case. It is natural that different types of colleges have “ideological boundaries,” but these boundaries cannot be rigid. Theology needs to be discussed in secular universities. Christian colleges must be willing to change, including their statements of belief, when confronted with new evidence. Larsen teaches at Wheaton College and is glad that it modified its views on various positions (p. 122).

Lauren Winner, in chapter five, speaks of the seminary where she attended and later taught. It was open to free intellectual pursuit, and there were students from all kinds of Christian denominations, including Catholicism. Evangelicals were able to “grow” while they were there as a result of the free flow of ideas (pp.125-26). The purpose of seminaries is to help people develop eyes so that when they look at the world, they can see Jesus. This will result in social activism.

In the conclusion, this reviewer was interested in a testimony of conversion. A woman explains how she felt the presence of Jesus in her room one night. She didn't see Him but just knew He was there. She then had the feeling that a cat was following her around in the following days. The cat wanted her to open the door and let it in. At first she did not, but in the end she gave in and let the cat in (p. 168). She sees this as her conversion to Christianity. The author, Mark Galli, approves of this testimony. He says that some have been converted while on LSD. Jesus needs to be at the center of whatever encounter the non-Christian has (p. 169). Whoever they are, whether Catholic nuns, Evangelicals, or Pentecostals, after this encounter they are called to serve those in need (p. 172).

The value of this book is allowing the reader to see how broad the meaning of the word "Evangelical" is. For those interested in having a clearer understanding of such terminology today and how such Evangelicals are trying to engage our culture and politics, I recommend this book. However, many readers of the *JOTGES* probably call themselves Evangelicals. They may want to reconsider such a practice since they would not see themselves being described in this book. It is certainly not a book that maintains that the gospel of eternal salvation is based on free grace. If one is seeking a discussion on reaching the culture with the free message of eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone, I do not recommend this book.

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Understanding Biblical Election. By Ron Merryman. Jacksonville, FL: Merryman Ministries, 2020. 44 pp. Spiral bound, \$17.95.

Because of the disastrous effects of Calvinism and Reformed Theology, many have had their assurance of everlasting life wrecked. Many Christians have wondered, "Am I one of the elect? How do I know God chose me? How can I be sure I have eternal life if I don't know whether God picked me?"

Unfortunately, there are not many books written on this important Biblical subject that look at the Biblical data without the bias of Reformed Theology. This book attempts to examine election from the perspective of church age saints. Thus it is not an exhaustive look at this Biblical subject.

Merryman begins by considering the election of Messiah and Israel. He uses the election of Israel to introduce the concept of corporate election. Israel is a nation comprised of ethnic Jews. It was a group. In a similar manner, the writer concludes that the election or choice of the church is corporate.

He then looks at the word group for election used in the NT and notes the translations and uses of the word group. He lists all uses of the underlying Greek words but does not discuss them all. However, he does make observations about them.

To support his conclusion that the election of the church is corporate, he discusses Eph 1:1-13; 1 Thess 1:2-4; 2 Thess 2:13-14; Rom 9:1-24; and 1 Pet 1:1-2.

In discussing Eph 1:1-13, he assumes the words “we” and “us” are speaking about church age saints (i.e. the Church). He does not address whether the pronouns used in Ephesians refer to Jews (we, us) and Gentiles (you).

In the Thessalonian passages, he observes the corporate nature of election and that the choosing is for “salvation.” He describes this as the “entire salvific package.” He understands this to be everything someone receives when that person believes in Christ. He concludes this section by saying the Church is chosen for God’s glory. He does not address any other possible meanings for the word “salvation” in Thessalonians. (For the view that salvation refers to the Rapture in 1-2 Thessalonians, see the discussion of 2 Thess 2:13 in *Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election Is to Service, Not to Eternal Life*, by Shawn Lazar [Denton, Texas: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017], 213-224.)

In discussing Rom 9:1-24, he is correct to point out the importance of asking the question of “Election of whom and to what?” He makes some good observations in this section and rightly shows the fallacies of the Reformed view.

In discussing 1 Pet 1:1-2, he takes the view that the “elect” refers to church age believers in Christ. He does not see that Peter is describing Jewish believers in Jesus, the Messiah.

He includes a section of observations about the Reformed view of election. He makes some worthy observations and concludes, “Scripturally, Reformed Soteriology is bankrupt.” It is!

JOTGES readers may not agree with everything written, especially about the message of eternal life. Merryman says that OT people were saved by faith “in the sacrificial system God had designed” (p. 5, note 3). He says likewise that NT people are saved by faith “in the death-resurrection of Christ” (p. 39) and that “Faith...rests its case for forgiveness of sins totally upon the death and resurrection of Messiah, Jesus Christ” (p. 41, note 28). His view of the message of life relates mostly to sin and forgiveness of sin. It also relates to believing what Christ did (His work) as opposed to believing in Christ *for everlasting life*.

There are many valuable observations and analyses in this brief book. There is much that is worthwhile.

I recommend this book for pastors and theologians.

Brad Duskocil
Long Beach, CA

Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don't Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. By Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener. Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2019. 236 pages. Paper, \$15.99.

Michael Brown is the founder and president of FIRE School of Ministry in Concord, North Carolina, and host of the daily radio program *The Line of Fire*. He is also a noted proponent of the Charismatic Movement and claims to speak in tongues (p. 43).

Craig Keener is a professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, the editor of the *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, and has served as president of the Evangelical Theological Society. He also claims to speak in tongues. In regard to the pre-Tribulation Rapture, he says that those verses used to support it are taken out of context (p. 25).

Not Afraid of the Antichrist is divided into three parts: 1. Why many doubt ‘Left Behind’ theology; 2. What does the Bible say? (or, What the Bible says;) and 3. Implications for us today. Each part contains four chapters. It has endnotes but no bibliography.

Keener is known for his academic writing, but *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* is different kind of work for him. Not only does he have a co-author, his style is very condescending. The style is not academic, as he acknowledges in the preface, and the 49 endnotes are indeed “few and far between” (p. 15). The book is “addressed to a wide audience” (p. 36) and is meant to “inspire” (p. 15).

Both Brown and Keener, in their “earliest days as believers” (p. 14), attended churches that taught a pre-tribulation Rapture. Although they are now “convinced that this teaching is not found in Scripture,” they “never divide from others over the subject” (p. 14). Yet, Christians who argue for it make “extra assumptions beyond what any passage says” (p. 23), “construct secondary arguments” (p. 36), and are “cult-like” because they “discount the clear testimony of hundreds of Scriptures because of a questionable system of interpretation” (pp. 187-88).

Keener gets to the crux of the issue in his introduction. Based on their reading of 1 Thess 4:17, the authors do believe in a Rapture. However, the question is “whether this catching up happens before or after the final time of Tribulation” (p. 24). They feel it simply isn’t fair that the last generation of Western believers escape the Tribulation when previous generations of Christians have suffered persecution in this life.

In the first section of *Not Afraid of the Antichrist*, the authors raise some questions about the pre-tribulation Rapture, explain why they left behind their “left behind” theology, explore views about the end times throughout church history, and reject dispensationalism. Section two examines support for a pre-tribulation Rapture in the OT, makes the case that the Rapture and the second coming are one and the same, evaluates some pre-tribulation arguments, and presents some post-Tribulational passages. Section three discusses the coming tribulation, tells us how to live in light of post-Tribulationalism and the return of Christ, and reminds us that even though we will face tribulation, we should “live in expectation of God’s promise for a renewed world where suffering and death will be no more” (p. 219).

The authors maintain that the doctrine of a pre-tribulation Rapture began with John Nelson Darby around 1830. Keener brings up the work of Dave MacPherson and his claim that Darby got his idea for it from Edward Irving who got it from Margaret MacDonald who got

it in a vision. But then he acknowledges that MacDonald's prophecy "sounds more post-Tribulational" (p. 61). So why bring it up?

But the guilt by association doesn't stop there. We are told that "The Way International, a cult that denies Jesus' deity, is preTribulational" (p. 63). Pre-Tribulationalism is termed "Left Behind" theology to identify it with the novels and movies of that name. Edgar Whisenant's book *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*, which all serious pre-Tribulational advocates repudiated when it was published, even garners a mention.

In his chapter on OT support for a pre-Tribulational Rapture, Brown fails to mention Enoch as a type, a living man taken by God from earth to heaven who never dies. He views God protecting the children of Israel from the death of the firstborn as confirming "the post-Tribulation position, namely, that God can preserve His people *here on the earth* while He pours out His wrath *on the very same earth*" (p. 89). But the question is not about what God *can* do, but what God *will* do.

God can "multitask" (p. 98), says Brown. He can deal with "the Church and Israel at the same time" (p. 98) during the Tribulation period and the argument that the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7) is for Israel is "specious" (p. 98). So, which is it? Does God want the last generation of Western believers to experience tribulation or does he want to preserve them on earth while others experience tribulation? Brown's "most decisive OT text in our discussion" is Isa 26:20-21 and the larger context of "the Apocalypse of Isaiah" in chapters 24-27 (p. 94). But here he equates Israel with all believers.

Chapter six of *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* tells us that "the idea that the Rapture and the Second Coming are two distinct events is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures" (p. 101). Yet, even the authors believe that "there is one Second Coming, and it has different aspects to it" (p. 107). Much ado is made over the fact that the same Greek words (like *parousia*) "are used to describe two supposedly separate and quite different events" (p. 102). An appearing (*epiphaneia*) and a revealing (*apokalupsis*) "must be visible" (pp. 114-115), so these words can't possibly refer to a pre-Tribulational "secret" Rapture. The authors believe that Christians are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but then they descend to earth together with him as he "defeats his enemies and establishes His Kingdom on the earth" (p. 107).

The authors misrepresent pre-Tribulationism. Christ meeting believers in the clouds (1 Thess 4:17) is certainly an actual presence and arrival that is a visible appearing and revealing *to believers*. Regarding the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, OT saints are not “in Christ” (1 Thess 4:16) and neither do they “sleep in Jesus” (1 Thess 4:14). Yet, in the post-Tribulation system, saints of all ages are raptured to meet Jesus as he returns to earth.

In the chapters on “evaluating some pre-Tribulation arguments” and “post-Tribulation passages,” the authors are hopelessly confused because they make no distinction between Israel and the Church and attempt to lump together Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4. The authors believe that “the view that Christians are raptured and thus resurrected before the Tribulation makes Biblical prophecy far more complex than it needs to be” (p. 29).

However, rejecting a pre-Tribulation Rapture and forcing all prophetic events together is what makes Biblical prophecy far more complex than it needs to be. Things that are different are not the same. The Rapture is not the second coming. The church has not replaced Israel. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not the White Throne Judgment.

Chapter 10 of the book, entitled, “How to Live in Light of Post-Tribulationism,” reads instead like “How to Live in Light of Postmillennialism.” It closes with the statement that “the Gospel is spreading through the world at an ever-increasing pace, *with* the Spirit’s help, not *without* the Spirit’s help, and in the midst of great darkness and evil and apostasy, God’s light is shining brighter by the day” (p. 199). This chapter also contains some very dubious statistics on how many people are coming to faith today (pp. 196-98).

I note also that the authors believe that “Jesus’ true followers must persevere to the end” (p. 206).

I can only recommend *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* to seasoned and grounded pre-Tribulation pastors and teachers who need to see what opponents are currently saying. This is not a book that Craig Keener should be proud of.

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Veiled and Silent: A Call to Relook at the Functioning of Women Within the “Assemblies.” By Kent Young. Tallahassee, FL: N.P., 2015. 82 pp. Paper, \$6.99.

In this short book, Kent Young re-examines Paul’s two commands to women to keep silent and to wear head coverings. He also examines how Plymouth Brethren assemblies have interpreted those passages. In sum, Young argues that Paul did not universally ban women’s speech in the meeting. On the contrary, he assumes they will pray and prophesy. Instead, Paul forbade women both from teaching and from interrupting or interacting with a teacher in the presence of their husbands. Head coverings are only to be worn in the meeting, especially since women would be permitted to pray or prophesy.

In chapter 1, Young summarizes the issues and shows how Brethren commonly apply these commands. Against those who claim Paul was making culture-specific requirements that no longer apply today, Young points out that Paul “appeals to no Corinthian, Jewish, or other first century custom, but to the unseen spiritual world (1 Corinthians 11:10) and to nature (11:14)” (p. 9). Furthermore, he argues that Paul made the commands binding on all the churches (p. 14), leaving no room for ignoring them. “There is really no justification for one who believes in the authority of the Scripture to consider either of these commands as being somehow inapplicable to believers today” (p. 15). Young sees the central problem as trying to reconcile Paul’s command for women to be silent with his order that they wear head coverings while praying or prophesying (p. 16), which suggests they are not always quiet.

In chapter 2, Young presents three harmonizations by John Calvin, David Bercot, and Rusty Entrekin. For example, Bercot says the two commands have different social settings. Whereas women must remain silent in the meeting of the church, they can pray and prophesy elsewhere (p. 20). Young finds that explanation unconvincing because Paul is not describing what women should do in private, but the practice of “all the churches of God.” Young then summarizes Entrekin’s argument that Paul was referring to a local problem with Corinthian women speaking in a disruptive manner. Entrekin argues that the Greek word for *silent* (*sigāō*) is not absolute but specific to not interrupting a public speaker, as in Acts 12:17 and 15:12-13 (p. 22).

And the present tense for *speaking* (*laleō*) indicates the Corinthian women had been talking while the speaker was addressing the assembly. In sum, Entrekin concludes that Paul was not commanding women to be absolutely silent but forbidding them from carrying on a conversation during a teaching time. Young favors aspects of Entrekin's interpretation but goes further in the next two chapters.

In chapter 3, Young argues for a chiasmic pattern in 1 Cor 14:26-35 that clarifies in what sense women should be silent. Just as languages (tongues) without interpretation require silence, and prophets without revelation should be silent, women (wives?) should be silent regarding the teaching given. What does that mean? For Young, it could mean that Paul was forbidding women from functioning as teachers over men, or he could be restricting women from asking questions of teacher while in the presence of their husbands. Young leaves the question open but is sure that "Paul had no intention of placing a universal restriction on women from all verbal participation in the meetings of the saints... There are times when they are to be silent and there are times when they can speak" (pp. 43-44).

In chapter 4, Young comments on Paul's saying that women should keep silent "as the law also says" (1 Cor 14:34). What law is that? Young concludes that while women in the OT were allowed to pray and in front of men, they were forbidden from teaching the law. Hence, Young understands Paul to be saying that only men can be teachers. But can't women at least ask questions? Young further notes that while NT teaching was often dialogical, the only recorded interactions we have in Scripture are questions being asked by men, not women, even though female disciples were present. Young says, "there are no examples, so far as I am aware, of women publicly questioning that which is being taught" (p. 59). Hence, Young takes the command to be silent to include refraining from asking questions during a teaching time.

Despite having written a short book, Young still manages to make a cogent case for his position. However, it did leave me with several questions, especially about the apostolic reasons *why* women should be banned, not just from teaching, but from even *interacting* with a teacher. In all my years of school, I have never noticed a particular problem with women asking questions. Why would God object to

that? Moreover, I firmly believe that dialogue and discussion are essential for learning to occur.

Young could not think of examples where women publicly questioned what was taught, but Jesus often dialogued with women about spiritual matters (e.g., the Samaritan woman or Martha or the woman caught in adultery or the woman with the issue of blood). They asked Jesus questions. There are also examples of women who taught men *in some sense*, such as Priscilla with Apollo (Acts 18:24-26). Perhaps those are all examples of something that happened in private, not in the meeting of the church. But if women or wives cannot interact with a teacher, what about unmarried women or women whose husbands are not believers or women whose husbands do not have answers to their questions? It seems that, in those cases, women will suffer if they cannot ask a teacher questions. Is that God's design?

In sum, I recommend this book for conservatives struggling with questions about the role of women and of head coverings in the church.

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