

Journal of the  
**GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY**

*“Faith Alone in Christ Alone”*

---

<b>VOLUME 36</b>	<b>Spring 2023</b>	<b>NUMBER 70</b>
------------------	--------------------	------------------

---

<b>Mark 16: Unbelieving Believers and a Baptism which Saves</b>	<b>3</b>
James F. Myers	
<b>A Literary and Theological Analysis of Ruth</b>	<b>17</b>
Philippe R. Sterling	
<b>Is Jesus’ Evangelistic Message still Valid?</b>	<b>39</b>
Robert N. Wilkin	
<b>The Lord’s Eating with Sinners in Luke 5</b>	<b>53</b>
Kathryn Wright	
<b>Who Are Those on the “Outside”?</b>	<b>69</b>
Kenneth W. Yates	
<b>Book Reviews</b>	<b>89</b>

# Journal of the GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

Published Semiannually by GES

Editor

**Kenneth W. Yates**

Associate Editor

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Layout

**Matthew Simmons**

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

**Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address** should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202 or email [ges@faithalone.org](mailto:ges@faithalone.org). Subscription Rates: single copy, \$9.25 (U.S.); 1 year, \$18.50; 2 years, \$35.00; 3 years, \$49.50; 4 years, \$62.00; \$13.50 per year for active full-time students. Please add \$4.00 for U.S. shipping. Add \$4.50 per year for shipping to Mexico and Canada and \$8.50 per year for all other international shipping. New subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25; gift subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25.

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

**We Affirm:** God, out of love for the human race, sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners. He paid the full penalty for human sin when He died on the cross. Any person who believes in Jesus Christ for everlasting life receives that gift which, as the words everlasting life suggest, can never be lost (John 1:29; 3:16-18; 19:30; 1 Tim 1:16).

---

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

---

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

©2023 Grace Evangelical Society

ISBN: 978-1-943399-49-9

# MARK 16: UNBELIEVING BELIEVERS AND A BAPTISM WHICH SAVES<sup>1</sup>

JAMES F. MYERS

*JFM Ministries*

## I. INTRODUCTION

**A**dvocates of baptismal regeneration and the continuation of sign gifts for the post-apostolic church often turn to Mark 16:16-20 for a proof text:

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

Those opposed to these two doctrines often dispute the authenticity of this proof text as a later addition by an editor, not Mark,<sup>3</sup> or they ignore contextual data in interpreting Mark 16:16-20, thereby, missing its thrust. Regarding the latter, the most common approach is to deny the necessity of baptismal regeneration based upon the structure of the passage<sup>4</sup> and to dismiss the continuation of sign gifts by citing

---

<sup>1</sup> This is an updated version of James F. Myers, “Mark 16:16–18: An Alternate View” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 7 (January 2001): 2-12.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from the NKJV, *New King James Version* (Nashville: Nelson, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> This article assumes that the text of Mark 16:16–20 is not a scribal addition, but original to Mark’s account.

<sup>4</sup> See the appendix.

dispensational distinctives. A simpler and more accurate approach emphasizes context. This article presents an alternative interpretation of Mark 16:16–20 based upon these contextual features of Mark 16.<sup>5</sup>

## II. DISBELIEVING THE RESURRECTION (MARK 16:1-14)

On the day of Jesus' resurrection, His scattered disciples were hiding. Privately they mourned, weeping because they did not believe Jesus' predictions that He would rise from the dead.<sup>6</sup> As the hours passed, they continued to doubt that their Lord had risen from the tomb, despite eyewitness testimony.

### A. The Women (Mark 16:1-8)

Early on the third day after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene and others came to the tomb to anoint His body, showing their unbelief in the resurrection. Upon reaching the tomb, they found the stone removed and an angel seated inside. Having informed them that Jesus had risen and was no longer in the tomb, the angel invited them to look and see where Jesus had lain. Then he commanded them to go and tell the disciples, especially Peter, that Jesus would meet them in Galilee, just as He had previously said. Fear caused the women to flee in terror without telling anyone, another obvious expression of unbelief.

### B. Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-10)

Mary Magdalene was the first person to see Jesus alive after His death, burial, and resurrection. She had remained at the tomb where she met the resurrected Christ. John 20:13–17 indicates that initially she too disbelieved Christ's resurrection.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, after Jesus

---

<sup>5</sup>Two excellent defenses of the authenticity of this passage are John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to S. Mark* (London: 1871; reprint, Ann Arbor, MI: Sovereign Grace, 1959); William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, SNTSMN, vol. 25, ed. Matthew Black (Cambridge: University Press, 1969).

<sup>6</sup>Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34.

<sup>7</sup>In John 20:13, she thought that people had moved Jesus. Clearly, she was thinking in terms of a dead body.

reiterated the angel's command, she did indeed go and tell the hiding disciples who were mourning in unbelief (Mark 16:10).

### C. The Disciples (Mark 16:11-14)

The disciples did not believe Mary's report that Jesus was alive and that she had in fact seen Him. Later that same day, Jesus appeared to two of his followers going to Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:13-35). Likewise, these had not believed Jesus' resurrection. However, when the Lord finally opened their eyes to His resurrection, they returned to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. Once again, the eleven disciples did not believe their report, just as they had not believed Mary earlier.

## III. JESUS' RESPONSE (MARK 16:15-18)

That evening, Jesus appeared to all the disciples (Mark 16:14; cf. John 20:19-23) and rebuked their hardness of heart for disbelieving those who had seen Him after His resurrection. In verse 11, *they did not believe*. In verse 13, *they did not believe*. In verse 14, Jesus *rebuked their unbelief... because they did not believe*. Clearly, the disciples were unbelieving.

Unbelief in the resurrection and in the prophecies Jesus had given them about His resurrection resulted in the disciples' fearfulness and retreat into hiding (John 20:19-25). They were also hard-hearted, that is, obstinate, stubborn, refusing to accept the truth even in light of clear and certain eyewitness evidence. Consequently, Jesus strongly rebuked their obduracy because *they had not believed* the testimony of the eyewitnesses.<sup>8</sup> Mark does not give the content of Jesus' rebuke to the disciples, which is consistent with the rest of his account in which he seldom gives the content of Jesus teaching, but merely reports that He taught.<sup>9</sup> However, Mark does record the command Jesus gave after the rebuke. Since it immediately follows the rebuke, one ought not consider it an entirely new subject.

---

<sup>8</sup> The word for "rebuke" is severe, sometimes implying insult, reviling, justifiably reproaching a person because of his guilt.

<sup>9</sup> Of all four Gospels, Mark quotes the lowest percentage of Jesus' words. See, A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934), 1405.

### A. The Commission (Mark 16:15-16)

Most Christians regard the Great Commission passages as Matt 28:16-20, Luke 24:45-48, and Mark 16:15-16. The common references to going and to baptism cause many commentators to parallel all three passages. But Mark 16:15-16 is not parallel. Mark alone includes references to signs of healing, casting out demons, speaking in tongues, and protection from snakebites and poisons. These aspects set it apart from Matthew and Luke. There are further reasons for viewing the passage as distinct from the Great Commission.

### B. The Occasion

The Mark 16 passage occurred on the day of Jesus' resurrection, when He appeared to the disciples privately in Jerusalem as they ate a meal in hiding. Matthew's Great Commission occurred before hundreds of disciples on a Galilean mountain designated by Jesus. Luke records what some have called His Great Commission on the day of Jesus' ascension from the Mount of Olives near Bethany (Luke 24:46-49). The commissioning of His disciples was extremely important to our Lord. The fact that He taught it on a number of occasions to different audiences seems fitting.

The event in Mark's account chronologically precedes those by Matthew and Luke. Moreover, the primary concern within the immediate context was His disciples' unbelief. Having excoriated them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, Jesus commissioned them to *go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature* (Mark 16:15). It is not necessary to move Mark's event to Galilee, the Mount of Olives, or to parallel Matthew or Luke. Rather, it parallels John 20:19-23.

### C. Addressees

Mark 16:14 portrays a private gathering around a table for those particular disciples whom the Lord would appoint as His apostles. The commission initiated in verse 15 addresses a select few (not all believers). Unfortunately, some commentators interpret Mark 16:15-16 as if verse 16 concerns non-Christians who will believe the gospel. Magically, these new believers become the subject of verses 17-18. Inserting a new group into the context creates unnecessary

interpretive difficulties. Accordingly, to whom does Jesus address verses 16-18?

It is common for New Testament writers to give consequences of obedience versus disobedience immediately after an imperative. First then, what is the imperative or command? It is found in 16:15: *preach the gospel*. The responses to this imperative are in the following verse, *he who believes... he who does not believe* (16:16). Second, the consequence of belief and baptism is *will be saved*; the consequence of unbelief is *will be condemned* (also 16:16).

Many hold that verse 16 speaks of those who hear the gospel proclamation. An articular participle, *he who believes*, may indicate a general category applicable to the hearers of the apostolic proclamation. However, such a construction following an imperative normally addresses the same audience, in this case, the *Eleven* (cf. Mark 16:14). The flow of thought is this: *They did not believe* (16:11); *they did not believe* (16:13); *they did not believe* (16:14); *he who believes* (16:16). In light of this, the subjects of verse 16 are the apostles themselves.<sup>10</sup>

#### D. The Baptism of the Eleven

*He who believes and is baptized...*(Mark 16:16): Which baptism did Jesus mean? The two most common answers are water baptism (wet) and Holy Spirit baptism (dry), both of which Mark mentions (Mark 1:8). Some give this a dispensational twist, interpreting it as baptism by the Holy Spirit because it eliminates problems attendant with water baptism being salvific. The one who believes and whom the Holy Spirit baptizes, God will eternally save. Yet, this unnecessarily introduces a concept not germane to the passage, one that would not only have been obscure to the disciples at the time but is also tautological. It is like saying that one who believes and is justified will be saved.

Mark also refers to another baptism (discussed in Luke 12:50–53) which better fits the passage. Namely, it is the baptism of Christ's death of which He spoke in Mark 10:38–39, saying *with the baptism I am baptized with, you will be baptized*. This reference to chapter 10 is not nearly so distant as the previous reference to water baptism found

---

<sup>10</sup> Editor's note: The appendix considers traditional alternatives to baptismal regeneration.

in chapter 1. In addition, it is clearly not so distant as Matt 28:19, to which some commentators refer.

The baptism spoken of in Mark 10 easily fits the context of Mark 16. Jesus had already told the disciples of a future baptism for them, the very baptism that He would experience at the cross.<sup>11</sup> In addition, if this baptism indicated submission to the Father's plan, even to the point of humiliation, suffering, and death, then this fits both passages quite well. After all, in this baptism the disciples indeed shared in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of the gospel.

### **E. The Salvation of the Eleven**

Many Christians immediately assume that the word *save* speaks of salvation unto eternal life. This grievous error leads to a multitude of false conclusions. In the Bible, the verb *save* (or its noun form, *salvation*) usually refers to a different kind of salvation. Marcan usage conforms to this pattern.<sup>12</sup> In other instances, English translates the Greek term ("saved") in ways other than *saved*: 5:23 (be healed); 5:28 (made well); 5:34 (be healed); 6:56 (made well); and 10:52 (made you well). Jesus' words in Mark 8:35 are particularly applicable: *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it*. Saved in what sense? Saved from the condemnation announced at the end of the passage: saved from a wasted life.

### **F. The Possibility of Condemnation**

In Mark, 16:16, Jesus continued by declaring the consequences of unbelief: *he who does not believe will be condemned*. As with the word *salvation*, readers tend to conclude falsely that the word *condemned* must mean eternal condemnation. This leads to unwarranted conclusions. Louw-Nida defines it as, "to judge someone as definitely guilty and thus subject to punishment."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The baptism of Mark 10 cannot be the baptism of the Spirit, for Jesus did not experience this. Furthermore, Holy Spirit baptism never occurred prior to Acts 2. Acts 1:5 regards Spirit baptism as yet future.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Mark 3:4; 8:35; 10:26; 13:13, 20; 15:30–31; 16:16.

<sup>13</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: UBS, 1988), 556.



The punishment referred to in the New Testament is usually physical and temporal. Mark's two other usages of the word both refer to physical death as condemnation (Mark 10:33; 14:64). The word, as used by other authors, usually refers to a temporal judgment, not an eternal condemnation as the penalty for sin (cf. Rom 14:23; Heb 11:7; 2 Pet 2:6). Although this word can apply to eternal condemnation, context determines its interpretation. Its usual sense of punishing one found guilty of wrong applies in Mark 16. If the disciples would not believe and identify themselves with Christ's sufferings (their wrong), they could expect divine discipline for their unbelief and hardheartedness (the punishment).

### **G. Summary (Mark 16:15-16)**

Mark 16:15 commissioned only those who would become His apostles. Jesus then followed this commission with an exhortation to believe and be baptized. The immediate object of their faith must be the truth of their Savior's resurrection.<sup>14</sup> Jesus sharply rebuked the Eleven for not believing His resurrection. Nevertheless, those apostles who believed that God raised Jesus from the dead and were baptized into His humiliation and suffering through obedience to God's plan would be delivered (16:16a). God would find guilty and discipline any of the Eleven who would disbelieve the resurrection.

## **IV. THE SIGN GIFTS (MARK 16:17-18)**

The rest of this passage relates specifically to the eleven disciples (not to others), so one would also expect this for verse 17. Second Corinthians 12:12 states that the signs of an apostle were *signs, wonders and mighty deeds*. These were to authenticate apostolic credentials, not the reception of eternal life. Therefore, when Mark 16:17 says, *these signs shall follow them* [those apostles] *that believe*, it does not speak of those who believe through apostolic preaching, but of the apostles themselves. Those of the Eleven who would believe in the resurrected Savior (not for eternal salvation, but to enable

---

<sup>14</sup> The resurrection is foundational to the apostolic message of eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone (Acts 2:24-32; 3:15; 4:10, etc.).

apostolic ministry) and were baptized (Mark 10:38-39) would do the miraculous things specified. Jesus instructed them and promised that the supernatural signs would follow those apostles who would believe.

The book of Acts and this interpretation harmonize. Only apostles (and two of their close associates) actually healed people. Paul alone survived a snakebite. The New Testament does not mention occasions of drinking poison. The casting out of demons was, again, basically an apostolic role. Though others outside the apostolic group experienced tongues, they most certainly did not perform the other signs. The New Testament neither teaches that Christians in general would perform other signs, nor gives examples that they did. Moreover, the fact that others besides the eleven disciples spoke in tongues does not change Jesus' audience or the content of His words in Mark 16:15-18.

With the singular exception of the apostle Paul,<sup>15</sup> context confines verses 17-18 to the eleven disciples present at the table when Christ appeared to them, beginning in verse 14. There is no reason to apply this to all following believers of that day or now, as many charismatics, Pentecostals, and others seek to do. The miraculous manifestations of verses 17-18 would accompany those of the Eleven (later to include the apostle Paul) who as apostles believed in the resurrection and were obedient to the sufferings of gospel ministry.

Verse 20 reinforces that this pericope is focused on the disciples in the upper room. They indeed *went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs*. Their unbelief was gone. Their belief was strong; they endured the baptism of suffering and humiliation for the sake of their Lord. They were saved from the shame and discipline that would have come upon them had they not gone from unbelief to belief. The veracity of the gospel they preached was validated through the miraculous signs which accompanied their message.

---

<sup>15</sup> Paul was not present in Mark 16, since his conversion occurred in Acts 9.

## V. BAPTISM OF THE CUP

The word baptize (from *baptizō*) is transliterated straight from Greek into English, which offers little understanding regarding the meaning of the word. Various definitions include: “to put or go under water in a variety of senses;”<sup>16</sup> “to immerse for a religious purpose;”<sup>17</sup> “consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence;”<sup>18</sup> “the application of water as a rite of purification or initiation; a Christian sacrament;”<sup>19</sup> “to dip in or under;” “to dye;” “to immerse;” “to sink;” “to drown;” “to bathe;” and “to wash.”<sup>20</sup>

In passages such as Matt 26:23, Mark 14:20, Luke 16:24, John 13:26, and Rev 19:13 [all of which contain *baptō*, the root word of *baptizō*], the definitions given above are applicable and make good sense, but in numerous other passages they simply will not work. This is because these definitions all involve a liquid such as water, blood, or a solution for dyeing something. But there are other types of baptisms which do not involve a liquid solution at all. For example, in Matt 3:11, it is stated that Jesus would baptize with fire and with the Holy Spirit. Clearly there is no water in those two baptisms; they are dry baptisms.

From a study of *baptizō* and related words in their contexts, a definition can be derived: “to place into or identify with.” That is, in baptism, one thing or person is placed into or identified with another thing or person. It is an action which signifies identification with someone or something. The identification may be symbolic through ritual, or it may be an actual identification. In a ritual baptism, a person or object is identified with water or other substance which represents someone or something else. This may be a ceremonial

---

<sup>16</sup> W. Arndt, F. W. Danker, W. Bauer, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 164.

<sup>17</sup> E. W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 80.

<sup>18</sup> W. E. Vine and F. F. Bruce, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan NJ: Revell, 1981), 2:96.

<sup>19</sup> M. F. Unger, R. K., Harrison, H. F. Vos, and C. J. Barber, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> The NT uses *baptō* only in the literal sense, e.g., “to dip” (Lk. 16:24), “to dye” (Rev. 19:13), and *baptizō* only in a cultic sense, mostly “to baptize.” (G. Kittel, Friedrich, and G. W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985], 92.)

washing or cleansing of objects (Mark 7:4, 8; Heb 6:2; 9:10). It may be a ritual in which a person is immersed in water to indicate identification with a person or an object (Acts 1:5; 1 Cor 1:16). Ritual baptisms serve as a public testimony, a declaration by the person being baptized that he desires to be identified with the reality of whatever the water signifies. However, in a real baptism, a person is actually identified with someone or something else, but without ritual (1 Cor 10:1–2; 12:13).

There are eight different baptisms in the New Testament. Three are ritual baptisms, and five are real identifications. The first of the rituals is the baptism of Jesus, which was His public anointing as prophet and priest in terms of His ministry and His identification with the Father's plan for the Incarnation. The second ritual baptism is that of John the Baptist to identify the Jews of his day with his message that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The third ritual baptism is believer's baptism by immersion in water as a public declaration that the believer is now identified with Jesus Christ.

The other five baptisms found in the New Testament, designated as real baptisms as opposed to a ritual baptism, do not involve an identification that concerns water, i.e., these are dry baptisms. In Mark 1:8, John the Baptist gave a prophecy that Jesus would baptize by means of God the Holy Spirit. This occurred for the first time on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (see also Acts 1:5; 11:16). The apostle Paul indicated in 1 Cor 12:13 that this baptism is common to all church age believers and is the means by which the body of Christ is formed. In the baptism of Noah (1 Pet 3:20–21), those who were in the ark were delivered from temporal judgment. There is a corresponding baptism which can now deliver the believer from temporal judgment in his life, which is identification with the resurrected Christ through godly living. The baptism of Moses, mentioned in 1 Cor 10:2, is an identification of the children of Israel with Moses as they went through the Red Sea. The baptism of fire mentioned by John the Baptist refers to judgment and is likely a reference to judgments at the Second Advent of Christ to the earth.

Then there is the baptism called the baptism of the cup. It is sometimes referred to as the baptism of the cross, which is not apt because this baptism is not unique to Jesus but is one to be shared by the disciples. In Mark 10:38–39, both the cup and the baptism are

brought together. It is striking that Jesus would declare to the disciples that they would share in His baptism. Two primary interpretations of this are: (1) the disciples would be *identified* with Christ on the cross through positional sanctification. That is, they themselves would not go to the cross to pay for the sins of others as Christ was doing, but that their lives would be *identified* with His as He hung on the cross (Rom 6:3-4, 6; Gal 2:20); or (2) just as Christ was to suffer at the hands of sinners for righteousness' sake, so too the disciples would suffer at the hands of others undeservedly. Thus, their *identification* with Christ's suffering would be experiential, though not identical. Peter and Paul both spoke of sharing in the sufferings of Christ in this sense (1 Pet 4:13; Phil 3:10).

The disciples to whom Jesus spoke were not sent to a cross to bear the sins of the world. Yet Jesus clearly said that in the future, they would be baptized with the same baptism that Jesus was undergoing. This cannot be a reference to Jesus' water baptism because that was a past event. It cannot refer to the baptism by the Holy Spirit, for that is something that Jesus did not experience.

The cup as a metaphor for experiencing something is used throughout Scripture, usually referring to judgment. Jesus used it several times in reference to His suffering leading up to the cross as well as the experience of the cross itself (Matt 26:39, 42; John 18:11). So in saying, "you will be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized," Jesus meant that the disciples would also encounter unjust and undeserved suffering because of their faith in Christ.

Understanding the baptism of Mark 16 in this light makes good sense in the context. If the disciples would believe in the resurrection of Christ and were willing to endure this cup of humiliation and suffering, they would be delivered from the consequences of living a life of unbelief.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Those who advocate baptismal regeneration and the continuation of sign gifts often base their thinking on a particular understanding of Mark 16:16-20. Christians who disagree with these two doctrines also have become so accustomed to other interpretations of this passage that it becomes difficult to think of it in any other way.

Nevertheless, a careful preview of the immediate context in Mark 16 reveals that our Lord addressed the eleven disciples when He rebuked their unbelief in the resurrection. If the disciples were to believe in His resurrection and identify with His sufferings as they proclaimed the gospel, He would deliver them from the promised divine temporal discipline for unbelief. When these disciples believed in Christ's resurrection, accompanying supernatural signs would validate their gospel preaching.

## APPENDIX

### The Traditional Argument against Baptismal Regeneration

Four categories of persons emerge from 16:16: (1) Those who believe and are baptized; (2) those who believe and are not baptized; (3) those who do not believe and are baptized; and (4) those who do not believe and are not baptized.

Action	Result
Belief and baptism	Saved
Belief and no baptism	Not stated
Baptism, but no belief	Condemned
No belief and no baptism	Condemned

Since the one who does not believe is condemned, it matters not whether someone baptizes him. However, since the verse says nothing about those who believe but are not baptized, one who takes the passage in a traditional way may *not* conclude such are not eternally saved because the verse does not address this.<sup>21</sup> As A. T. Robertson states concerning Mark 16:16, “Condemnation rests on disbelief, not on baptism. So salvation rests on belief. Baptism...[is] not the means of securing it.”<sup>22</sup> This interpretation assumes that the ones referred to are non-Christians who respond to the proclamation of the gospel.

Although the traditional interpretation correctly rejects baptismal regeneration, it does not handle the repeated motif of the disciples’ unbelief in Christ’s resurrection. Under that approach, Mark 16:15-18 appears suddenly without any transition. This article’s view finds a stronger contextual basis than the traditional view, because the context flows naturally through these verses.

---

<sup>21</sup> From the standpoint of this article, verse 16 would not speak of either eternal salvation or eternal condemnation at all.

<sup>22</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1930), 1:405.





# A LITERARY AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF RUTH<sup>1</sup>

PHILIPPE R. STERLING

Pastor

*Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship  
Lewisville, TX*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to unfold the theological message of the Book of Ruth by means of a broad literary study of its narrative, rooted in exegesis. The composition includes a literary analysis of the narrative, a comparison with literary parallels in Scripture, and an exposition of the theological message.

## II. LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

The literary analysis of the book of Ruth is comprised of a synthetic exegetical summary of its narrative, a detailed literary exposition of its narrative, and a layout of its overall literary structure.

### A. Synthetic Exegetical Summary

#### 1. *Introduction (1:1-6).*

- a. In a time of famine during the period of the Judges, Elimelech and his family migrate from Bethlehem to Moab (1-2).

---

<sup>1</sup>The material for this article is adapted from Philippe R. Sterling, Unpublished Th.M. thesis, "The Contribution of Rhetorical Art to the Message of the Book of Ruth," Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985.

- b. Elimelech dies and his two sons marry Ruth and Orpah, Moabite women. Then the sons also die, leaving their mother, Naomi, bereft of her whole family (3-5).
- c. Naomi decides to return from Moab because she hears that Yahweh has provided food for His people (6).

## 2. *First Episode (1:7-22).*

- a. Naomi, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, departs from Moab to return to Judah (7).
- b. Naomi dissuades Orpah from going with her but fails to dissuade Ruth, who declares her loyalty to Naomi, her people, and her God, then continues with her to Bethlehem (8-19a).
  - 1) Naomi counsels Ruth and Orpah to return home and prays that Yahweh will deal with them in loyal-love and grant them rest in marriage. However, they express their desire to remain with her (8-10).
  - 2) Naomi justifies her counseling them to return by citing both her inability to provide them with husbands and her bitter situation caused by Yahweh. As a result, Orpah leaves, but Ruth clings to Naomi (11-14).
  - 3) Naomi advises Ruth to follow Orpah, but Ruth declares her loyalty to Naomi, her people, and her God, then journeys with her back to Bethlehem (15-19a). Having pointed out Orpah's return to her own people and gods, Naomi advises Ruth to return with Orpah (15). Ruth tells Naomi to cease urging her to leave because she is determined—until death—to identify with Naomi, her people, and her God (16-17). Seeing Ruth's determination, Naomi accepts her decision, and together they journey on to Bethlehem (18-19a).
- c. Having arrived in Bethlehem, stirring up the city with her return, Naomi speaks to the women of the city, ascribing to Yahweh the responsibility for her bitter situation (19b-21).
- d. The author provides a summation of Ruth 1 and a transition to chapter 2: Naomi and Ruth the Moabitess return to Bethlehem from Moab at the beginning of the barley harvest (22).

3. *Second Episode (2:1-23).*

- a. Ruth obtains Naomi's permission to glean and providentially comes to the field of Boaz, a worthy relative of Naomi.

Paraphrase: Naomi has a kinsman by the name of Boaz, a man of noble character from the family of Elimelech (1).

- 1) Ruth obtains permission from Naomi to go glean in a field (2).
  - 2) Ruth providentially comes to the field belonging to Boaz, the kinsman of Elimelech (3).
- b. Boaz extends protection and provision to Ruth because of her devotion to Naomi, with the result that she accepts his favor and completes her gleaning (4-18a).

1) Having come from Bethlehem and exchanged blessings with his reapers, Boaz questions his overseer about Ruth and learns that she is the Moabite girl who returned with Naomi and that she has been gleaning all morning (4-7).

2) Boaz extends protection and provision to Ruth because of her devotion to Naomi, with the result that she graciously accepts his favor (8-14).

3) Boaz instructs Ruth to remain in his field with his workers and to refresh herself from his vessels of water. Overwhelmed by his kindness, she asks why she has found such favor, since she is a stranger (8-10). Boaz justifies his kindness to Ruth by citing her faithfulness to Naomi, then blesses her. As a result, she graciously accepts his favor (11-13). At mealtime, Boaz continues to show kindness to Ruth by giving her more food than she is able to eat (14).

4) Boaz instructs his reapers not to molest Ruth and to leave extra gleanings for her. She gleans until evening, beats out an epha of barley, then returns to the city (15-18a).

- c. Ruth cites Boaz's kindness to Naomi and herself. Naomi, discerning Yahweh's providence, counsels her to continue gleaning in Boaz's field with his maids (18b-22).

1) Naomi, seeing what Ruth gleaned, asks where she worked. Ruth reports that she worked with Boaz (18b-19).

2) Naomi praises Yahweh for his loyal-love and tells Ruth that Boaz is a close relative. Ruth responds by reporting his

instruction for her to join his servants until they finish the barley harvest (20-21).

- 3) Naomi counsels Ruth to stay in Boaz's field and to go out with his maids (22).
- d. Epilogue. Ruth gleanes until the end of the barley and wheat harvests and lives with her mother-in-law (23).

#### 4. *Third Episode (3:1-18).*

Ruth goes to the threshing floor and follows Naomi's plan for claiming Boaz as kinsman-redeemer by looking her best, uncovering Boaz's feet, and then lying down (1-6).

- a. Because Ruth is a woman of noble character, Boaz responds to her claiming him as kinsman-redeemer by vowing to redeem her if a closer relative does not. In the morning, he fills her cloak with barley before returning to the city (7-15).
  - 1) Ruth follows Naomi's instructions. When Boaz awakens and asks her to identify herself, she does so, then claims him as kinsman-redeemer by requesting that he cover her with his robe (7-9).
  - 2) Boaz blesses Ruth for her act of loyal-love in choosing him over younger men. Because Ruth is a woman of noble character, he pledges to secure her redemption, provided that a closer relative does not. He instructs her to lie down until morning (10-13).
  - 3) Ruth lies at Boaz's feet until morning, then rises early. Boaz instructs the threshers not to let it be known that Ruth has been there, fills her cloak with six measures of barley, then leaves for the city (14-15).
- b. Ruth reports to Naomi all that Boaz said and did. Naomi advises her to wait until Boaz settles the matter that day (16-18).

#### 5. *Fourth Episode (4:1-12).*

- a. The close relative surrenders his right of redemption to Boaz after he is told that in redeeming the field of Elimelech, he would also have to acquire Ruth the Moabitess as his wife (1-8).
  - 1) Boaz goes to the city gate and sets the stage for the redemption procedure by inviting the close relative and the elders of the city to sit down (1-2).

- 2) Boaz informs the close relative of his right to redeem the field of Elimelech, and the relative agrees to do so (3-4).
- 3) Boaz then informs the close relative of the accompanying responsibility to acquire Ruth the Moabitess as wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance. Upon learning this, the relative surrenders his right of redemption to Boaz for fear of jeopardizing his own inheritance (5-6).

Parenthesis: The procedural custom for confirming a transaction of redemption and exchange was that one party removed his sandal and gave it to another (7).

- 4) The close relative removes his sandal after advising Boaz to buy the land (8).
- b. Boaz publicly redeems all that belonged to Elimelech and acquires Ruth as his wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance (9-10).
- c. The people and the elders of the city witness the transaction and bless the couple by praying for fertility, prosperity, and perpetuity of name (11-12).

#### 6. *Conclusion (4:13-17a).*

- a. Boaz and Ruth consummate their marriage, and Yahweh enables her to conceive so that she gives birth to a son (13).
- b. The women of the city praise Yahweh for blessing Naomi. They name the child, whom she adopts, *Obed* (14-17a).
  - 1) The women of the city praise Yahweh for His provision of a redeemer for Naomi through the faithfulness of Ruth (14-15).
  - 2) Naomi adopts the child (16).
  - 3) The women of the city name the child *Obed* (17a).

#### 7. *Genealogy.*

The genealogy of Perez is traced to David; Boaz and Obed are listed in the seventh and eighth generations, respectively. (4:17b-22).

### 8. *Message.*

God providentially worked through the faithful acts of Ruth and Boaz in order to restore Naomi to fullness and to bring about the birth of Obed, the grandfather of David.

## B. Literary Exposition of the Narrative

The literary exposition defines where each unit of the text begins and ends, discerns the configuration of its component parts, develops the plot and characters, and delineates the theological ideas and connotations uncovered. The exposition will proceed section by section through the Book of Ruth.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. *Introduction: Elimelech and His Family in Moab (1:1-6).*

The opening unit in third-person narration presents the characters, specifies their relationships, and describes their situation. This information prepares for the dialogue that will follow between

---

<sup>2</sup> Among the great number of literary and rhetorical studies on Ruth, the following have been the most helpful: David Atkinson, *The Wings of Refuge: The Message of Ruth* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983); Cyril J. Barber, *Ruth: An Expository Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983); S. Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 154-173; Adele Berlin, "Poetics in the Book of Ruth" in *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983): 83-110; S. Bertman, "Symmetrical Design in the Book of Ruth," *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 165-168; E. F. Campbell Jr., "The Hebrew Short Story: A Study of Ruth," in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob Myers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 83-101; E. F. Campbell Jr, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975); J. de Waard and E. A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth* (London: United Bible Societies, 1973); Barbara Green, "The Plot of the Biblical Story of Ruth," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1983): 55-68; Ronald M. Hals, *The Theology of the Book of Ruth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969); Paul Humbert, "Art et leçon de l'histoire de Ruth," in *Opuscles d'un Hebraisant*, (Neuchatel: Université de Neuchatel, 1958), 83-110; Oscar Loretz, "The Theme of the Ruth Story," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22 (1960): 391-99; J. C. de Moor, "The Poetry of the Book of Ruth," *Orientalia* 53 (1984): 262-83; Jacob M. Myers, *The Linguistics and Literary Form of the Book of Ruth* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955); Bezalel Porten, "The Scroll of Ruth: A Rhetorical Study," *Gratz College Annual of Jewish Studies* 7 (1978): 23-49; W. S. Prinsloo, "The Theology of the Book of Ruth," *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 330-41; Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildersheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981): 50-117; D. F. Rauber, "Literary Values in the Bible: The Book of Ruth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 27-37; Kiyoshi K. Sacon, "The Book of Ruth—Its Literary Structure and Theme," *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 4 (1978): 3-22; Jack Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979); Phyllis Trible, "Two Women in a Man's World: A Reading of the Book of Ruth," *Soundings* 59 (1976): 251-79.

Naomi and her daughters-in-law. It connects to the last unit of the book through a number of *inclusios*<sup>3</sup> and has narrative affinities with patriarchal accounts in Genesis. The motifs are, for the most part, bleak (e.g., famine; sojourning outside the land; intermarriage with Moabites; three deaths). But there is a positive statement of God's providence in giving food to His people.

The unit is made up of three sections. We can label verses 1 and 2 as *sojourn*, verses 3-5 as *calamity*, and verse 6 as *return*. Verses 1 and 2 have narrative affinities with the patriarchal famine/sojourn accounts of Gen 12:10 and 26:1: there was a famine in the land and so-and-so went to sojourn in such-and-such place. Verses 3-5 tell of the deaths of Elimelech and his two sons while in Moab, leaving Naomi bereft of her entire family. Verse 6 concludes the unit and provides a link with the next section via the word *return*.

The unit introduces the theme of Yahweh's intervention. No reason is given for the famine and deaths, but the turnaround is attributed to Yahweh. Though used many times in the book's dialogues, the divine name *Yahweh* is mentioned only twice in the narration (1:6; 4:13). Yahweh intervenes by ending the famine and by providing an heir.

The unit frames the book with chapter four through a number of *inclusios*. A ten-year period is cited in 1:1-6, while ten elders and ten generations are cited in 4:1-22. The story begins with a death and ends with a birth. There are references to historical eras: the story opens with the Judges and Elimelech—whose name means *my God is king*—and closes with David, the king appointed by God (1 Sam 16), providing a transition from the era of the Judges to the dynastic monarchy.

Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons left Bethlehem because of famine; the bereaved Naomi and her two daughters-in-law now return to Judah because Yahweh has given food to His people. The key theological idea is Yahweh's intervening by giving food to His people (1:6). The report comes to Naomi in terms of Yahweh's action.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>In the literary study of the Bible, an *inclusio* is a structural device which creates a bracket or frame by placing a similar word, phrase, or concept at the beginning and end of a section.

<sup>4</sup>Yahweh visits His people in either judgment (Exod 20:5, 32:34; Lev 18:25; Deut 5:9) or blessing (Gen 50:24; Exod 4:31; 1 Sam 2:21).

2. *Episode 1: Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem (1:7-22).*

In this episode, third-person narration gives place almost entirely to dialogue. Two scenes make up the discourse. The first is a farewell scene culminating in the departure of Orpah and the return of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem. The second scene describes their arrival in Bethlehem, with Naomi's lamenting the tragedy that has come upon her.

- a. Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah set out for Judah (1:7).

The episode links to the introduction through the repetition of the word *return*. She "arose...that she might return" in verse 6. They "went out...to return" in verse 7. The themes of famine and harvest also connect the first episode to the introduction.

The ideas of going and coming enclose the episode, which is dominated by a homecoming motif.

- b. Scene 1, a roadside in Moab: Orpah returns home, but Ruth returns with Naomi (1:8-19a).

Three sets of speeches make up the farewell scene, which best divides into two sections. The first leads to Orpah's departure. The second describes Ruth's determination to stay with Naomi, leading to their return to Bethlehem. Naomi's and Ruth's invocations of Yahweh provide an *inclusio* to the three sets of speeches. Verse 8 cites Naomi's invocation of blessing on her daughters-in-law for their loyal-love. Verse 17 cites Ruth's invocation of Yahweh in an oath. The three sets of speeches are climaxed by the narrator's comments, which emphasize the poignancy of Naomi's plea and Ruth's determination. The scene reveals a repeated alternation of advice and reception:

1a advice to leave (8, 9a)

1b refusal of Ruth and Orpah (9b, 10)

2a advice to leave (11-13)

2b refusal of Ruth (14)

3a advice to leave (15)

3b resolve of Ruth (16-18)

Though made up of two sets of speeches, verses 8-14 should be regarded as one unit. Two narrative reports follow Naomi's two speeches (1:9a, 14), which are chiasmic both in part and in whole:



	a	b	c
A	Then she kissed them		
B	and they lifted up their voice and wept		
B'	and they lifted up their voice and wept again		
	c'	b'	a'
A'	and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law		
	c''	b''	a''
	but Ruth clung to her		

The chiasm of 1:9-14 skillfully rounds off Naomi’s persuading Orpah to return. The placement of Ruth’s action accentuates the contrast between her and Orpah. Orpah returns, whereas Ruth remains and demonstrates her loyalty and devotion to Naomi. Ruth and Orpah first appear similar: they are both Moabite wives of Naomi’s sons, both childless widows, and both loyal to Naomi. The difference between them appears gradually, making a dramatic impact.

Naomi’s first speech of dissuasion shows this structure:

A	go, return each of you to her mother’s house		
B	may Yahweh deal in loyal-love with you		
	C as you have dealt with the dead and with me		
B'	Yahweh grant that you may find security		
A'	each in the house of her husband		

Naomi invokes the loyal-love (*hesed*)<sup>5</sup> of Yahweh. At the heart of her speech, both in structure and content, are these Moabite women who are models of loyal-love. She puts forward the past loyalty of human beings as the basis for invoking the loyal-love of Yahweh. Naomi prays specifically that they find *security*. Significantly, in 3:1 it will be Naomi who seeks rest for Ruth. Prayer is one of the key devices by which the author develops a providence theology. The

---

<sup>5</sup>Paul Humbert considered *hesed* to be the key to this whole story (p. 86). It occurs three times in the book (1:8; 2:20; 3:10). This is the great word at the center of God’s covenant relationship with His people. For example, Deut 7:9 connects God’s keeping of His covenant with His *hesed*. Nelson Glueck concludes, in his classic study of the word, that it can be rendered as *loyalty*, *mutual aid*, or *reciprocal love* (p. 102). Katherine Sakenfeld updates Glueck’s study and generally summarizes the meaning of the word as *deliverance or protection as a responsible keeping of faith with another with whom one is in a relationship* (p. 233). Their studies show that *hesed* can represent both human and divine conduct. In this passage, the two spheres are related. Ruth and Orpah conducted themselves in accordance with their family obligations. Naomi prays that Yahweh would do for them what she is unable to do—deliver them from adverse circumstances by providing them with husbands. The human *hesed* was the ground for invoking the divine *hesed*. Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967); Katherine Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978).

devout prayer in verse 9 for a home will become a reality in 3:1, when Naomi assumes her role of responsibility after discerning Yahweh's *hesed*.

Naomi's second speech of dissuasion (11-13) has three refrains, each containing the term *my daughters*: (1) return my daughters; (2) return my daughters, go; (3) no, my daughters. Naomi's insistence intensifies as she moves from refrain to refrain. Three times she counsels them to turn back, each time citing a reason. The first two reasons are presented in the form of rhetorical questions that mention her inability to provide them with husbands. This foreshadows the resolution of the problem through Ruth's marriage to Boaz. The third reason is a declaration of God's opposition to her. She laments that Yahweh has turned against her. Theologically, this reveals once more that events do not happen by chance; God is sovereign and arranges life's circumstances.

The second section (1:15-19a) is made up of a seven-link chain of verbs of motion:

your sister-in-law has *returned*  
*return* after her  
do not urge me to *return*  
where you *go*  
I will *go*  
she saw she was determined to *go* with her  
they *went* until they *came*

There are three occurrences of *return*, three of *go*, and one of *came*. The linking chain of verbs of motion ends with the new verb *came*. This effectively knits the section together and brings it to a climax.

In each of the dialogues, Naomi makes a reference to deity (8-9, 13, 15). Her arguments make use of national, personal, and religious motives. She makes use of the national motive in her first speech that urges the women to return. In their first refusal, the women indicate their determination to return to Naomi's people. In her second speech, Naomi ignores the national motive and focuses on the personal one of childlessness and marriage. This argument convinces Orpah. With Ruth, she again takes up the national motive and adds a religious one. Ruth's reply is that she identifies totally

with Naomi's people and God. She even implicitly responds to the personal argument by saying that they will share identical fates.

Ruth's speech (16, 17) gives the motivation for her decision to accompany Naomi and displays the following structure:

Ruth's supplication to Naomi:

1. where you may go, I want to go
2. where you may stay, I want to stay
3. your people, my people
4. your God, my God
5. where you may die, I want to die
6. and there I want to be buried

In this list, 1-2 and 5-6 form the framework for 3-4. The central position of 3-4 accentuates Ruth's total identification with Naomi's nationality and faith. Following Ruth's declaration of motivation is an oath that invokes Yahweh, suggesting that Ruth is joining the people whose God is Yahweh. Together, the oath and the six motivations accentuate the extraordinary faithfulness of Ruth.<sup>6</sup>

- c. Scene 2, a street in Bethlehem: Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem (1:19b-22).

The arrival scene describes the reaction of the women of Bethlehem to Naomi's return and, through Naomi's words, underscores, the tragedy that has befallen her. The scene links with 1:7-19a through the repetition of *they came to Bethlehem* (19a, b). The unit, as a whole, is also enclosed by the repetition of *they came to Bethlehem* (19b, 22).

The band of Bethlehemite women functions as a feminine chorus, a group of interested spectators who sympathize with Naomi's misfortunes. The narrator uses the encounter as an opportunity to give expression to the spiritual sentiment evoked

---

<sup>6</sup>Ruth's statement does not indicate a Lordship commitment in order to gain eternal life. Her statement may be akin to the declaration a believer might make at baptism concerning following Christ in discipleship and identifying with His people. Ruth may have come to faith in Yahweh earlier through the witness of Naomi concerning God's promise to Abraham of a seed through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. The Apostle Paul verified in Rom 4:1-8 (quoting Gen 15:6 and Ps 32:2) that both Abraham and David (Ruth's great-grandson) were declared righteous before God by faith and not by works. Like them, Ruth would have believed the promise of God, and He would have it reckoned to her as righteousness. The genealogical line that leads to the Messiah, who promises eternal life to everyone who simply believes in Him for it, passes through Ruth and Boaz (Matt 1:5). The loyal-love Ruth demonstrates can be compared to the brotherly kindness and love that caps the qualities that Peter instructs believers to supply upon the foundation of faith in 2 Pet 1:4-11.

by the narrative's action. This feminine chorus will return at the story's conclusion, when the women comment on the course of events.

Naomi's response to the curious women is a theological interpretation of her condition. Her name *Naomi*, which means *pleasant*, is inappropriate. *Mara*, which means *bitter*, is a more appropriate description of her plight. Yahweh is pitted against her. A chiastic structure explains the bitterness in her life as a divine curse:

A for Shaddai has dealt very bitterly with me  
 B I went out full but Yahweh has brought me  
 back empty  
 B' why do you call me Naomi, since Yahweh has  
 witnessed against me  
 A' and Shaddai has afflicted me

The two middle lines reiterate Naomi's calamity as they contrast fullness and sweetness with emptiness and affliction. In Genesis, *Shaddai* promised fertility and the preservation of life (Gen 17:1; 28:2-3; 35:11; 4:4; 49:25), but to Naomi, *Shaddai* has brought death.

Naomi's words form a legal complaint against Yahweh, who appears as her antagonist. She places her suffering in the pattern of God's providence. The narrator will again pick up the word *empty* very effectively at 3:17, where the resolution of her plight commences. Ironically, as Naomi complains about her emptiness, Ruth—the one who will later give birth to a son for her—stands there unnoticed.

The key word repeated in this episode is *return*. It carries the movement and tension of the episode, which reaches its culmination in verse 22. Significantly, the episode ends by emphasizing that both Naomi and Ruth returned from the land of Moab.

The final sentence of chapter one summarizes the first episode, provides a ray of hope, and supplies a link to the next episode: "and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest." The famine of verse 1 has been changed to the harvest of verse 22. God has given His people bread. Perhaps He will also change the bitter to sweet (cf. Exod 15:22-25) and the empty to full.

### 3. Episode 2: Ruth Finds Favor in the Field of Boaz (2:1-23).

Three interconnected scenes make up the second episode. The first (1-3) and the last (18-22), which involve Ruth and Naomi, frame the principal scene (4-17), which involves Ruth and Boaz. The first is introductory, preparing for the events of the principal scene.

The opening unit links to the close of the last episode through the references to *harvest* and *harvesters*, *Ruth the Moabitess* and *Naomi, the fields of Moab* and *the field of Boaz*. The fields of Moab were a place of tragedy. The field of Boaz will be a place of blessing.

Chapter 1 ends with anticipation. Chapter 2 appears to end without expectation. Like the first chapter, there is a summary statement that points to the next episode—when harvest is over, threshing begins (23).

The episode's structure displays a symmetrical pattern with a focal point in the middle:

Editorial comment (1)

A Ruth and Naomi (2-3)

B Boaz and the harvesters (4-7)

C Boaz and Ruth (8-14)

B' Boaz and the harvesters (15-16)

A' Naomi and Ruth (19-22)

Editorial comment (23)

The meeting between Boaz and Ruth, being centrally situated in the structure and being the most extended section, forms the episode's focal point. There is a frequent and rapid change of participants. Emphasis is placed on human emotions and relationships.

a. Parenthesis: The narrator introduces Boaz (2:1).

The episode opens by introducing Boaz in a parenthetical clause that arouses interest and suggests importance. Three brief phrases identify him. First, he is a *kinsman* of Naomi. The crucial importance of this family link will soon be seen. Second, he is an *'iš gibbōr ḥayil*, a *mighty man of character*. This phrase is an idiom that can have a military, economic, or moral connotation;<sup>7</sup> his subsequent actions will reveal which meaning applies to Boaz. In 3:11 Boaz calls Ruth *a woman of character*

---

<sup>7</sup> See Judg 6:12 and 2 Kgs 5:1 for the military connotation; 2 Kgs 15:20 for the economic connotation; and 1 Kgs 1:52 for the moral connotation. Boaz could be a man of valor, a man of wealth, a man of character, or all three.

(*hayil*) on the basis of her actions. These two *people of character* are brought together. Third, Boaz is of the family of Elimelech.

- b. Scene 1, house in Bethlehem: Ruth sets out to glean (2-3).

In the dialogue with Naomi (2) Ruth takes the initiative, but her actions depend upon Naomi's approval. Ruth's speech consists of two requests directed to Naomi. The second specifies the first and deals with permission to go to the field to glean, just as the Mosaic Law stipulated that the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan be allowed do (Lev 23:22; Deut 24:19-22). The imperative *go* places the emphasis first on Naomi's approval, and then on Ruth's action resulting from the approval, thereby stressing her loyalty to Naomi.

Ruth uses the phrase *find favor*. This brings to mind the *find rest* of 1:9 and suggests that the one in whose eyes she will *find favor* is also the one in whose house she will *find rest*. "To find favor in the eyes of" is a common idiom. It generally has to do with the attitude of good will and generosity on the part of those who have the ability to do a favor (Num 32:5; 1 Sam 20:3).<sup>8</sup> The expression appears three times in this episode (2, 10, 13), each time with a slightly different effect. Here, it indicates that Ruth intends to request permission to glean.

Ruth goes by her own choice, but another dimension is going to impact the situation. The narrator describes this dimension: "She happens to come to the field of Boaz." The expression suggests chance while also hinting that the event is caused. Naomi makes the connection in 2:20 when she states that Ruth's meeting with Boaz was an expression of God's loyal-love to them. It echoes Abraham's servant's prayer for divine intervention in the choice of a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:12). This reinforces the theological theme of the gracious providence of God. What is coincidence in human terms is providence in divine terms. The first meeting between Ruth and Boaz will happen because of a choice and because of "chance." In the next scene the first thing that happens is the appearance of Boaz.

- c. Scene 2, Boaz's field near Bethlehem: Ruth meets Boaz (2:4-18a).

The second scene links with the end of the first scene by the repetition of Boaz's name. Ruth chances upon his field and, coincidentally, Boaz arrives. This is "coincidence" on top of

---

<sup>8</sup> For an extended discussion of the expression see William L. Reed, "Some implications of *hên* for Old Testament Religion," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 73 (1954): 36-41.

“coincidence.” Paul Humbert interprets it well: “Providence betrays its interventions by discreet and multiple signs.”<sup>9</sup> The clauses “Boaz came from Bethlehem” (4) and “she went into the city” (18a) enclose the scene. Six sets of speeches make up the scene. In the first, Boaz and his reapers exchange divine blessings. Porten observes that not only does the divine hover over events (3), but He is on the lips of great and small alike.<sup>10</sup> The second set of speeches occurs between Boaz and his overseer and gives information about Ruth. The next three sets are between Ruth and Boaz. The concluding dialogue is between Boaz and his workers.

In the dialogue with his overseer, Boaz receives information about Ruth (5-7). He spots the female stranger and asks who she is. The overseer identifies Ruth and gives information that moves the story forward. He echoes the language of 1:22 by replying that Ruth is the Moabite girl who returned with Naomi from Moab, and he informs Boaz of how diligently she has been working.

The focal point of the scene is the encounter between Boaz and Ruth (8-14). Expectation of this event was created in 2:1 where Boaz is introduced as a man of substance who is a relative of Naomi, carried further in 2:3 where it is said that Ruth came by chance to his field, and in 2:4-6 where Boaz receives information about her. Having that information, Boaz speaks to Ruth.

The first exchange between Ruth and Boaz consists of his instructions to her, and her deferential response. By means of rhetorical questions that assume a positive answer, as well as by means of negative and positive commands, he extends exceptional kindness, protection, and privileges to Ruth. His speech is composed of three parts: the first tells her not to go to another field; the second tells her to stay in his field and glean with his girls; the third assures her of his protection and his provision for her thirst. The command *to cling* to his girls echoes 1:14 where Ruth had clung to Naomi. Boaz’s concern elicits a threefold reaction from Ruth: she falls on her face, bows to the ground, and asks why she has found such favor since she is a stranger. Why has Boaz regarded this stranger?

---

<sup>9</sup> Humbert, “Art,” 91 (translation from French mine).

<sup>10</sup> Porten, “The Scroll of Ruth,” 33.

Rauber observes that *the stranger* is one of the most important images in the OT.<sup>11</sup> It brings to mind Abraham and the patriarchs (Gen 21:1). It recalls Moses' words at the birth of his son (Exod 2:22). It brings out the connection between the Israelites' experience in Egypt and social obligation (Exod 22:11; Lev 25:23). Ruth's action of breaking with her past in order to serve the God of Israel echoes the commitment of Abraham. The author's technique here is to explore within this account the potent memory of a major theme in OT history. Boaz's blessing in the next set of speeches will also echo God's blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12. Ruth's faith implicitly compares with Abraham's.

The second set of speeches between Ruth and Boaz is composed of his answer to her question and her gracious acceptance of his favor. Boaz's response includes an explanation and a blessing. He has heard of her loyalty to Naomi and of her extraordinary faith in leaving her land to come to an unknown people. Ruth, like Abraham, left the land of her birth and her people to go to a strange land. As God bestowed a blessing on Abraham because of his faith, so now Boaz bestows a blessing on Ruth. The break with the past receives the promise of blessing for the future. Boaz expresses his wish that Yahweh—under whose wings Ruth has come to take refuge—would complete her reward.<sup>12</sup>

In 3:9, Ruth will ask Boaz to spread his wing over her. Boaz's blessing, like that of Naomi, will become a reality when he himself accepts the responsibility of protecting Ruth. The theological implication is that to pray or to bless includes having willingness to be the agent of bringing that prayer or blessing to realization. Boaz's words bring comfort to Ruth. Her answer parallels her previous response. The phrase *find favor in the eyes of* forms the conclusion to her replies. Ruth accepts the favor shown to her, thus bringing to an end the tension created in 2:2 and amplified in 2:10. The kindness of Boaz and the humility of Ruth emerge as key elements of their character.

The last exchange with Ruth further heightens the kindness of Boaz. At mealtime, he addresses three invitations to her: *come near, eat, dip*. He proves to be one who gives far more than

---

<sup>11</sup> Rauber, "Literary Values," 31-32.

<sup>12</sup> Boaz's usage of the image of wings carries an implication of covenant loyalty. It reflects such usages as Deut 32:11, where the wings of the eagle symbolize God's care for His people, and Ps 91:4, where Yahweh provides refuge under His wings for His covenant people.



is required. Ruth seats herself next to the harvesters and, in response to Boaz's three invitations, performs three acts: "she ate, was satisfied, and kept some over." Her response is to eat, not to speak. She is a more-than-ordinary recipient. Not only does Boaz share food with her and even serve her, but he ensures special treatment for her from his harvesters.

Following the exchanges between Ruth and Boaz, the narrative turns to the dialogue between Boaz and his young men. He instructs them not to bother her and to leave her extra stalks of grain. He proves to be the means of protection and provision for Ruth.

After the commands of Boaz, the narrator puts the emphasis on the actions of Ruth. She uses to the fullest the kindness shown her, then returns to the city. What Ruth determined to do in setting forth to glean, she has done.

- d. Scene 3, house in Bethlehem: Ruth reports to Naomi (2:18b-22).

The third scene completes the episode's circular design. Ruth began the day by speaking to Naomi; Naomi now concludes it by speaking to Ruth. Their interactions frame the events in the field. In the first scene, Ruth took the initiative. Now it is Naomi who begins. She initiates and concludes the dialogue. There are three sets of exchanges between them.

The plentiful supply of grain that Ruth brings prompts a question and a blessing from an astonished Naomi. The question is posed using synonymous parallelism and is capped with a blessing. Naomi echoes Ruth's words in 2:10 by using the term *pay attention to* in the blessing. Ruth had asked Boaz why he paid attention to a stranger like her and Naomi, not knowing Boaz's identity, says, "May he who paid attention to you be blessed." Ruth's response is slowed for dramatic effect. The narrator presents her response first through indirect and then through direct speech. Her answer builds up to the climax in which Boaz is identified by name.

The name *Boaz* causes a turnaround in Naomi's perspective. Discerning the providence of Yahweh, she blesses a second time the now-identified benefactor and informs Ruth that he is one of their family's redeemers (*goel*).<sup>13</sup> It is clear that Yahweh has

---

<sup>13</sup>The word *goel* is used in connection with human activity and metaphorically of divine activity. On the human side it is a term of civil and family law (Leviticus 25), of cultic law (Leviticus 27), and of criminal law (Numbers 35). On the divine side it is used in connection with God's redeeming acts (Exod 6:6; Ps 74:2; Isa 43:1). The passages in Ruth have

not forsaken His loyal-love to them. He has initiated the sequence of events by which their problem will be resolved. There is suspense in this sentence structure, just as there was in Ruth's response. The identification of Boaz as a *goel* is delayed until the end. This revelation opens the possibility of Levirate marriage. Naomi's emptiness is beginning to be transformed. With her acknowledgement, Naomi includes Ruth in the family. The narrator, however, stresses Ruth's alien status by calling her a Moabitess. Naomi's observation prompts Ruth to cite Boaz's instructions for her to remain with his servants until the end of the harvest. Naomi answers with words similar to those of Boaz, telling Ruth that it is good for her to go out with his girls so as not to be molested in another field. It appears that Boaz and Naomi unite as an older generation concerned with a young woman's safety.

The ending of this episode parallels that of the first, though with a significant difference. While Naomi finishes the conversation in both, in the first she saw herself as alone and bitter, but she now sees Yahweh's loyal-love coming through human agents. She introduces the motif of the redeeming kinsman.

e. Epilogue

The last word does not belong to Naomi, but to the narrator. Ruth stays with Boaz's maids and lives with her mother-in-law, once more showing her loyalty. This epilogue links with the previous scene through a chiasm:

A mother-in-law (18b)  
           B gleaned (18b)  
           B' to glean (23a)  
 A' mother-in-law (23b)

The emphasis on Ruth's gleaning underscores her loyalty to Naomi. The first episode concluded with the beginning of the barley harvest, this one with the end. The future is uncertain, but after harvest comes threshing. Thus, the narrator implies the transition to the next episode.

---

to do with human activity in the realm of civil and family law. The *goel* is the kinsman who redeems the property or person of a relative. The usage in Ruth combines the duty of Levirate marriage with that of redemption.

4. *Episode 3: Boaz Pledges to Redeem Ruth (3:1-18).*

The third episode is parallel in structure to the second. There are three interconnected scenes; the first and last, involving Ruth and Naomi, frame the principal scene, which involves Boaz and Ruth. The focus of the episode is once again on the encounter between Boaz and Ruth.

Scene 1 – House in Bethlehem: Naomi proposes a plan (3:1-6)

Scene 2 – Boaz's threshing floor: Boaz pledges redemption (3:7-15)

Scene 3 – House in Bethlehem: Ruth reports to Naomi (3:16-18)

5. *Episode 4: Boaz Accomplishes Redemption at the Gate (4:1-12).*

The near relative declines to acquire Ruth (1-8)

Boaz acquires Ruth (9, 10)

The people give their blessing (11, 12)

6. *Conclusion: A Son Is Born to Naomi (4:13-17a).*

Private Union: Boaz weds Ruth, and Yahweh enables her to have a son (13).

Public Celebration: The women of the city praise Yahweh for His blessing to Naomi and name the child, whom she adopts, Obed (14-17a).

7. *The Genealogy of Perez (4:17b-22): The son born to Boaz and Ruth is in the line of King David.*

8. *The Literary Structure of the Narrative: Symmetric Structure and Theological Implications.*

The literary structure of the Book of Ruth has theological implications. It acts as a vehicle to express the theological themes of human responsibility and divine providence. The structure accomplishes this by counterbalancing and juxtaposing the main elements of the story. Ruth and Boaz occupy important analogous positions. They are both contrasted to individuals who fail to carry out their responsibilities of kinship (1:8-18; 4:1b-8). They both prove to be people of noble character by acting responsibly and righteously (2:1-23; 3:1-18).

The theme of God's providential work is brought out by contrasting Naomi's afflictions with her blessings (1:19b-21; 4:14-17a). The two outer sections bring out the national setting and significance

of the story (1:1-6; 4:17b-22). As two people of noble character act responsibly, God acts providentially to resolve Naomi's plight and to fulfill His will for the nation in preparing for the birth of David, the future king. Even amidst the apostate period of the Judges, God blesses—and mediates blessing through—individual believers when they trust Him and commit themselves to Him. The central theological concept is the loyal-love of God and of faithful believers.

### **III. LITERARY PARALLELS TO THE BOOK OF RUTH**

The Book of Ruth is a historical and theological short story set in the time of the Judges. It shows God—in order to bring about a special birth in the genealogical line of Judah—working behind the scenes in the lives of those who live righteously and responsibly before Him. It emphasizes the hidden aspect of the activity of God and the responsibility of God's people to live in loyal-love and to cooperate with Him in working out the experience of blessing. Through the use of patriarchal allusions and the concluding genealogy, the book presents the progress of covenant history from Abraham to David. God providentially brought about the birth of His chosen king for Israel.

### **IV. THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF RUTH**

The book of Ruth records God's preparation for a special birth in the line of Judah. God providentially guided in establishing for Israel a ruling house whose eternal throne would be guaranteed in the Davidic Covenant that culminated in Jesus Christ. The genealogy of Jesus Christ found in Matthew 1 incorporates the genealogy found in the Book of Ruth and makes special mention of Ruth, as well as of Tamar—another OT woman in Christ's ancestry. Matthew begins his genealogy with the heading, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." His purpose is to emphasize that Jesus has His genealogical roots in Abraham and that He has come as a Davidic king in response to the promises made to the patriarchs. The Book of Ruth establishes the continuity between Abraham and David.

The Book of Ruth provides relevant life principles for God's people in every age. Here are a few:

- Those who live righteously and responsibly before God may fully trust Him to lead them throughout their lives in the fulfillment of His purpose for them.
- Believers can endure difficult things knowing that in the end God will provide the fullness and completion they so desire.
- Believers should live their lives responsibly by serving the needs of others.
- Believers should be willing to be God's agents in bringing their prayers for others to fruition.
- Until they are received to glory, believers may not know the long-range effects of their faithfulness.



# IS JESUS' EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE STILL VALID?<sup>1</sup>

ROBERT N. WILKIN

Executive Director  
*Grace Evangelical Society*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the years 2000 and 2001, we published two articles by Zane Hodges on how to evangelize.<sup>2</sup> In Free Grace circles, those messages caused much interest in the evangelistic ministry of Jesus.

Some Free Grace people feel that the evangelistic ministry that Jesus preached was intended to be effective only until He died and rose again. Then, according to this way of looking at evangelism, a dispensational change occurred.

Dispensationalism is the teaching that God has had different requirements during different ages as to what believers must do to please Him. It also includes the teaching that Israel is distinct, and always will be distinct, from the church.

Many people believe that each time God has given more revelation, the content of saving faith has changed. Thus, what Adam and Eve had to believe in order to be born again was far different from what people had to believe during Isaiah's day. And what people had to believe to be saved during Jesus' earthly ministry was far different from what people must believe today to be born again.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This article was originally a message given at the 2007 GES Annual Conference. It has been slightly edited, and footnotes have been added.

<sup>2</sup> Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of Our Message," *JOTGES* (Autumn 2000): 3-12 and "How to Lead People to Christ, Part 2: Our Invitation to Respond," *JOTGES* (Spring 2001): 9-18. Both articles may be found online at [faithalone.org/ges-journal/](http://faithalone.org/ges-journal/).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Gregory P. Sapaugh, "A Response to Hodges: How to Lead a Person to Christ, Parts 1 and 2," *JOTGES* (Autumn 2001): 21-29.

It is my contention that the content of saving faith has never changed. There has been and always will be only one saving message. The message that the Lord Jesus preached during His earthly ministry is, I believe, the same message He preached to Adam and Eve in the Garden. It is the same message that He preached to Abraham and to Moses, as well.

No one has ever been born again by a generic faith in God, by faith in animal sacrifices, or by faith that Messiah is coming.<sup>4</sup>

My thesis is: The evangelistic message that the Lord Jesus preached is, indeed, a sufficient message for today. If you think that the message the Lord Jesus preached needs to be supplemented today by the teachings of Paul or one of the other apostles, then I would like to challenge you to reconsider.

Since Jesus' evangelistic ministry is carefully laid out in the Fourth Gospel, that is where we will go to see the evangelistic message that He preached.

I will then compare that with some favorite, seemingly evangelistic passages found in Paul's writing (e.g., Gal 1:11-12; 2:15-16; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16; 1 Cor 15:1-11). We will see that there is good reason to believe that the Apostle Paul (along with the other apostles) got his evangelistic message from Jesus and that Paul did not change or supplement Jesus' evangelistic message.

A word is in order about the words *evangelism* and *evangelistic*. In this paper I am using them as synonyms for the saving message—the message that must be believed in order for a person to be regenerated. It is my opinion that in the NT the words actually have a broader meaning than that, referring, as well, to sharing the entire good news about Jesus. This would include both sanctification and justification truth—how to be born again plus how to follow Christ via baptism and discipleship. But for our purposes I will use the terms as they are commonly used in Evangelicalism to refer only to sharing the saving message.

---

<sup>4</sup> Believing in the coming Messiah for everlasting life is far different from simply believing that the Messiah is coming. The Jews of Jesus' day all believed that the Messiah was coming. But they did not believe that Jesus was that promised Messiah or that the Messiah guarantees everlasting life to all who believe in Him.



Before we look at the evangelistic message of Jesus, I believe it is important to defend the idea that we should use sound methods of interpretation when studying the saving message.

## **II. WHY EXEGESIS IS NEEDED IN EVANGELISM**

According to 2 Tim 3:16-17, all Scripture is profitable. Of course, Paul means that all Scripture is profitable *if it is properly understood and applied*.

That includes every verse of Scripture on every topic that Scripture addresses. It certainly includes passages of Scripture that present the saving message.

However, if any text is misinterpreted, then it is no longer profitable. God's Word only profits the hearer when it is properly interpreted.

Evangelism is sharing the good news about Jesus Christ. Evangelism is good news if, and only if, it accurately reflects what the Lord Jesus actually said. Evangelism that misrepresents Him and His teachings is bad news, not good news.

Mormons practice what they call evangelism. But the message they share is not the message of the Lord Jesus. Instead, it is an exegetically flawed message contradicting Jesus' message that all who simply believe in Him have everlasting life.

Evangelicals who exegete the Scriptures carefully and correctly in determining what they share when they evangelize are following the Berean principle of Acts 17:11. We are to search the Scriptures to see if the various evangelistic presentations being suggested to us are, indeed, exegetically sound.

Through the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru), I came to faith in Christ when I was in college. For two years I shared my newfound faith, but I did so uncritically. My message did change over time due to objections people raised that I could not answer from the Bible. But I never did what should have been obvious. I didn't seriously consider how the Bible tells us to evangelize.

I went on staff with Cru and worked in full-time college evangelism for four years. Again, the message I shared became exegetically more sound over time because of continued questions I received. But again, I failed to start from the beginning and ask what the Lord Jesus did when He told a person the saving message.

After four years on staff with Cru, I went to Dallas Theological Seminary, where I majored in NT in both my Th.M. and Ph.D. programs. There, for the first time, I exegetically studied the message of evangelism. As I studied what Jesus taught, I modified the way I evangelized to fit His message.

While experience is no proof, I can testify that after I studied how the Lord shared the saving message with people and after I began sharing His words with people, I found my evangelistic endeavors became more natural, more enjoyable, more fulfilling, and more abundant. Whereas before I evangelized only strangers, now I evangelize friends and acquaintances and family and strangers. Essentially, talking about the everlasting life Jesus gives to anyone who believes in Him is just as easy for me as talking about the Cowboys and the fine season they are hopefully having.

I have found that exegetically-sound evangelism flows from us naturally, whereas evangelism that we have not studied for ourselves comes out as stilted and unnatural.

### III. JESUS' EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE

The first question is where to start.

*The Synoptic Gospels.* Many Evangelicals start with the Synoptic Gospels and Jesus' calls to discipleship. For example, James Montgomery Boice wrote a book on evangelism titled, *Christ's Call to Discipleship*.<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur wrote a similar book called, *The Gospel According to Jesus*.<sup>6</sup> Many such books exist.

Beginning with the Synoptics is an exegetically unsound idea. The Synoptics are not evangelistic presentations. They are written to believers to tell them how to follow Christ in discipleship.

*1 Corinthians 15:1-11.* Many other Evangelicals start with 1 Cor 15:1-11. They say Paul was teaching that if anyone believes that, "He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4), then that person is born again.

---

<sup>5</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, 1993, 2008).

As I pointed out in a magazine article<sup>7</sup> and blog,<sup>8</sup> people rarely stick with just this passage when they use it in evangelism. They add things to it. And they leave out many things.

Paul is not reminding the Corinthians of the message he preached in order for them to be born again. He is reminding them of the message he preached in order for them to grow and be sanctified.

Even if you think this is the saving message Paul preached, where is faith included?

Where does Paul talk about everlasting life or justification?

Why is the salvation under discussion a present-tense salvation—“are [being] saved”—and not past-tense, as in Eph 2:8-9?

Why is Jesus' name not even mentioned here?

Why are Jesus' post-resurrection appearances so emphasized here, but not in other places where Paul recites the saving message (Acts 16:31; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16)?

Note well: If this is the saving message for today, then people can be born again by believing in a works-based salvation. If this is the saving message for today, then Jesus' evangelistic message is, indeed, not a sufficient message for today.

Some attempt to find the concept of salvation from eternal condemnation in 1 Cor 15:1-2. They do so in Paul's words, “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” For example, in a 1979 message entitled “Of First Importance,” Ray Stedman said,

Now he adds a condition here; we do not want to miss it. Notice how he puts it, “if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain.” I do not want to dwell long on this, but I want to point out that it is possible to believe in vain. Your faith in Christ can be of such a superficial nature that you accept all the words of the gospel as a kind of an insurance policy against going to hell, *but you do not let it change*

---

<sup>7</sup> Bob Wilkin, “Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:3-11” at <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/another-look-at-1-corinthians/>. Last accessed Dec 13, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Wilkin, “Does 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Contradict John 3:16?” at <https://faithalone.org/blog/does-1-corinthians-15-1-11-contradict-john-3-16/>. Last accessed Dec 13, 2021.

*anything in you.* That is what Paul calls “believing in vain.”  
And it happens all around us (italics added).<sup>9</sup>

Appealing to 1 Cor 15:1-11 as an explanation of what one must believe in order to be born again is going against the obvious meaning of the text. Paul is not evangelizing his readers there. Nor is he saying that they were born again by believing those truths. In 1 Cor 15:2, Paul is speaking of a present-tense salvation. In light of 1 Cor 3:15 and 5:5, he is talking about being spiritually healthy. The readers in Corinth would remain spiritually healthy if they continued to hold fast to the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection. There were some in the church at Corinth who were doubting the bodily resurrection of the dead and thus even Jesus’ bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:17, 19). That is why Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter.

In 1 Cor 15:2, to “believe in vain” would be to believe in a Jesus who died on the cross and who did not rise from the dead: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor 15:17).<sup>10</sup>

*The Fourth Gospel.* The Gospel of John is an evangelistic presentation. John 20:30-31 says that John was writing directly to unbelievers in order to lead them to faith in Christ for everlasting life. While the Synoptics include some isolated comments by Jesus that relate to evangelism (e.g., Luke 8:12-13), those comments are not full presentations and must be considered in light of the Fourth Gospel in order to be properly understood.

In the fourth Gospel, it is relatively easy to exegete the evangelistic ministry of Jesus if we simply read and analyze the text.

Jesus repeatedly says that the one who believes in Him has everlasting life.

He uses various means to illustrate believing in Him:

- eating the bread of life (John 6:35)
- drinking the water of life (John 4:13-14; 6:35)
- receiving Him (John 1:12)

---

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/1-corinthians/of-first-importance>. Last accessed Dec 13, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> See Bob Wilkin, “Unless You Believed in Vain (1 Corinthians 15:2),” at <https://faithalone.org/blog/unless-you-believed-in-vain-1-corinthians-15-2/>. Last accessed Dec 13, 2021.

- coming to Him (John 6:35)
- believing the words that the Father gave Him to deliver (John 5:24).

The Lord Jesus also uses a number of ways to illustrate what we believe Him for—what we believe He guarantees to the believer:

- shall never hunger (John 6:35)
- shall never thirst (John 4:13-14; 6:35)
- has been born of God (John 1:13; 3:3, 5)
- shall never perish (John 3:16)
- has everlasting life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; etc.)
- shall not come into judgment (John 5:24)
- has passed from death into life (John 5:24)
- shall never die (John 11:26).

Three sample passages demonstrate that Jesus' evangelistic message had three elements: 1) belief, 2) in Him, 3) for everlasting life.

*John 3:16-18.* In one of the most famous verses of Scripture, John 3:16, Jesus guarantees that all who believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. Then in the next verse He clarifies: The reason the Father sent Jesus was not to condemn the world (thus, *perish* in v 16 is equal to *being eternally condemned* in v 17), but that the world through faith in Him might be saved (thus *everlasting life* in v 16 is equal to *being saved* in v 17). He adds in verse 18 that the one who believes in Him is not condemned; that is, he is in a state of non-condemnation. But the one who does not believe in Him is in a state of condemnation right now (“is condemned already”).

Clearly the issue here is life and death. Note that the Lord does not discuss sin here. As the late Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer was famous for saying, “In light of Calvary, the issue is no longer a *sin* issue. The issue is now a *Son* issue.”

Dead people need life. They get it by believing in Jesus. And once they get it, they have everlasting life; they will never perish, and they are saved once and for all.

*John 6:35.* After feeding 5,000 men—plus likely another 15,000 women and children—from one boy's lunch, Jesus is confronted with

a crowd that wants Him to keep the free food coming. They remind Him of the provision of bread that God gave the nation during the wilderness wanderings.

Jesus then launches into a sermon based on His being the Bread of Life. "I am the bread of life." He clearly means that He is the *Source* of *everlasting life*. One must partake of Him in order to have life that can never be lost.

"He who comes to Me [for the bread of life] will never hunger." This is a statement of eternal security. *Never hunger* means never hunger. If anyone who partook of the bread of life ever needed to partake of the bread of life again in order to keep everlasting life, then this promise by the Lord Jesus would be a lie.

"He who believes in Me [= drinks the living water], shall never thirst." Here, the Lord connects this discourse with what He told the woman at the well, as recorded in John 4:10-14. Once again, the promise that the believer will never thirst is a statement of eternal security. If the Lord is telling the truth, then once a person simply believes in Him, he has life that can never be lost.

If we follow the context, verses 36-40 emphatically repeat the promise of life that can never be lost for the one who believes in Jesus. So does verse 47.

Note that again we have no discussion of a sin problem. Unlike modern evangelistic presentations that confront the unbeliever with his sin, Jesus confronts the unbeliever with his need for everlasting life.

Unlike modern presentations that make the conditions of eternal life a turning from sins, a commitment of life, and obedience, the Lord Jesus makes belief in Him the sole condition.

*John 11:25-27.* A comparison of these verses with the purpose statement in John 20:30-31 shows that this is a key passage in John's Gospel.

Here Jesus makes not one, but two, "I am" statements.

First, He says, "I am the resurrection." This He explains in verse 25: "He who believes in Me, though he may die [physically], he shall live [physically]." Jesus is not promising *spiritual* life here, as most wrongly presuppose. Jesus is promising future resurrection life in the kingdom of God for the one who believes in Him.

Second, He says, “I am the life.” This He explains in verse 26: “He who lives and believes in Me shall never die.” Here we have two present articular participles: “the one who lives” and “the one who believes in Me.” The meaning of “he who lives” influences our understanding of “and believes in Me.” Unlike modern presentations, Jesus does not condition eternal life on persevering faith. He conditions eternal life on one act of believing in Him. The moment one believes, he falls into the category of a believer, even if his faith later fails.

If we find someone who believes in Jesus, we have found someone who “will never die.” Since He is discussing everlasting life here (“I am the life”), this is a strong statement of eternal security. Whereas Jesus often emphasizes the present possession of everlasting life, here He does that by denying the opposite.

Note that if anyone who believed in Jesus ever later died spiritually, then Jesus lied here.

This sort of evangelistic presentation is radically different from the way most evangelize today.

And We should note the ending of the Lord’s words to Martha: “Do you believe this?” He does not ask her to pray a prayer or commit herself to follow Him. He simply asks if she believes this. In John’s Gospel “to believe in” (*pisteuō eis*) is the same as “to believe that” (*pisteuō hoti*) He is the Christ, as Martha’s response in verse 27 shows. She states that she does believe Him, and she says why—because she believes that He is the Christ, the Son of God.” In Johannine thought, for Jesus to be the Christ is for Him to be the Guarantor of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him.

#### **IV. HIS EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE IS SUFFICIENT TODAY**

The evangelistic message of the Lord is always sufficient:

- It was sufficient when He gave it.
- It was sufficient when His apostles gave that same message.
- It is sufficient today.
- It will be sufficient in the Tribulation.
- It will be sufficient in the Millennium, too.

There should be no need to defend this proposition. It should be so obvious as not to need any explanation. However, tradition is powerful, and most traditions today do not believe that Jesus' evangelistic message is still effective today.

There are seven proofs that Jesus' evangelistic message is still effective today.

First, Christianity is Jesus' message, first to last. Every doctrine we teach—eschatology, angelology, anthropology, soteriology—is based on what Jesus Himself taught.<sup>11</sup>

Second, the apostles did not change His message. The apostles taught and wrote what Jesus taught.

Third, it makes no sense that Jesus was presenting a new saving message that would be valid for only three years. He was giving the message that would be true forever.

Fourth, Jesus was well-aware that the Holy Spirit would use His Words in order to give His followers additional special revelation (John 14:26). He certainly knew that the Fourth Gospel would lay out His evangelistic message.

Fifth, to suggest that at His Bema, Jesus will rebuke people who share His very words with others is so bizarre as to be unbelievable.

Sixth, John never once said that the message Jesus preached has changed. John 20:30-31 clearly shows that the message Jesus preached is still a sufficient message today.

Seventh, if we say that Jesus' evangelistic message is no longer sufficient, then we have no way of knowing what the sufficient message for today is, since there is no other book in the NT designed to give us that new message.

I have asked numerous people who believe that Jesus' message is no longer effective, "Is there any passage in the NT that tells us everything we must believe in order to be born again?"

Their answer has been "no." People have told me that God expects us to believe the whole counsel of God's Word regarding the saving message. In their view, we must piece together the saving message from multiple texts throughout the NT.

Most evangelistic tracts reflect this sort of thinking. Verses are cited from many different NT texts in order to create a saving mosaic.

---

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Zane C. Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2018).



Of course, different tracts have different verses and different saving messages. Most say you must believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. But they do not stop there. They variously add the need to turn from our sins, commit our lives to Christ, receive Christ, invite Him into our lives, and, sometimes, submit to Christian baptism. Very few say that we must believe in Him for the gift of God, which is everlasting life.

That is the problem that arises when someone decides that the evangelistic ministry of Jesus is no longer in effect today.

## V. DID PAUL CHANGE OR SUPPLEMENT JESUS' MESSAGE?

In this section, I will briefly examine some passages Pauline passages to see how they compare with Jesus' evangelistic message.

I have chosen a number of passage types. Some of these, I believe, are clearly just another way of saying what Jesus said.

Some of these are *not* the message Paul used to lead unbelievers to faith in Christ and hence are not a fair comparison. They are different from Jesus' evangelistic message. But they are also different from Paul's!

*Galatians 1:11-12.* Same message. This one passage alone is a show-stopper for the idea that Paul changed Jesus' evangelistic message. Paul got his message directly from Jesus, and Paul did not change it one bit.

*Galatians 2:15-16.* Same message. If the term *justify* is understood as a virtual synonym for *eternal life*, then this message is the same message of John 3:16; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:47, etc.

*Ephesians 2:8-9.* Same message. While there are some things missing here—since Paul is writing to believers and is not trying to evangelize them—we do see eternal life here. To be saved, in this context, is to be *made alive*, as verse 5 clearly shows. And that life is everlasting life. The verb referring to *salvation* is in the perfect tense: a completed past action with an abiding result.

This passage, if unpacked properly, is identical to John 3:16, etc.

*1 Timothy 1:16.* Same message. Again, much is missing here. But clearly, this text—like Eph 2:5-9—shows that Paul preached everlasting life. It also shows that *what we are believing in Jesus for is everlasting life.* We cannot be born again by believing in Him for temporary life. We cannot be born again by believing in Him for life that can be lost or revoked. We cannot be born again by believing in Him for anything other than everlasting life or the equivalent (eternity with Him in His kingdom, being once for all declared righteous, etc.).

*The Romans Road? Not Evangelistic!* One of the messages I like to give has the title “The Romans Road Ends in a Cul-de-Sac.” Free Grace people sometimes use a version of the Romans Road. But they typically do not give it the Lordship slant that many give it. However, Romans 10:9-10 is not saying that one must confess Jesus in order to be justified/born again. Neither is Rom 10:13.

In Romans, Paul never uses the words *save* or *salvation* to refer to being justified or born again. When he wishes to speak of justification, he uses that word or the word *righteousness*.

The Book of Romans is not an evangelistic book, and anyone who snips verses here and there from Romans is likely to end up confusing the listener rather than leading him to faith in Christ.

## VI. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS THAT ARISE?

There really are no practical problems in sharing Jesus’ evangelistic message if we are seeking to please the Lord Jesus Christ and do what He told us to do.

Look at the following seemingly practical problems and see if you can see why they really are not problems at all.

“But that isn’t the way we’ve always done it.” So?

“But that isn’t the historic teaching of the church.” So?

“But that would mean a person could be born again by faith in Jesus and yet not have a completely orthodox view of the Trinity, the virgin birth, or the hypostatic union.” So?

“But that would mean that someone might be born again without committing himself to follow Christ for the rest of his life.” So?

“But I don’t like that message.” So?

“But I think that is an offensive message to people who believe that salvation can be lost by falling away.” So?

“But that isn’t the message the Lord used to lead me to faith in Christ.” So?

“But if that’s true, then my testimony is wrong.” So? If that is the case, then change your testimony to conform to Scripture, rather than twisting Scripture to conform to your testimony!

## **VII. JESUS IS LORD OF THE SAVING MESSAGE**

James 3:1 should be a warning to us all on the need to be exegetically sound. James says that those who teach God’s Word will be judged more harshly at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We need to take care in the message we proclaim, including the message of how to be born again.

So should 1 Cor 3:10-15.

All believers will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and our works will be evaluated. This includes all the things we have taught evangelistically and all the things we have taught in terms of discipleship. This is a sobering thought.

Teach what Jesus taught, and you will not be rebuked by Him at the Bema for those teachings. Teach contrary to what He taught, and rebuke is sure to come.

We should proclaim what the Lord Jesus proclaimed: that the one who simply believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life that can never be lost has that life. If we do, then we can anticipate one day hearing, “Well done, good servant.”



# THE LORD'S EATING WITH SINNERS IN LUKE 5

KATHRYN WRIGHT

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the Gospel of Luke, a consistent theme is found in the Lord's encounters with various groups of people. Luke presents Him as sitting at a table and eating with them.

While the other Gospel writers speak of the Lord's participating in certain meals (e.g., Matt 26:6-7; Mark 14:3ff.), Luke emphasizes it to a much greater degree. It is noteworthy that the Gospel of John is markedly silent on the topic of table fellowship until the anointing at Bethany and the Passover (John 12:1-7; 13:1-3). If, as will be argued, *eating* at these meals deals with having fellowship with the Lord, that is to be expected. There is a difference between having fellowship with the Lord and receiving eternal life. The Gospel of John is a book about the offer of eternal life to unbelievers. Though all believers have eternal life, not all believers are in fellowship with the Savior.

The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, is a book written to believers, so one would expect an emphasis on the fellowship with the Lord that is available to the one who already has eternal life. This is the key to understanding the many examples in Luke of the Lord's feasting with others at a table. It seems that it is with only a bit of hyperbole that Karris comments that throughout the Gospel of Luke the Lord has either just left a feast, is on His way to a feast, or is currently at a feast.<sup>1</sup>

In these settings, Jesus is depicted as teaching those around Him. Bock notices this theme, stating that Luke likes to mention events surrounding a meal (7:36-50; 9:10-17; 10:38-42; 11:37-54; 14:1-24; 19:1-10; 22:7-38; 24:29-32, 41-43). The tables where these meals take place provide opportunities for the Lord to teach spiritual truths. Perhaps even more critical to the purpose of this article, Bock says it

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Karris, *Eating Your Way Through Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 14.

is at these tables that fellowship with the Lord occurs.<sup>2</sup> Once again, this would be expected in a book written to believers. The Lord desires intimacy with those who are His children. His teaching at these meals is part of that intimacy.<sup>3</sup>

In the narratives of these feasts, there is often an element of contrast among those involved. On the one hand, there are Jewish religious leaders or other observant Jews present. On the other hand, there are tax collectors and sinners (5:30; 15:1; 19:7). The mention of these notorious sinners has led many to conclude that these meals are evangelistic in nature. Jesus is teaching those present the good news that will save them from the lake of fire.

The account of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 is an example. Even though it is not explicitly stated that the Lord ate with Zacchaeus, it is clear that He did.<sup>4</sup> As will be argued below, there are parallels between the accounts of Zacchaeus and Levi, and the Lord ate with Levi.<sup>5</sup> When the Lord says He will “stay” at Zacchaeus’ home, the word strongly suggests more than just a short stay.<sup>6</sup>

Many maintain that the Lord eats at the home of Zacchaeus, a well-known sinner, so that He can tell him how to become a child of God. This is the kind of “salvation” he needs (Luke 19:9).<sup>7</sup> Often, this interpretation of the purpose of these meals results in a gospel of eternal salvation that involves works. Stein, for example, states that Zacchaeus was eternally saved because he repented from his many sins as a tax collector.<sup>8</sup> He suggests that when, in the Gospel of Luke,

---

<sup>2</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 495.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of such teaching are found in Luke 5:31-32; 7:41-42; 14:7-11, 12-14, 16-24; 15:3-7, 8-10, 11-32; and 19:11-27.

<sup>4</sup> Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, vol. 3 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 315; Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 409; Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 444.

<sup>5</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 252.

<sup>6</sup> Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 234.

<sup>7</sup> John A. Martin, “Luke” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 252; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 469. Bock also lists the account of Zacchaeus as an example of the Lord’s eating with sinners.

<sup>8</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 469.

the Lord eats with sinners, He requires them both to believe in Him and to turn from their sins in order to be eternally saved. Both things are necessary.

In light of the purpose of Luke's Gospel, this is a serious misinterpretation of these meals. In this article, I will argue that these meals were not evangelistic in nature. They gave the Lord an opportunity to teach discipleship truths to believers. Those at the meals were new and unhealthy children of God who needed to grow in their new life.

An article of this length cannot address all the feasts in Luke. Therefore, I will discuss the first meal the Lord has with sinners, with the suggestion that it is a model for those that follow.

## II. LUKE 5:27-32: THE FIRST FEAST

The primary person involved in the Lord's first feast with sinners is a man by the name of Levi. In the account, the reader is told that he is a tax collector. It will become clear that he has accumulated a great deal of wealth through this profession.

Luke has already hinted at the kind of man Levi is. In Luke 3:10-14, John the Baptist addresses what the people needed to do to prepare for the coming of Christ. Three times he tells the people that they need to turn from their sins. He specifically uses the example of the tax collectors (3:13).

The tax collectors in first-century Israel were known as particularly evil men. In Matt 5:46, the Lord Himself indicates how the public viewed them. Rome, which held Israel under subjection, appointed certain Jews to collect taxes from their countrymen. These men had to collect a certain amount of money for Rome, and whatever they collected above that amount was theirs to keep. They had a well-deserved reputation for overcharging their fellow Jews and making themselves rich because of the authority given them by Rome. They were seen as thieves and traitors and the worst kind of sinner, on par with prostitutes.<sup>9</sup>

Levi was an agent of Rome who worked at a toll post in Capernaum (Matt 9:1). This would have been a highly desirable post due to the

---

<sup>9</sup>R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 52-53; *Sanh* 25b also discusses how they were seen as being dishonest by the Jews.

taxes he could collect from the fishing businesses on the Sea of Galilee and because Capernaum was a major city on a popular trade route that ran from the north.

In Luke's account, it appears that Levi has been in this business for some time. He has accumulated enough wealth to own a sizeable home and to throw a large feast. There would have been a great deal of resentment towards him from religious Jews in Capernaum. In the eyes of such people, the Lord's actions towards this man are stunning.

### A. Jesus Calls Levi (v 27)

Luke records that Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax booth. The Lord gives a direct command to him: "Follow Me."

Some take this as a command to become a believer; Levi is being offered eternal life. Childress calls it the "good news of eternal salvation."<sup>10</sup> Richards takes the same view, saying that Levi is a sinner who can become a new person with a new life.<sup>11</sup> Others maintain that there is more than one level to the command, but that it includes the summons to spiritual conversion, and that the Lord's calling Levi to be eternally saved shows that anybody can become a child of God.<sup>12</sup> Stein is the most direct. He boldly claims that Jesus' encounter with Levi is not a call to "a deeper Christian commitment to Jesus...but rather the commitment to become a Christian."<sup>13</sup>

There can be no doubt, however, that this is not correct. It fails to make a distinction between discipleship and eternal salvation. There is no call for Levi to believe in the Lord for eternal life here (John 3:16; 5:24; 11:25-26). Instead, Jesus is commanding Levi to do something very costly. In fact, Levi will pay a large price to obey what Christ is commanding him to do.

Even some staunch Calvinists admit that this is what is happening here. Levi is being called to be a disciple who studies under Christ, submits to His teaching, and serves others.<sup>14</sup> However, none of these

---

<sup>10</sup> Gavin Childress, *Opening up Luke's Gospel* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 49.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987), 659.

<sup>12</sup> Osborne, *Luke*, 145; H. D. M. Spence-Jones, *St. Luke*, vol. 1, (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 117.

<sup>13</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 181.

<sup>14</sup> Sproul, *A Walk*, 93.



things is a requirement for receiving eternal life, which is a free gift (Eph 2:8-9).

The words *follow Me* are used throughout Luke to describe becoming a disciple, or a student, of the Lord (9:23, 49, 57, 59, 61; 18:22, 28).<sup>15</sup> This is not a call to become a believer; rather it is a call to be a follower. Of particular interest is 5:11, where the same verb is used when Jesus calls Peter, James, and John to be His disciples *after* they have believed in Him.

We see, then, that when Jesus calls Levi to follow Him, Levi is already a believer. It is not credible to believe that Levi would leave his job and follow a Man he did not know. Peter, James, and John had fished the waters around Capernaum and would have paid taxes at Levi's booth. The Lord often preached in that area and had performed many miracles in various nearby places. Levi would certainly have heard and seen Him.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Levi's response to this short, direct command indicates that he had been a very attentive listener to what the Lord taught.<sup>17</sup>

Even though Levi already had eternal life, the possibility of his being a follower of the Lord would not have crossed his mind up until the time Jesus calls him to become a disciple. He would have felt that his profession excluded him from any kind of intimacy with the King or the possibility of greatness in His kingdom. Now, however, the Lord is telling this despised tax collector that he can be one of the Messiah's inner circle. He will jump at the chance and pay the price to do so. The Jews who heard Jesus' summons would have been surprised that it had been given to a man like Levi.

## **B. Levi's Response (v 28)**

Luke records how, at the Lord's invitation, Levi "left all, rose up, and followed Him." Once again, the reader sees the connection with Peter, James, and John. In this same chapter, they, too, left all and followed Jesus after they had believed in Him.<sup>18</sup> Since most agree that

---

<sup>15</sup> Not all of these verses have the command, but they use different forms of the verb to "follow."

<sup>16</sup> Wiersbe, *Bible*, 188.

<sup>17</sup> John Peter Lange and J. J. van Oosterzee, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Luke*, trans. Philip Schaff and Charles C. Starbuck (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 88.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Peter, James, and John were already believers when Jesus called them to follow Him, we should see Levi in the same light. Like these three men, Levi left his lucrative job behind at the words of Christ. The other three had left their productive fishing business. Luke is the only Synoptic Gospel which adds that Levi left everything behind.

In the case of each of these men, Luke wants us to see that this is a call to follow the Lord in discipleship. If one wants to be a disciple, he must be willing to leave all he has in order to do so (Luke 14:33). Although this should not need to be said, in today's theological climate it must be. Leaving everything is not a requirement for receiving the free gift of eternal life.

Luke 9:23 supports this conclusion. To follow Christ, one must deny oneself and engage in self-sacrificial acts. This must be on an ongoing or "daily" basis. Eternal life, on the other hand, is received in a moment of time (John 4:14; 5:24).

Constable agrees that this is not a description of one's coming to initial faith in Christ for eternal life. The terms used here stress "Levi's decisive break with his former vocation and his continuing life of discipleship." What Levi does would have involved great financial and career sacrifices.<sup>19</sup> It also involved repentance, or a turning from sin. He was leaving whatever corruption was part of his job in order to walk with the Christ (3:12-13).

An often-overlooked detail is that Levi "rose up." The exact same verb is used a few verses earlier. When the paralytic is healed by Jesus, he "rose up," picked up his bed and went to his own house (5:25). Luke seems to make a connection between this man and Levi. Both respond to the Lord's command by a three-step process, which begins with rising up. Both men also go to their homes.

Both men also experience joy over their encounter with Christ. The paralytic goes home glorifying God. As will be seen, Levi shows his joy by hosting a great feast.

In verse 31, Jesus will refer to Himself as a physician. Clearly, He healed the paralytic of a physical ailment. But in a very real sense, Levi was just as sick as the paralytic. He was certainly morally ill when the Lord called him to follow Him. This was true even though he had already believed in Him and had eternal life. Jesus healed both the paralytic and Levi by forgiving their sins (v 24). Even though he

---

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Constable, "Luke 5:28," Constable Notes, [www.bible.net.org](http://www.bible.net.org).

is a tax collector, this forgiveness would allow Levi to have intimacy with Christ.<sup>20</sup> Another similarity between the paralytic and Levi is that both men were isolated from their fellow Jews—the paralytic by his disease and Levi by his profession. The Great Physician heals them in this regard also.<sup>21</sup>

### **C. The Feast (v 29)**

After leaving everything to follow the Lord, the first thing Levi does as a disciple is to hold a great feast in his home for many of his friends, with the Lord as the honored Guest.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, he is being a servant of those in attendance. Before, as a tax collector, he had served himself. Now, he will serve others. The banquet is a clear picture of discipleship.

The feast is another example of Levi's paying a price for following the Lord in discipleship. Luke comments that this was a "great" feast, and that there were a "great number" of people who were invited. Most homes in first-century Galilee were small. The description of this event shows that Levi was a man of wealth, since he had a large home. The cost of hosting such a feast would have been high.

Those who are invited to this feast also show that Levi is a disciple of Christ. They are identified as "tax collectors" and "sinners" (v 30). In the eyes of devout Jews, they are outcasts, just like Levi. Later, the Lord will say that when you have a feast, those are the kind of people to invite (Luke 14:12-24). Just as the Lord had invited Levi to follow Him, Levi invites those like him to be with the Lord in his home. He wants them to hear the teachings of the Christ. Levi's attitude towards them is a reflection of the attitude of Christ Himself. The picture is one of joy in the company of others who want to know Christ better.<sup>23</sup>

This scene was scandalous to the religious Jew. As mentioned above, Levi was a morally sick individual. Now, a large group of such people are in the presence of this One who claims to be the Christ. Even

---

<sup>20</sup>To be noted here is the fact that the forgiveness of sins is not to be equated with the reception of eternal life. The paralytic was already a believer when Jesus forgave his sins. He had already believed (v 20). Forgiveness of sins results in fellowship with Christ.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Stein, *Luke*, 181.

<sup>23</sup>Alberto S. Valdés, "The Gospel According to Luke," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 249.

worse, they have all “sat down” with Him in the intimate setting of a meal together. Levi, no doubt, is surprised that the Lord would come to his home and sit and eat with him. Religious Jews would never do such a thing, but the One whom he believes to be the Christ does.

Since Levi already has eternal life, his actions here speak of more than the reception of that gift. Like the paralytic man in 5:17-25, Levi is seeking the fellowship with the Lord that forgiveness of sins brings. Levi is willing to turn from his sins and pay whatever the price to enjoy that fellowship. Sitting with the Lord in his house over a meal is a beautiful picture of such realities. Levi wants others to have the same joy.

We are not told exactly what was discussed around the tables at that feast. But the Lord’s main message concerned the coming kingdom of God. It is a certainty that He addressed such issues. Part of the Lord’s teaching about this coming kingdom regarded believers’ being rewarded when He sets it up. Those believers who do what Levi does here will be rewarded on that day (Luke 14:14). Levi had been wealthy in the things of this life. As a disciple, the teachings and example of the Lord are showing him how to be wealthy in the world to come. That is why he left his high-paying job in order to be close to the Christ. He was exchanging the wealth of this world for wealth in Christ’s kingdom.

In Luke 12:42-43, the Lord teaches these principles on another occasion. Those who will be great in His kingdom are said to be believers who give others food. This is not a statement about feeding the poor, but about serving others. That is exactly what Levi is doing here. Service to others can take many forms, but in this case, Levi is literally giving them food. He is also allowing them to eat of the spiritual food of Christ’s words. Levi is serving those present by placing them in the presence of the King.

Whenever Levi believed in the Jesus for eternal life, he became a child of God. Now he is experiencing the fellowship with the Lord that forgiveness of sins brings. This fellowship, which would be maintained by following the Lord’s example and teaching, will result in eternal rewards. This feast is a picture of that fellowship. Eternal salvation is absolutely free. Levi is going beyond that. He is paying the price in order to be a disciple.

#### **D. The Reaction of the Religious Jews (v 30)**

Since the religious leaders despised no group of people more than tax collectors, it is no surprise that the scribes and Pharisees “complained” about what they saw going on in Levi’s home. First, Christ had chosen one of these notorious sinners to be in His inner circle. Then He sat at a meal of intimate fellowship with a large number of such sinners.

The scribes were a very powerful group of men in first-century Israel. They obtained this title after years of study. They held many positions of power in government, including judgeships. Most of them were also Pharisees.<sup>24</sup> The Pharisees followed a long list of oral traditions passed down by leading rabbis. These traditions dictated with whom a righteous Jew could associate. The scribes were the leading experts in such matters. In their opinion, one did not need to be a religious scholar in order to recognize the Lord’s sinful actions on this occasion. It was clear that Jesus was spending time with the wrong people.

There would have been differences of opinion among these religious Jews about the future of common Jewish “sinners” in the coming kingdom. But they would have all agreed that the Christ would not dare to eat a meal with them. It was not possible that the Christ would want to be close to such individuals. These people were all ceremonially unclean because of their lives, their contact with Gentiles, and their unwillingness to adhere to the traditions passed down by the rabbis.

The complaint of these religious leaders revolved around fellowship. How could the Messiah eat and drink with these people? That would defile Him. No doubt, for most of these men, this would be clear proof that Jesus was not the Christ.

Luke recounts the religious leaders’ attitude. At another meal, one of them is scandalized that a person claiming to be the Christ would allow Himself to be touched by a well-known sinner. Even a prophet would not allow that (Luke 7:39). Later, these men will once again complain that Jesus continues to eat with morally sick individuals (Luke 15:2).

---

<sup>24</sup> Joaquin Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969), 233-36.

The presence of tax collectors and sinners at a meal with the Christ was saying more than simply that such Jews could be in the kingdom. By eating with them, the Lord was showing that they could be great in that kingdom. As discussed above, the Lord specifically taught this doctrine and was teaching it on this occasion. The scribes and Pharisees could not accept such teachings, and the tax collectors and sinners in attendance at the feast probably had a hard time believing them as well. It would be like a common person being invited to a party of rich and powerful people and wondering if there had been a mistake.

Levi and all the “sinners” present at the feast, including the other disciples in the Lord’s inner circle, would have heard such sentiments before. When it came to religious matters, the scribes and Pharisees were generally held in high regard by the people.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps in the mind of Levi, and certainly in the minds of some of those at the feast, Jesus should not be eating with them. They were certainly aware of their numerous sins. They knew that the title given to them—sinners—by the religious leaders was well-deserved. Perhaps the religious leaders had a point. These tax collectors knew they could believe in Him as the Christ. Levi had already done so, and no doubt many others at the feast had as well. But should they be allowed to eat with Him? Could they actually be close to Him? Wasn’t that privilege reserved for more deserving Jews, that is, those who lived righteously? The Lord would need to address these questions and allow those in attendance at the feast to understand what kind of relationship they could have with Him.

### **E. The Response of the Lord (vv 31-32)**

The Lord’s words here explain why He eats with the tax collectors and sinners. They are also often misunderstood. He states:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

Once again, many see this as a statement concerning eternal salvation. When Jesus eats with people, it is not a picture of fellowship with Him, but an opportunity for those present to come to faith. The

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Lord's words are interpreted to conform to this understanding. The "sick" would be the person who is not saved. The same would be the case with "sinners." The unbeliever needs to repent in order to have eternal life. What the unbeliever needs is to become "righteous." One becomes righteous when he believes (Rom 3:21-26).

This view of these verses means that Jesus is speaking in an ironic or even sarcastic sense. People like the scribes and Pharisees *thought* they were righteous. The tax collectors and sinners knew they were not. They understood that they were sinners. Jesus goes to such people and "calls" them to repent in order to be saved because they are willing to listen. They understand their spiritually lost condition.

According to this understanding of the passage, all people are sinners and need to be saved. If a person were righteous, they would not need to repent. *If such a person existed*, Jesus would not need to come for that person. There would be no need to call such a person. In reality, of course, such a person does not exist. But these religious leaders were blind to such things.<sup>26</sup> This Lord's sarcastic remark is an attack on the scribes and Pharisees. They thought they were righteous, but were, in reality, just like the tax collectors and sinners whom they despised.

There are numerous problems with this view. The first is that repentance is not the same thing as belief (Acts 20:21). Repentance is a turning from sin (Luke 3:8). That certainly fits the context here. The people at the feast were being told that they needed to turn from their sins.

But if repentance is a turning from sin, it cannot be a requirement for eternal life. That would make the reception of that life a work, and the Scriptures are clear that it is by God's grace, apart from works of any kind (Eph 2:8-9; John 4:10-14).

Stein recognizes that repentance is a work. However, he maintains that it is required for eternal salvation and that Levi did this work when he left everything behind to follow Christ.<sup>27</sup> Levi had to do that if he were to be eternally saved. Stein does not seem to see the contradiction in saying that something is simultaneously free and costly.

It is better, however, to take these words of the Lord at face value. *The righteous* refers to those who live righteously. *Sinners* refers to

---

<sup>26</sup> For two examples of such views, see Martin, "Luke," 218; Stein, *Luke*, 182.

<sup>27</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 182.

those who do not. Believers in Christ can fall into either category. Levi is a believer who is a sinner. He needs to leave his old way of life behind. Those at the feast who have already received eternal life by believing in Jesus need to do the same.

This view is seen in the Lord's parable found in Luke 15:4-7. There are 100 sheep, which represent believers. When one strays, he needs to repent and return to the flock. The other 99 do not need to repent because they are in fellowship with the Lord.<sup>28</sup> The 99 are living righteously.

There are examples of righteous believers in the book of Luke. These would include John the Baptist, Elizabeth and Zacharias (1:6), Mary (1:28), Simeon (2:25), and Anna (2:37). These people are not called "righteous" because of their position as believers, but because of the way they live. "Sinners" can describe a believer who does not live righteously.

Like the paralyzed believer who needed healing, Levi and the other sinners/believers at the feast needed healing as well. They needed to repent from their sins and become healthy spiritually in order to be in fellowship with the King. Even though they were believers, they were "sick." They needed the advice of the Physician who was already their Savior.

Dillow also argues against taking the Lord's statement as a call to eternal salvation and making "sinners" equivalent to unbelievers. He says that if Jesus is referring to the "righteous" in an ironic or sarcastic way, meaning that they only think they are righteous, we must assume that He is doing the same regarding "sinners." He would be referring to people who only think they are sinners, but are not. Instead, the righteous in Luke 5:32 and 15:7 are healthy believers who do not need to turn from a sinful lifestyle.<sup>29</sup> The Lord is saying that not only do people like Levi have eternal life, but that He also desires that they repent of their sins and eat with Him. He wants to be close to them, which is the picture of spiritual health. If they do, they can even be great in His coming kingdom.

---

<sup>28</sup> Once again, the issue is fellowship and not eternal life. The sheep that has strayed does not lose eternal life, but loses intimacy with the Shepherd.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph C. Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings* (Monument, CO: Paniym Group, 2012), 703.



### III. PARALLELS WITH ZACCHAEUS

The views expressed in this article about the feast in Levi's home find support in the account of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. There are many connections between the two stories. Both men were tax collectors. As a result, both were despised by many of the Jews. As happened in the case of Levi and his friends, the righteous Jews point out that by going to the home of Zacchaeus, the Lord is fellowshiping with a "sinner" (19:7) The Lord goes to each man's home, which invites criticism from the Jews. Just as a feast is a time of joy, Zacchaeus receives the Lord into his home "joyfully" (19:6).

There are also parallels between Levi and Zacchaeus in the way they respond to the Lord. It is clear that Jesus teaches Zacchaeus while He is in the man's home. There can be no doubt that He spoke about His coming kingdom. After listening to what the Lord says, Zacchaeus commits to giving half of what he owns to the poor and, with the rest of his wealth, to correcting any wrongs he has done to others (19:8). As was the case with Levi, this would have been a great amount of wealth to give up in order to obey the Lord.

As in the account of Levi, here is an example of repentance. Levi had repented of his sins by following the Lord and serving others. Zacchaeus does the same. In order to do what the Lord says, he is turning from the corruption of his trade and the wealth it earned him. Zacchaeus now serves the poor, whom he previously abused.

Luke shows the extent of Zacchaeus' repentance, and he serves as a model for others. The OT said that if a person wronged someone, they were to make restitution by returning the amount stolen and adding 20 percent. Zacchaeus goes far above that requirement by restoring 400 percent above what he had cheated others out of.<sup>30</sup> He also goes beyond the works required for repentance proclaimed by John the Baptist (3:12-13).

It would be a mistake to conclude that Zacchaeus does such things in order to earn eternal life or show the sincerity of his faith. He already believes that Jesus is the Christ; he has eternal life. Like Levi, he wants to leave his corrupt lifestyle behind and be a disciple of the Lord.

---

<sup>30</sup>Valdés, "Luke," 161.

But, as discussed above, he also does so because of what the Lord teaches him in his home. While speaking to Zacchaeus, the Lord gives the parable of the minas (19:11-24). In that parable, Jesus says that those who serve Him with their possessions will be great in the kingdom. Like Levi, Zacchaeus is willing to part with his earthly wealth in order to gain riches in the world to come.

Such actions and words by the Lord did not sit well with the righteous Jews. The reader can only imagine the joy that Zacchaeus experienced upon hearing such words from the Lord. The King was in his home, eating with and teaching him. As with Levi and the tax collectors in Luke 5, He told Zacchaeus that He wanted an intimate relationship with him and that he could be wealthy in His kingdom. No price was too much for him to pay to make those things a reality.

Another parallel between the accounts of Levi and Zacchaeus is the Lord's response to Zacchaeus' repentance. He tells him that "salvation" has come to his house and that He "has come to seek and save that which was lost" (19:10). This is to be understood in light of the Lord's statement to Levi and his guests in 5:32, that He has come to call sinners to repentance. The Lord gives His mission statement—using different words—on both occasions. They form an *inclusio* with these two accounts of rich tax collectors.<sup>31</sup>

Once again, as in the case of 5:32, this statement is not a declaration that Jesus came to save unbelievers from the lake of fire, even though He certainly did. It is given *after* Zacchaeus commits to following the Lord by giving up his wealth and *after* He has spent time with Zacchaeus in his home. Zacchaeus already has eternal life. The salvation here is a salvation from the corrupt lifestyle Zacchaeus has been living. Like Levi, he needs to be saved from the destruction that sin brings in the life of the believer. The unrighteous believer will also lose wealth in the world to come if he continues in this lifestyle.<sup>32</sup> The Lord wanted Zacchaeus to experience spiritual health.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Constable, "Luke 5:32," Constable Notes.

<sup>32</sup> Dillow, *Reign*, 704.

<sup>33</sup> Even some Free Grace writers take a different view. Being a "son of Abraham" and "salvation" would both be equivalent to being a believer. This view would agree with the view of this article that Zacchaeus was a believer. He could have believed before Jesus came to town, on the way to his home, or after the Lord spoke to him in his home. This position would also maintain that Zacchaeus' reaction of parting with his wealth would be an expression of discipleship. With this alternate view, Zacchaeus' decision to follow Christ in discipleship happened very quickly after he had believed in him for eternal life.

The one who is “lost” here is not the unbeliever. It is the believer who is out of fellowship with the Lord. This, too, is seen in the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7). The lost sheep is still a sheep, but it represents the believer who is not living righteously. Jesus is saying that He did not simply come to give eternal life. He came to call unrighteous believers, who are out of fellowship with Him, to come back to the fold and to intimacy with Him.<sup>34</sup> Jesus calls such people to repent of their sins and eat with Him.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In every culture, going to a person's home and eating with them is a sign of friendship or intimacy. It is a time of sharing one's life with the host. On such occasions there are always discussions among those in attendance.

The NT has taken that imagery and applied it to the Christian life. In Rev 3:20 the Lord is speaking to a group of unrighteous, carnal, believers at Laodicea. He asks if they would allow Him to come to them and eat with them. He wants to have a closer relationship with them. This can only happen, however, if they repent (Rev 3:19-20). It is a gross misunderstanding of NT theology to conclude that the carnal people in the church at Laodicea were unbelievers.

Luke does the same thing in his Gospel. The Lord is often seen eating in the home of sinners. Levi is a case in point. His willingness to immediately leave his wealth-producing vocation at the simple word of the Lord shows that he had already believed that Jesus was the Christ. The great feast he provided Him in his home was given out of the desire to know more about Him and what He would have him do. The parallels with Zacchaeus and the Lord's teachings in his home support such conclusions.

Jesus' eating with these kinds of men show that He did not come just to give eternal life. He wants those who have that life to be spiritually healthy and to be rich in the kingdom that He will one day bring. The good news of Christ is that this is available for even the worst kind of sinner who believes.

---

<sup>34</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 84.

It is unfortunate that many have interpreted these dinners as a call to eternal salvation. They take words like *sinners*, *righteous*, *lost*, *saved*, and *repentance* as belonging to the realm of the offer of eternal life. By doing so in accounts such as the Lord's dealings with Levi, they distort that offer by making it dependent upon works. In the process, they lose the distinction between being a believer and being a disciple. Being a believer is free. Being a disciple is costly.

In the homes of Levi and Zacchaeus, the Lord is calling those who are believers to become disciples. The price Levi and Zacchaeus pay monetarily is high. They will have to turn, or repent, from their previous corrupt lifestyles. But they believe what the Lord says when He talks to them around the table. They want this kind of fellowship with Him to continue both in this world and the one that is coming. There could be many more joyous occasions where He would dine with them as friends. They are overjoyed that the Lord would offer them these blessings *in addition* to the eternal life they already have. In their minds, the money they spend, and whatever is involved in repenting from past wrongs, are wise investments indeed.

# WHO ARE THOSE ON THE “OUTSIDE”? (MARK 4:11)

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Mark 4, Jesus begins to speak in parables to the Jews who come to hear Him. When the disciples ask Him why He has begun this practice, the Lord says that those on the “outside” will hear everything in parables, but that He will explain the meaning of this new form of teaching to His disciples (vv 10-11).

The immediate question that arises here is the identity of those on the “outside.” At first glance, the answer appears simple. However, a closer look at the immediate context, as well as at the Gospel of Mark as a whole, indicates that the group is larger than one might initially expect.

## II. THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

As indicated by Christ’s new method of teaching, Mark 4 is a turning point in the Gospel. At the end of Mark 3, religious leaders from Jerusalem have come to Galilee because they have heard about the Lord’s miracles and His authoritative teaching (1:22). Up to this point, Mark has not mentioned Jesus ministering in the capital city. However, we know from the Gospel of John that He had been there. A major event in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry was His cleansing the temple (John 2:13).<sup>1</sup> This would help explain the scribes’ hostile attitude towards Him.<sup>2</sup> Without a doubt, news of Jesus’ ministry, power, and teaching in Galilee has also reached the capital city. In light of their view of Jesus, the scribes want to quell

---

<sup>1</sup> This means that Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem twice during His ministry, once at the beginning and once at the end (Mark 11:15-17).

<sup>2</sup> Allan Chapple, “Jesus’ Intervention in the Temple: Once or Twice?” *JETS* 58 (2015): 545-69.

any enthusiasm the people in Galilee have towards Jesus' words and actions. These leaders are well-aware that Jesus has followers. At least some of these people believe that He is the Messiah, which poses a threat to the religious leaders' positions of power and influence within the nation.

These leaders conclude that Jesus is able to perform supernatural feats because He is empowered by Satan (3:22). If that is the case, He can't be the Messiah. That would mean, of course, that His teachings are not to be believed.

This is not the first time in the Gospel that such leaders have opposed Christ. Others have accused Him of blasphemy (2:7). Another group of leaders points out that Jesus does not live by the religious laws handed down by the experts (2:24). How could the Messiah not adhere to these regulations? Still another group of these powerful men decides He must be killed (3:6).

The accusation that Jesus has been sent by Satan is an ominous sign. Eventually, these leaders will be the driving force in putting Jesus to death. Jesus came to offer the kingdom of God to that generation of Jews, with Himself as the long-awaited Christ. These men, acting as the official religious representatives of the nation, show that this offer, as well as Christ Himself, will be rejected.

Up to this point, Jesus has been speaking plainly in the synagogues of Galilee. Now, because of their willful blindness to the plain truths He has spoken, He will speak in parables. It is a form of judgment. But it is more. It is an act of grace. God holds people accountable for what they understand. When Jesus begins to speak in parables, those who do not believe will not understand what is being taught and will not be held responsible for the truths contained in the parables.

### III. THOSE ON THE "OUTSIDE" IN MARK 3

It is noteworthy that in Mark 3 Jesus mentions that there are those who are on the "outside" immediately after the religious leaders accuse Him of doing Satan's work. The Lord is in a home (3:20), with a large group of disciples around Him. He is notified that His natural family, consisting of His mother, brothers, and sisters, is "outside," wanting to speak with Him (3:31-32). It is the same word used a few verses later (4:11) when He refers to speaking in parables to those who

are "outside." In Mark 3:31-32, those who are "outside" are contrasted with those who are inside the house with the Lord. He refers to those who are inside as His true «brother, sister, and mother" (3:35).

It seems that Mark is making a connection between those who are inside the house with the Lord and those to whom He will explain the meaning of His parables. All others are on the "outside.»

There can be no doubt that the religious leaders who reject the Lord in Mark 3 are a part of the group that is "outside." In very basic terms, they represent unbelievers. Those who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ are not inside with Him. The scribes who blaspheme the Spirit in 3:21 are not in the house, sitting as disciples at the feet of the Lord. Jesus will certainly not explain the meanings of the parables to them, either.

But in 4:11, Mark makes the connection between these unbelievers and those on the "outside" in another way. When the scribes say that Jesus is empowered by Satan, Mark says that He spoke to them in *parables* (3:23).<sup>3</sup> This is the first time that word is used in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus asks them, in a parable, how it would be possible that Satan would cast out Satan. The next time the word appears is in 4:2, when Jesus begins to teach the people in *parables*.

But those on the "outside" now include more than the religious scribes.

### A. Jesus' Natural Family Is on the "Outside"

While it is certainly correct to conclude that, because of their unbelief, the scribes are those who are "outside" in Mark 3, the reader is specifically told that Jesus' family is, as well. In fact, Mark wants to make a connection between the scribes and Christ's family. To do so, he uses a literary device.

This section of Mark (3:20-35) is an example of a literary device called a "sandwich."<sup>4</sup> With this device, Mark begins a section with a story, but then interrupts the account. He then relates another story

---

<sup>3</sup>We see here that the word *parable* in Greek has a wide range of meanings. It can be used to describe a riddle that points out the ridiculous conclusion at which a person has arrived. Sometimes a proverb, or a figure of speech, is described as a parable. It can also mean what we usually understand it to mean, which is a story from everyday life that teaches a deeper point. See Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 278.

<sup>4</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2002), 164.

that is connected in some way to the first. Afterwards, he concludes the first story. Examples of this technique are seen in 5:21-43; 6:7-31; 11:12-26; 14:1-11, and 14:53-72.<sup>5</sup>

Here, the first story begins in 3:20-21, where Jesus' family thinks He is crazy and comes to get Him. In 3:22-30, the religious leaders strongly oppose Him and claim He is possessed by Satan. Then, in 3:31-35, Mark concludes the story concerning Jesus' family. It is clear that Mark wants to connect the two accounts. In verse 21 he reports what the family said about Jesus, and then, in verses 22 and 30, what the religious leaders said about Him.

What ties these two groups together is their opposition to the Lord. Both His family and the religious leaders oppose Him, although the degree of opposition is very different. They express their opposition by what they say about Him. Both groups are in agreement that He is not in His right mind. In the case of His family, Mark states that the family thought the Lord had lost His senses. In the case of the scribes, a man possessed by Satan would not have his proper mental faculties either.

The Lord's family arrives in Capernaum from Nazareth. We are told that His brothers and His mother come to the home in which Jesus is teaching. There is a large crowd around the Lord. Evidently, since they stand outside and call for Him, His family wants to speak to Him privately. The picture is that they want Christ to come outside so that a conversation can take place between Him and His relatives. This could be due to the difficulty of getting into the house, the large number of people, or their simply wanting to spare Him any public embarrassment. They do not want others to hear them tell Him that they think He needs help with His mental acuity. It is their desire to meet with Him in private and keep it within the family.

If they do not want to embarrass Him, then there is a marked difference between the attitudes of the religious leaders and the family. While both the religious leaders and the family think Jesus is crazy, the leaders want to discredit Him in the eyes of the people. They want to embarrass Him. They keep telling people what they think about Him.<sup>6</sup> The family does not do that.

---

<sup>5</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 189-90.

<sup>6</sup>The tense of the verb in verse 22 indicates that the scribes "were saying" that Jesus was



Still, there is an element of sadness in this account. The Lord's family is on the "outside" of the house, while the disciples are inside. The disciples are close to Him. His family is not. The scribes are also not on the inside with the Lord. Christ's family is associated with the scribes in this detail, as the "sandwich" indicates. France states that this account is the strongest negative reaction that Jesus' family has about Him in any of the Gospels.<sup>7</sup>

Kuruville suggests that Mark is emphasizing just how much "outside" the Lord's family is. This would include Mary. The account says that the family came "out" of their hometown to seize Him (3:21). The reason they did so is because He was "out" of His mind. In both cases, the preposition in Greek is the same as the adverb used to say they were standing "outside" (3:31). It is also the same word used in 4:11. The family is not with Him.<sup>8</sup>

The reader of Mark may see a contrast here between the family of Christ and the paralyzed man in Mark 2:1-12. That man, and his friends who carried him, were also confronted by a situation in which Jesus was in a crowded house and it was not possible to be close to Him. They, however, went to extraordinary lengths to be near Him.<sup>9</sup> The Lord's relatives did not, since they thought He had lost His senses. Whatever He was teaching was not deemed important enough for them to make that effort.

## B. The Disciples Are Inside

In contrast to the scribes and the Lord's family, the disciples are inside with Him. This group would have included not only the Twelve, but also others who were following Christ and wanted to hear more of His teaching. Mark describes them as a *multitude*.

The picture here is one of intimacy with the Lord. These disciples are not only in the house with the Lord, they are sitting around Him (3:34). They are at His feet. Once again, Mark may want the reader to think of the paralyzed man in the crowded home in Mark 2. This

---

possessed by Satan. They were doing it repeatedly to different people. Their aim was to discredit Him in eyes of their countrymen.

<sup>7</sup> France, *Mark*, 164.

<sup>8</sup> Abraham Kuruville, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 70.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-26

man was placed at the feet of the Lord as well, and the Lord looked with favor upon his efforts to be there.<sup>10</sup>

It is also clear that these disciples are there to spend time with the Lord and to be taught by Him. That was only possible by being inside the house. In Mark 2:2, Mark directly states that those inside the crowded house were there for that purpose. They had heard the Lord teach and wanted to hear more.

The Lord makes a distinction between His natural family on the “outside” and these disciples on the inside. Word reaches the people inside that Jesus’ family is wanting to speak to Him and wants Him to come outside. In first-century Jewish life the family was important, so it was natural that the disciples would tell the Lord that His family wanted to speak with Him. Surely, it was expected that He would go out to meet them. The Majority Text adds that His sisters, as well, were outside with His brothers and mother (v 32).<sup>11</sup> Little is known about Jesus’ sisters.

The Lord’s response would have certainly shocked His disciples. He redefines what it means to be His mother or His brothers. Those who were closest to a person consisted of his or her biological family. But the Lord changes this way of thinking.

Mark states that Jesus looked around at the disciples who were sitting about Him. The Greek phrase “who (were) about Him” (v 34) is practically identical to the way His natural family is described in verse 21.<sup>12</sup> Jesus proclaims that the disciples at His feet—those inside and close to Him, listening to His teaching—are those who are closest to Him. They are His mother and brothers.

The Lord’s natural family was on the “outside.” To determine the identity of people on the “outside,” His family’s spiritual condition needs to be determined.

---

<sup>10</sup> John D. Grassmick, “Mark,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 112.

<sup>11</sup> The Critical Text is divided on the issue.

<sup>12</sup> BDAG, 756.

### **C. Were Jesus' Family Members Spiritually Saved?**

The Gospel of John tells us that the Lord's brothers did not believe in Him during His lifetime.<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising that they are standing on the outside and are associated with the unbelieving scribes.

We know nothing about the spiritual condition of Jesus' sisters. It would be tempting to conclude that they were like their brothers in this regard since they are on the outside, as well, and think that Jesus has lost His senses. However, that is not a necessary conclusion, as their mother's presence indicates.

Mary, the mother of the Lord, shows that a believer can be on the "outside" and think the Lord is acting irrationally. She certainly believed that He was the Christ (Luke 1:32-55). However, in Mark 3 she was concerned about the way He was conducting Himself. He was not eating properly; she would have worried about His health and concluded that the crowds of people were taking advantage of Him (3:20-21). She probably thought He was being too fanatical in His actions and that He should, instead, be more reasonable. Maternal instincts would have compelled her to take Him away for a period of rest, at the very least.

It must also be remembered that Jesus was the eldest son of the family. Since Joseph is not mentioned in this account (v 32), most assume that he has died. In that case, Jesus was responsible for caring for His widowed mother and younger siblings.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the family, including Mary, saw Him as shunning His responsibilities by His actions. It is probable that the family did not think Jesus was One who would voluntarily act in this manner. His busy schedule, lack of food, and lack of sleep had negatively changed His personality. For His own good, they needed to rescue Him.

Mary is a believer who thinks she knows better than her Son how He should be conducting Himself. She is more worried about His physical welfare than about hearing Him teach. In fact, she thinks He should stop teaching and come home for a while.

---

<sup>13</sup> After the Lord's resurrection, at least some of them believed. These included the authors of the NT books Jude and James.

<sup>14</sup> M. J. Wilkins, "Unique Discipleship to a Unique Master: Discipleship in the Gospel according to Mark," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, vol 8 (2004): 57.

Whether the Lord's sisters are believers or not, the truth remains. In the context of Mark 3, a believer can be on the "outside."<sup>15</sup> Since it is not possible for a believer to lose eternal life, being on the "outside" here is not the same as being an unbeliever.

This raises the question as to what Jesus means by the phrase, "whoever does the will of God" (v 35). Those on the inside, sitting at His feet, are those doing the will of God.

#### D. The Will of God

In John 6:40, Jesus says that everyone who believes in Him for eternal life has done the will of the Father. John, the only book in the NT written to unbelievers, tells the unbelieving reader that this is the will of God for him. No works are involved, simply faith.

If we take the phrase to have the same meaning in Mark 3:35, Jesus is saying that those who believe in Him for eternal life are His real family. All believers are on the inside.

The examples of Mary and possibly the Lord's sisters would cause us to question that interpretation. The Gospel of Mark was not written to unbelievers. It was written to those who already have eternal life.<sup>16</sup> It is at least a possibility that the mention here of those who do the will of God is to be understood as a statement directed towards believers.

Luke's parallel account of Mark 3:35 bears this out. There, Jesus defines what the will of God is. It is hearing the word of God and *doing* it (Luke 8:21). There is a way in which doing the will of God involves doing works. This is entirely appropriate if one is addressing believers.<sup>17</sup>

For believers, then, doing the will of God requires obeying Him. The disciples at Jesus' feet were doing just that. They were listening to Him and paying attention to what He was teaching. That is what He

---

<sup>15</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Mark* (Cambridge, ENG: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 167. Bock says that the "sandwich" technique puts Mary in this bad company.

<sup>16</sup> This is supported by the idea that there is no clear presentation of the gospel of eternal life by faith alone in the book. There is also early church evidence that the book was written to believers. See, for example, Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Some great Bible teachers maintain that doing the will of God in the NT always refers to believing in Jesus for eternal life. What is being argued here is that the audience determines the meaning. Doing the will of the Father means one thing for the unbeliever and another for the believer. In this account, as well as in Luke 8, the Lord is telling believers what the will of the Father is for them.

was telling those who had believed in Him to do. Through this teaching, He was also telling them what would be required of them in order to be His disciples. Unlike Mary, these believers did not think He was out of His mind.

Here, being a brother, sister, or mother of the Lord is not the same as being a believer. When we believe in Jesus for eternal life, we become a *child* of God (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1). The relationships spoken of in Mark 3 are different. A child is one who is born into a family. Being a sister, brother, or mother of the Lord speaks of close familial intimacy. Those who are closest to the Lord are those believers who walk in obedience to what He teaches. Those believers at Jesus' feet—those who were inside—were doing that. Mary was not.

Not all believers, then, do the will of God in the sense that Jesus means here. Not all believers listen to and obey the teachings of Christ. In the case of Mary, and perhaps some of His sisters, the Lord is not saying that they are not believers. He is saying that the believers sitting at His feet, learning from Him in order to do what He teaches, are closer to Him than any member of His natural family. This is true even if some of those family members believe He is the Christ.

Obviously, the Lord is not teaching that one's physical family is not important. Jesus loved and cared for His mother until the end of His life (John 19:27). Instead, He is teaching about the radical nature of discipleship. There is a difference between being a disciple and being a believer. A disciple is a believer who obeys what the Lord teaches. Receiving eternal life is free. Being a disciple is costly. For the disciple, Jesus is more important than his family relationships. Not all believers have this point of view. Not all believers are disciples.<sup>18</sup>

At this point in the Gospel of Mark, there is a shift. Jesus has gone to the nation of Israel to offer it the kingdom of God. The religious leaders from Jerusalem, who are representatives of the nation, have made their decision concerning Him and have rejected Him. The handwriting is on the wall. Things are going to change, and the Lord begins to teach about that change. People are going to respond in different ways. This is true even among believers. Like Mary and the disciples in the house, different believers are going to respond

---

<sup>18</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1989), 83-88.

differently to what the Lord has to say. As has already been seen, this impacts who is inside with the Lord.

#### IV. FOUR RESPONSES TO THE LORD'S TEACHINGS

When the Lord begins teaching in parables, He uses a well-known farming practice in everyday Israel to illustrate how people will respond to His teachings now that the nation will reject Him. He does this through the Parable of the Four Soils in Mark 4:1-9. The interpretation is given in vv 13-20.

In this parable, a farmer sows his field with seed for a crop. The seed falls upon four kinds of soil. The seed that the Sower sows is the word of God concerning the coming kingdom. But, as this parable makes clear, the message involves much more than how a person is able to enter into the kingdom. The word about the kingdom also involves how to be great in that kingdom—how to be fruitful and have a great harvest in the reign of Christ.

Jesus is certainly the One who sows this word. But those who sow would also include any disciple who proclaims the same message that the Lord preached.

The first soil, the hardened path, is the only type of soil in which there is no life. This represents people who will hear the word about the coming kingdom but will not believe it. In the parable, the birds who eat up the seed are seen as agents of Satan. The message was heard by the preaching of the word, but Satan took the seed away.

While Mark's account is clear enough, the parallel passage in Luke explicitly states the meaning: Satan snatches the word from the hearts of these people with the result that they do not believe and thus are not saved (Luke 8:12). Entrance into the kingdom of God requires that one believe in Jesus for eternal life. These people do not.

It is clear that the four soils represent the hearts of the people who hear the word about the coming kingdom of God. The word is proclaimed, and the issue is: What kind of heart will each person who hears the message have? Regarding the first soil, the religious leaders are the clear example. Their hearts are hardened to what Jesus was doing and saying. They do not believe in Jesus as the Christ and even conclude that He is possessed by Satan (3:22). There is irony here,

of course. They had accused Jesus of doing the work of Satan. But in their unbelief towards Christ, Satan had accomplished a work in them. The mention of Satan here (v 15) connects the first soil in the parable with the scribes in chapter three.

A major mistake that is made in interpreting this parable is failing to recognize that the first soil, the hardened path, is the only soil that does not bring forth life. It is the only soil that represents an unbeliever.<sup>19</sup> The issue with the rest of the soils is not whether the seed produces life, because seed always produces life when it germinates, regardless of the soil. The issue is the kind of fruit that will be produced by that life.

The word of the kingdom includes a call to fruitfulness. The Sower does not just desire people to believe in Him and gain everlasting life; He also wants those who believe to produce much fruit and have a great harvest in the kingdom of God. To produce this fruit, the disciple must continue to follow Jesus and take heed to His words. That is why Jesus tells the disciples to “listen” (vv 3, 9). That is the only way to bear fruit. They need to be on the inside, listening to Him teach.

The last three soils represent believers, and thus indicate that there are different kinds of believers.

The second soil, the rocky soil, pictures believers who fall away from the Lord (“they stumble,” v 17, and “it withered away,” v 6) because of persecution or difficult times (v 18).

The third soil, the thorny soil, is an illustration of those believers who do not fall away, but who “are unfruitful” (v19) because of various allurements of the world. In Luke 8:14, the Lord says this soil does not bear fruit to “maturity.” There is probably a difference between the second and third soils. The second soil is a believer who gives up. The third soil is one who continues in the faith but is a poor example of a disciple. If that is the case, once again the reader sees there is a difference between believers. They “listen” to what the Lord says in different degrees.

The fourth soil, the good ground, represents those believers who obey the things the Lord has taught. While all those represented by

---

<sup>19</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical?: Let the Scriptures Decide* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), 99-104.

the last three soils will be in the kingdom, only the believers described by the fourth soil will be greatly rewarded in it.<sup>20</sup>

## V. DISCIPLES LISTEN AND ARE TAUGHT

The Lord speaks to a large group of people when He teaches in parables. Mark calls it a “great multitude” (4:1). This group would have consisted of all kinds of listeners. As in the Parable of the Four Soils, the people would have responded in different ways. There would have been both believers and unbelievers. Among believers, there would have been different kinds of responses.

Among this large crowd, there was a distinct, smaller, group. This smaller group included those around Christ (v 10). This phrase is practically identical in Greek with the phrase in 3:32, 34, which refers to those who were sitting with Jesus in the house. It is also noteworthy that in 4:10 He was “alone” with them. This reminds the reader of when, in chapter three, the Lord was with this intimate group in the house. At that earlier event, those sitting at Jesus’ feet were also part of a much larger group (3:20).

Jesus had earlier called this smaller group *His mother, sister, and brother*. They were disciples of the Lord who wanted to be close to and learn from Him, and who wanted to do the will of God. These who were seeking to listen to the Lord’s teaching were rewarded with His explanations. This is one of the benefits of discipleship.

In both of these smaller groups, in chapter three and chapter four, the Lord invests His time and teaching. It is to this smaller group that the Lord explains the meaning of His parables. Those in this group are His disciples.

While Jesus will explain these things to the disciples, He will speak in parables to those who are “outside.” They will not have things explained to them. Certainly, those on the “outside” include the religious leaders who have rejected the Lord. In light of the use of the same word in 3:31, 32, those “outside” would also include the Lord’s unbelieving brothers. The emphasis here is that unbelievers are on the “outside.”

---

<sup>20</sup> Barry Mershon, Jr., “The Gospel According to Mark,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, vol 1 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical 2010) 156.



However, it also seems that we could, in one sense, even apply the term "outside" to some believers. Mary, the mother of the Lord, was a believer, but is also "outside" in 3:31, 32. In the large crowd of people that came to hear the Lord teach in 4:1, there were certainly others who believed in Him but did not devote the time needed to be near Him when He was alone with His disciples. They were believers but not disciples. They were not willing to pay the price to follow the Lord and learn from Him. They missed out on the Lord's explanation of the parables He taught. We see an example of such believers in John 2:23-25. They did not want to put forth the effort to be near the Lord.<sup>21</sup>

A believer grows in his knowledge of the Lord if he is willing to spend time to learn from Him. Jesus does that with the group of disciples here. This is one of the benefits of becoming a disciple of the Lord after believing in Him for eternal life. Receiving eternal life happens through faith, in an instant. Discipleship takes time and involves a learning process (vv 24, 34). During this process, the disciple learns what the will of God is so that he can do it (3:35). It is a process of spiritual maturity. This process takes time and diligence.

This is why the Lord repeats the word *listen* in these parables (4:3, 9). As the Lord explains His teaching, the disciple is to meditate on His words. As he does, the Lord will give Him more revelation through His word. The disciple will understand more and more spiritual truth.

The reason Jesus speaks to the unbelieving Jews—most clearly demonstrated by the religious leaders of Mark 3:22-30—in parables is so that, "Seeing they may see and not perceive." Even though they hear, they don't understand. In 3:22-30, these leaders had seen the Lord's miracles. They had heard His clear teaching. However, they rejected what was right before their eyes and claimed that Satan was at work in Jesus' words and actions.

Because they have refused to believe what was clearly stated, the Lord will now speak to them in parables, and they will not receive the interpretation of these parables that the disciples will receive.

In verse 12, the Lord quotes from Isa 6:9-10. In that passage, Isaiah tells the nation of Israel that judgment is coming upon them because

---

<sup>21</sup> Zane C. Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John, Part 2: Untrustworthy Believers—John 2:23-25," *Bib Sac* 135 (1978): 139-52.

of their unwillingness to listen to what God has said to them through the prophets. The Lord tells Isaiah to go to them and proclaim the truth even though they will not listen. The nation would not repent of its sin.

The Lord is applying these verses to the nation of His day. They also will not respond. Because of their unwillingness to listen, they also will not turn, that is, repent of their sin (1:15). Repentance would have prepared them to believe in Jesus as the Christ and thus receive eternal life. This repentance would have resulted in their sins as a nation being forgiven as well. The blessing of the kingdom of God would then have come to that generation of Jews.

The context of the Isaiah passage is also instructive. In the following verse (Isa 6:11), Isaiah speaks of judgment coming upon the nation as a result of its unwillingness to accept the truth plainly spoken by the prophet. The same is true for the nation in Jesus' day. The leaders, representing the nation, have also rejected the truth plainly spoken. Judgment is coming to them. The kingdom will not come to them. The parables that the Lord presents in Mark 4 speak of this development. As the Gospel of Mark unfolds, this subject of judgment upon Israel will become more pronounced in the Lord's teachings (Mark 11–13). This lends support to the idea that the kingdom of God is something that pertains to the nation of Israel.

The forgiveness of sins, then, is not the same thing as being saved from the lake of fire. Forgiveness results in fellowship with God. The nation is being offered the forgiveness of sins. An individual listener could believe in Jesus for eternal life but not turn from his or her sins. The context of Isaiah 6 bears this out. Not all the Jews who fell under the judgment of God in Isaiah's day were unbelievers. Some were believers. This supports the idea that in Mark 4, some on the "outside" were believers as well. They were believers, but not disciples. They were not doing what the Lord wanted them to do. They were not doing the will of God (3:35). Like Mary in the previous section, they are associated with the unbelieving scribes in this regard.

The Parable of the Four Soils bears this out as well. The second and third soils are illustrations of such believers. They do not listen to

what the Lord has taught and act upon it, at least not to the degree that should. Jesus emphasizes the need for all to "listen" to what He is teaching (4:3, 9). The Lord is clearly telling them that they need to do more than hear. They need to act upon what they hear. But they would obviously have to hear first. This was a message for the disciples.

In fact, Mark 4:21-25 has special relevance to the disciples. The words *to them* in verses 21 and 24 refer to the disciples; they were those who were alone with Him and being taught by Him. He tells them of the need to hear (v 23). In the MT, the verb *hear* occurs four times in verses 23-24.<sup>22</sup>

In speaking to the disciples, He gives a warning. He tells them to "Look out!" The verb is literally *to see* and is often translated *take heed* (v 24). They are to be careful about how they "hear" the words of the Lord. No doubt, there is a connection with the Parable of the Four Soils. The good soil is the one that "hears" the Lord's words, obeys them, and bears a large crop (v 20). The disciple who listens and obeys the word of the Lord will be given more.

This concept is directed to the believing disciples. The disciple who pays attention and acts upon the words of the Lord will be given more. This would include more revelation. It would result in spiritual maturity.<sup>23</sup>

The author of Hebrews speaks of this principle. He says that a new believer takes in the Word of God and that the Word is like milk. But as he puts it to use in his life, he is able to take in more substantive teaching. This more-advanced teaching is compared to eating meat. Through this process, he matures and is trained to understand doctrinal issues (Heb 5:14).<sup>24</sup>

But there is another possibility for the believer. He can choose not to listen to what the Lord is saying. Jesus says that the believer who does that will not be given more, but "even what he has will be taken away." This means that he will not be given more revelation from the Lord.

---

<sup>22</sup>The fourth occurrence is found at the end of the verse 24. The MT states that more will be given "to you who hear." The CR simply says that more will be given. Even if one accepts the CR, the context makes it clear that only the one who hears will be given more.

<sup>23</sup>In light of the Parable of the Four Soils, it would also include rewards in the kingdom.

<sup>24</sup>Kenneth W. Yates, *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 80-83.

Such a believer would be one who is not alone with the Lord, sitting at His feet and learning from Him. The unbelieving Jews were certainly on the outside and not benefiting from what the Lord was saying (4:11-12). But believers can act in a similar way. Like Mary, they can be on the outside looking in.<sup>25</sup> Kuruvilla agrees and says that those on the outside include unbelievers. However, it is also a warning to the disciples. They are encouraged to keep their eyes and ears opened, so as not to become like the unbelieving scribes and the unbelievers in the crowd.<sup>26</sup> The parables spoken by the Lord here, as well as the interpretations He gives, will be of benefit to them. But the disciple must continue to listen.

Mark wants to make a connection between those believers who are close to the Lord and listening to Him and believers who are not. Those who are not on the outside are given the meaning of the parables as they pay attention to the Lord (v 11). The verb *given* appears twice in verses 24 and 25. Disciples on the inside are given the meaning of the parables. Those who continue doing so are given more.

Figuratively speaking, a believer can choose to go outside. He can choose not to listen to and obey the Lord. Only believers who are with the Lord will have the meaning of the parables explained to them. Those believers on the outside will not.

## VI. THE EXAMPLE OF THE TWELVE

Later, the Lord's twelve disciples provide the reader of Mark with an example of the Lord's warning to believers in 4:10-12. The example is found in Mark 8:17-21.

In Mark 6:30-44, Jesus feeds the 5000. In Mark 8:1-9, He does the same for a group of 4000.<sup>27</sup> In both instances the Lord is teaching the disciples who He is. His miracles show that He is able to meet all their needs.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> France says that Mark wants to make a direct connection between those who are the outside in Mark 4:11 and Mary. See, France, *Mark*, 197.

<sup>26</sup> Kuruvilla, *Mark*, 81.

<sup>27</sup> Actually, the number of people was much larger because the number mentioned in both cases does not include women and children.

<sup>28</sup> Mershon, "Mark," 173.

Immediately after the second miraculous feeding, the Lord rebukes the religious leaders. This, of course, has parallels with His rebuke of the leaders in 3:23-30. Christ then tells the disciples to beware of the leaven of these men (8:15).

The disciples interpret that to mean that they have forgotten to bring bread with them (8:16). This causes the Lord to rebuke them. He asks them how they can still have hardened hearts. How is it that they cannot see, hear, or remember?

The Lord spells out what they should remember. If they remembered how He had miraculously fed two large groups with just a little bread, how could they worry about not having enough bread? They had seen the miracles with their own eyes.

In this sense, they were like the scribes in Mark 3:22. Those scribes did not learn the clear lesson of what they had seen. The scribes should have seen that Jesus was not empowered by Satan. The evidence was overwhelming. The disciples should have seen that the Lord could provide all their needs. That evidence was overwhelming, too.

But there are other connections between the scribes in chapter three and the disciples in chapter 8. Those scribes were on the outside and were not able to understand what they had seen and heard. Now the disciples are not paying attention to what the Lord is showing and teaching them, so they do not understand, either (4:12; 8:17).<sup>29</sup>

When the Lord describes those who are on the "outside," He says that they are able to see physically, but cannot see. They are able to hear physically, but are not able to hear (4:12). He says the disciples are in the same situation. They have eyes, but cannot see, and ears, but cannot hear (8:18).<sup>30</sup>

The reference to the hardened hearts of the disciples also reminds the reader of Mark of the unbelieving religious leaders. Prior to one group's accusing the Lord of being possessed by Satan, He is grieved by the hardened hearts of another group of these unbelieving men (3:5). Even though the term *hardened heart* is not used, the Parable of the Four Soils teaches that the unbeliever has a hardened heart. The seed that does not produce life falls on ground that is hard (4:15).

---

<sup>29</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 282.

<sup>30</sup> In Mark 4, the Lord appeals to Isaiah 6. Jeremiah 5:21 and Ezekiel 12:2 have the same theme, where, like Isaiah, the prophets go to the nation of Israel and the people will not listen. Here, in Mark 8, the Lord refers to the passage in Ezekiel.

Even though the disciples are believers, they are clearly acting like unbelievers in some ways. They are acting like those on the “outside.” They are neither listening to what the Lord is teaching nor observing what He is doing. They have ignored what Jesus has taught them (4:9, 24-25). In practical terms, they may as well be sitting on the “outside” when the Lord is teaching those who are sitting at His feet. No wonder Christ tells the disciples to beware. They could become like the Pharisees (8:15).

## VII. CONCLUSION

There is a vast difference between the believer in Jesus Christ and the non-believer. The believer has eternal life and is a child of God. The unbeliever does not have life.

When the Lord speaks of those who are “outside,” He speaks of those who do not listen to and obey His word. At the same time, it refers to those who are not close to Him. By definition, this is true of all unbelievers. In Mark 3–4, the unbelieving religious leaders are described in this way.

All disciples are believers, but not believers are disciples. A disciple is a believer who learns from the Lord. He listens to His teaching and desires to be obedient to what he hears. The disciple is the one who sits at the feet of the Lord to hear what He has to say. As pictured in Mark 3, he is inside the house with Christ. In this picture, the disciple is one who is close to the Lord.

In one sense, the believer who does not listen to and obey the Lord’s words is like the unbeliever. He is not sitting at His feet. He is on the “outside” looking in. Mary is an illustration of such a believer.

The unbeliever does not hear what the Lord is saying. He does not understand. He does not learn or obey. The believer can be like that. He can harden his heart to what the Lord is teaching and remove himself from the privilege of learning from the Teacher. The disciples were in danger of doing that very thing (Mark 8:15-18).

Of course, such a believer is still a child of God. He still has eternal life. But his intimacy with the Lord is negatively impacted. His fruitfulness is as well. If he continues being on the “outside,” he will suffer the loss of eternal rewards. He is like the stony or thorny soil in the Parable of the Four Soils.

These truths are not taught only in the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel of John teaches them as well. John uses a different word to describe believers who are inside with the Lord. That word is *abide*. In John 8:31-32, the Lord tells new believers to “abide in His word.” In John 15:4-7, Jesus tells the disciples to abide in His word in order to bear much fruit.

It is clear that the believer can remove himself from abiding with Christ. He can quit listening to His word. As Hodges puts it, he can lose the “disciple/Teacher relationship.”<sup>31</sup> In the account in Mark 3, this would be the believer who does not enter the house and learn from the Master. In the crowds that followed Jesus there would have been people who had believed in Him for eternal life but did not do what was necessary to be close to and learn from Him. Like the thorny soil, such believers would include those who love the pleasures of this world and do not see the value of devoting time to learning from and obeying Him. Like the rocky soil, other believers would not have been willing to endure persecution because of their association with Him.

The NT also uses a reversal of the metaphor of being “inside” and “outside” with regard to the believer’s closeness to the Lord. In Heb 13:14, the author encourages his believing readers to suffer with Christ. He writes that Christ was crucified “outside” the city. The Lord was considered to be outside religious and polite Jewish society. It was a shameful place and a shameful death. The readers are commanded to go outside with Him.<sup>32</sup> They were in danger of being like the rocky soil. The same idea is expressed in Mark 3–4. The disciple is found wherever the Lord is.

The same illustrative theme is used in Rev 3:20, with a strange twist. The church at Laodicea is filled with believers who are not disciples. They love the riches and pleasures of the world (Rev 3:17). As a result, they are not near the Lord. He is seen outside the church, while they are inside. While outside, He is knocking at the door, asking to join them in fellowship. Ironically, He wants to be inside with them.

---

<sup>31</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 81-82.

<sup>32</sup> Yates, *Hebrews*, 214.

It is not just Free Grace writers who maintain that believers can be on the “outside.” France says that the disciples, who cannot see or hear, are clearly associated with those unbelievers who are on the “outside” and who suffer from the same spiritual disabilities (4:12; 8:17-18).<sup>33</sup> Bock takes the same position, adding that the hardened hearts of the disciples also point to their inability to understand (4:13).<sup>34</sup> Lane simply states that the Twelve, in 8:17-18, appear no better than the crowds who are outside in 4:11-12.<sup>35</sup>

Bock also maintains that those who are on the outside in 4:11-12 include all who are not described by the fourth—the good—soil in the parable. This was argued above as well. If the second and third soils are believers, then there are believers who are on the outside when it comes to intimacy with the Lord. Those on the outside include everyone who is not open to what the Lord is saying.<sup>36</sup> This would include disobedient believers.

Kuruvilla rightly states that the Lord applies Isa 6:9-10 (Mark 4:11-12) to the apostles in Mark 8:17-21. It is clear that those who are inside and outside regarding the Lord are “fluctuating” groups. Every disciple runs the risk of becoming an “uncomprehending outsider” and needs to guard against it.<sup>37</sup>

It makes perfect sense that a book like Mark, written to believers, would warn them about the importance of listening to and obeying the words of the Lord. Jesus is in the house. As believers, we can go inside and learn from Him. We can sit at His feet. He gives us the things we need in order to bear fruit in this life and in the world to come.

What a privilege believers have. However, they can refuse to take advantage of this privilege. They can quit listening. They still have eternal life. But they have stepped outside the house. Once outside, they find themselves standing with the scribes and Mary.

---

<sup>33</sup> France, *Mark*, 317. He points out that the disciples have hope however, when the Lord asks if they “still” do not understand (8:17). This might imply that they will understand, see, and hear in the future. But there is no guarantee.

<sup>34</sup> Bock, *Mark*, 237.

<sup>35</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 282.

<sup>36</sup> Bock, *Mark*, 175. Bock rightly sees that the second and third soils are on the outside. However, he seems to believe that these two soils represent unbelievers.

<sup>37</sup> Kuruvilla, *Mark*, 82.



## BOOK REVIEWS

**The Book of Romans. *Ariel's Bible Commentary.*** By Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries; 2022. 408 pp. Hardcover, \$19.00.

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum is founder and head of Ariel Ministries in San Antonio, Texas. Ariel is a ministry that evangelizes and also produces discipleship resources from a Messianic Jewish perspective. The ministry emphasizes taking the message to the Jew first. Fruchtenbaum is a speaker and writer with many books to his credit.

I am a fan of Fruchtenbaum and have appreciated his writings and study materials for many years. He brings the Jewishness of the Bible alive. He challenges me to ask, “How would a Jewish believer understand this verse?” After all, in human terms, the Bible was written by Jews to Jews.

He has now written a commentary on the Book of Romans. Like many of his other works, it is detailed, logical, well-written, and generally a good resource. It has 408 pages and includes two appendices. Appendix 1 references OT verses used in Romans. Appendix 2 discusses and refutes differing views of Romans 9–11 (i.e., covenant postmillennialism, covenant amillennialism, and covenant premillennialism).

The commentary is Free Grace friendly and generally holds to belief alone in Christ alone for eternal life. However, there are instances where readers of the *JOTGES* will find exceptions.

In discussing verses 1:16-17, the author states that the theme of Romans is, “the gospel that saves.” He describes the content of the gospel as the “substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah. Everyone who believes this simple message is saved.” So, Fruchtenbaum presents the view that in Romans, *salvation* or *being saved*, is rescue from hell. It is not deliverance from God’s temporal wrath. He also suggests that all who believe in Jesus’ substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection are born-again. However, he does not discuss people who believe this, but who also believe they must maintain their salvation by perseverance in good works.

In his discussion of Romans 4 and its OT example of belief, (i.e., Abraham), he rightly says, “Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. Abraham’s faith rested in a person.” In applying this, however, he writes:

The object of a believer’s faith is also God, but the content of their faith is different. It is the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua [Jesus] the Messiah, who died for their sins (1 Cor 15:1-4). Believers are still saved by grace through faith, but the content of what they believe differs from the content of Abraham’s faith.

This raises the question of why, if the content of belief has changed, Paul cites Abraham as an example. Fruchtenbaum does not make any references to the Gospel of John in “salvation” contexts.

Throughout the commentary, Fruchtenbaum works from the Greek Critical Text, not the Majority Text. This is particularly evident in his discussion of Romans 8:1. He explains that all “believers are no longer under the sentence of condemnation.” There is no mention of those who walk according to the flesh or the Spirit.

He is correct in observing that the believer’s “new nature is incapable of sinning.” This point seems lost in the evangelical writing of today. However, in discussing 8:13-14, he explains that the distinction is not between spiritual and unspiritual believers, but between believers and unbelievers. That seems unlikely in a section on how the believer is to live.

In 8:16-17, Fruchtenbaum equates *children* of God with sons. So, “there is no distinction between heirs and joint heirs. Since [all] believers are sons of God by adoption, they will inherit what Yeshua [Jesus] will inherit.” In discussing 8:28ff, he takes a traditional view.

His discussion of Romans 9–11 is generally very good. He introduces this portion of Romans by explaining the section’s importance in relation to Israel. If God hasn’t, doesn’t, or won’t keep His promises to Israel, then how can church age saints be assured that God will keep His promises to them? He is right in observing that Romans 9–11 presents Paul’s Israelology.

Unfortunately, Fruchtenbaum equates righteousness with salvation. His discussion of Romans 10:9-10 is, therefore, not helpful. He says, “these two verses explain exactly how one is saved.” By this he means eternally saved. In explaining this, he says that “belief will

naturally flow into confession” and “confession is not a separate act from faith.” He goes on to say that “confession and believing” are “interchangeable and used synonymously by Paul.” While readers of the *JOTGES* may disagree with his position on 10:9-10, he does, as part of his discussion, refute Lordship Salvation.

What is surprising is that he does not mention the specific need for Jews to confess Jesus in order to avoid the wrath associated with the destruction of the nation in AD 70. In his discussion of 10:9-10 and 10:13, he abandons Israel as the intended subject.

In summarizing Romans 9–11, Fruchtenbaum correctly concludes that God will keep His promises to Israel and that this shows God will keep His promises to the church.

This commentary has some deficiencies in crucial areas. However, it also has many valuable insights and observations. So, I recommend this resource for those who are well-grounded in their beliefs, including pastors, elders, professors, and teachers.

Brad Duskocil  
Board Chairman, GES  
*Long Beach, California*

---

***Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries that Bring the Bible to Life.*** By Titus Kennedy. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2020. 254 pp. Paper. \$22.99.

Titus Kennedy is a professional field archaeologist and an adjunct professor at Biola University, as well as a research fellow at Discovery Institute. He draws upon archaeology and documentary artifacts to demonstrate the truthfulness of the Bible. The topics he considers in this book are often used by critics to deny Scripture’s reliability.

For this book Dr. Kennedy selected 101 key topics that provide significant archaeological support for the accuracy of the Biblical record. The publisher’s back-cover summary is a good starting point:

In *Unearthing the Bible*, Dr. Titus Kennedy presents 101 objects [each with one or two clear color-photographs] that provide compelling evidence for the historical reliability of Scripture from the dawn of civilization through

the early church. Gathered from more than 50 museums, private collections, and archaeological sites, these pieces not only emphasize the reliability of Biblical narratives but also provide rich cultural insights into the ancient world.

The 101 sections (distributed over eight chapters) correspond to:

1. Genesis and Job (15 sections)
2. Exodus–Deuteronomy (9 sections)
3. Joshua–Ruth (8 sections)
4. Samuel–Kings (9 sections)
5. Kings–Chronicles (19 sections)
6. Jeremiah–Malachi (14 sections)
7. Matthew–John (11 sections)
8. Acts–Revelation (16 sections)

Each chapter starts with a one-page overview of the relationship between that portion of the Bible and its surrounding world. Each section is then a self-contained unit within its chapter. Each section of 2-3 pages offers a summary of an artifact, a discussion of its relevance to particular Biblical passages, and (often) a discussion of how it assists in defending the Bible against liberal attacks. Sections are readable, current, and conservative.

The book concludes with definitions of key terms, a timeline, maps, and a Scripture index. The timeline mentions Biblical verses with chronological notations, so the timeline corresponds to content covered by the book.

The topics cover much of the Biblical text from Genesis to Revelation. Of the sixty-six books, the artifacts presented pertain to at least fifty-one. Of the Bible's 1,189 chapters, 324 receive attention. The following shows the distribution of the 324 (e.g., discussed artifacts relate directly to 31 of the 50 chapters in Genesis):

Gen 31/50; Exod 18/40; Lev 3/27; Num 10/36; Deut 5/34; Josh 6/24; Judg 6/21; Ruth 1/4; 1 Sam 10/31; 2 Sam 6/24; 1 Kgs 15/22; 2 Kgs 15/25; 1 Chr 6/29; 2 Chr 10/36; Ezra 1/10; Neh 6/13; Esth 3/10; Job 6/42; Pss 4/150; Prov 1/31; Eccl 1/12; Song 1/8; Isa 66/66; Jer 17/52; Ezek 2/48;

Dan 4/12; Hos 1/14; Amos 4/9; Jonah 1/4; Nah 1/3; Hab 1/3; Zeph 2/3; Matt 8/28; Mark 5/16; Luke 6/24; John 4/21; Acts 13/28; Rom 1/16; 1 Cor 3/16; 2 Cor 4/13; Gal 3/6; Eph 1/6; Col 1/4; 1 Tim 1/6; 2 Tim 2/4; Heb 2/13; Jas 1/5; 1 Pet 1/5; 2 Pet 1/3; Jude 1/1; Rev 2/22.

As a sample of what the book offers, chapter 1 deals with artifacts relevant to: Creation, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, Ur, personal and place names appearing in Genesis, contemporary customs matching those mentioned in Genesis, evidence that camels were domesticated by patriarchal times, and nomads settling in Egypt.

Many secular writers claim that Biblical books were written centuries after their purported settings. Based on this claim, they allege widespread error. This easy-to-read book does much to dispel such notions.

The book does not deal with Jesus' message of life, assurance being of the essence of saving faith, or of discipleship. Even so, its relevance to grace-loving people is huge, precisely because God does not lie and the Bible does not err. I recommend it.

John H. Niemelä  
*Message of Life*  
 Knoxville, TN

---

***The Believer's Payday: Why Standing Before Christ Should Be Our Greatest Moment.*** By Paul N. Benware. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002. 209 pp. Paper, \$17.99.

“One of the current myths in the Church of Jesus Christ is that all believers are the same and will always be the same. This is only partly true and has led to some faulty and really dangerous conclusions.” So says Dr. Paul N. Benware in his outstanding book, *The Believer's Payday*. This book should be in the library of every believer. It would serve as an excellent book study for a church small group.

Benware gives a thorough explanation and defense of the doctrine of eternal rewards. He covers the need for the Judgment Seat of Christ; what we need in order to earn eternal rewards (faithfulness with proper motives); and the subject of the judgment (not our sins). He offers several insightful case studies of rewarded believers (some

from the OT). In addition, he discusses what the rewards will be (crowns and ruling in the millennial kingdom).

The strengths of this book are both theological and exegetical. Benware is unabashedly Dispensational. He takes a pre-millennial, pretribulational view throughout the book. Rather than just proof-texting, he exegetes his positions. For instance, in chapter three, “Entering or Not Entering God’s Rest,” he overviews Hebrews 1–2 as the precursor to the “rest” in chapters 3–4. He defines the believer’s rest, as “the future reward that will be given to obedient believers when they stand before the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. These rewards relate to life in Messiah’s kingdom” (p. 49).

This book challenges church leaders. The author stresses the imperative for pastors to rightly divide the word of truth. Few pulpits emphasize either the Judgment Seat of Christ or the doctrine of rewards. Benware exhorts shepherds to teach the whole counsel of God: “Whenever leaders in the local church fail to indoctrinate those in their flock and to protect them from error, they do their flock an incalculable disservice” (p. 66). If believers can gain or lose rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ, how much more accountable are pastors to teach this monumental doctrine?

But are these rewards only for the millennial kingdom? No, says Benware, they are eternal: “...Paul spoke of his sufferings for Christ in this life as that which was producing an ‘eternal weight of glory’ (2 Cor 4:17).”

This book is not only theologically and exegetically correct, but is also immensely practical. It devotes an entire chapter to “Preparing for Payday,” focusing on 2 Pet 1:5-11.

In light of so much Biblical detail, the last chapter is a welcomed review and particularly helpful. It acts as a chapter-by-chapter “executive summary” of the entire book. Each chapter is reviewed by a propositional statement, followed by a short summary. For instance, in chapter 11, he says:

Believers need to carefully evaluate their lives ‘today’ to see if they are truly trusting and obeying. Believers cannot afford to live in a condition of spiritual delusion, nor can they afford to put off to a future day serious reflection about their own walk with Christ. It is imperative to immediately face these critical matters. It is important to decide to live fully and completely for the Lord Jesus

Christ now, and then to daily build on that decision in the power of the Holy Spirit (p. 198).

There is one appendix in the book entitled, “The Security of the Believer.” Benware rightly points out the difference between eternal security and the false doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which he rejects. He gives a Biblical basis for eternal security while also dealing with misinterpreted passages like John 15:1-11; Matt 24:13; Gal 5:4; 1 Tim 4:1; Ps 69:28; and Ps 109:13.

It is in the appendix that I have my only quibbles with the book. Benware thinks a believer can have eternal security *without ever having had assurance*. He says:

A believer may lack assurance of salvation, nevertheless that believer is totally secure in his salvation. A believer who does not believe in the doctrine of eternal security may have the assurance of his salvation (for at least that moment in time)... Lack of assurance in the life of a true believer in no way negates his eternal security. Of course, if a person is unsure about their own salvation, then he or she would be wise to come to the Lord and settle the matter by acknowledging Jesus Christ as the God-Man, as the substitute for sin and to personally place trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins (p. 200).

My quibbles are two-fold:

First, what does one need to believe or be convinced of in order to have eternal life? Is it not to believe the promise Jesus made to give eternal life to all who have believed in Him? Does one have to believe in the substitutionary atonement to be saved? If so, Martha could not have been saved. Jesus made a propositional promise to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me (for eternal life) shall live even if he dies...” (John 11:25).

I certainly think the more one knows about the doctrines of substitution, redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation, the better. The offer of eternal life could not have been made by our Lord had these things not occurred. But one does not need to understand how Christ can give eternal life in order to believe that He does give it to the believer.

Second, unless you have had assurance at some point, you have not believed the message of life. Not being clear on what Jesus

promised—that is, eternal life—leads to doubt and uncertainty about salvation. If you believe Jesus is credible and that He is capable of giving you eternal life, then you have it.

Shawn Lazar worded it this way:

Assurance is the essence of saving faith because it is the necessary conclusion to believing Jesus' promise. Since Jesus promised that everlasting life was the present possession of all believers, if you believe Jesus' promise, you must necessarily believe you have everlasting life as a present possession. Hence, you will be assured of your salvation. If you do not have assurance, you either do not understand Jesus' promise of everlasting life, or you do not believe it ("Gordon C. Clark and Assurance," Shawn Lazar, *JOTGES* [Autumn 2016]).

Even with these quibbles, I highly recommend this book for personal and group study. I am taking the men of our church through it.

Dix Winston, III  
Pastor, Crosspoint Community Church  
Centennial, CO

---

***Heavenly Rewards: Living with Eternity in Sight.*** By Mark Hitchcock. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2019. 183 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

Hitchcock is an associate professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. The book's title immediately caught my eye, due to my interest in the doctrine of eternal rewards. The book begins with many outstanding statements about this topic.

The author says that he began to earnestly study the NT teachings about the Judgment Seat of Christ and the rewards given there (p. 7). Rewards are God's idea—there is a long list of NT passages teaching that there will be rewards in heaven (pp. 12-20). In the coming kingdom there will be differences among God's people—differences that will exist not only during the Millennial Kingdom, but throughout eternity. This should be of enormous importance to us.

Though all of that is true, Hitchcock's conclusion is confusing. He says that we serve the Lord, but not for the reward. However, he



also says that working for rewards is Biblical (p. 21). It appears that he still labors under the misconception that working for rewards is selfish, although he recognizes that doing so is taught in the NT. It would have been better to simply say that we *do* indeed serve the Lord in order to be rewarded by Him. That is *one* of the motivations—an important one—for living a godly life.

Hitchcock also struggles with the relationship between rewards and eternal salvation. Unfortunately, he states that a life of good works “inevitably follows” eternal salvation. Good works are the fruit of that salvation. He cites Eph 2:8-10 and Jas 2:12-26 to prove his point. God has given us a lifetime in which to do good works and will reward us according to whether or not we do them (pp. 29-31). Hitchcock does not see the inconsistencies between what he says about rewards on the one hand, and about the relationship between grace and works on the other.

Hitchcock rightly sees two future judgments. Only believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Unbelievers will appear at the Great White Throne Judgment (pp. 36-37).

At points throughout the book, Hitchcock presents an unclear or Lordship Salvation gospel. He says that the unbeliever needs to believe that Jesus saves him from his sins (p. 45). Because he believes that all true believers will persevere in good works, he sees the unfaithful servants in the Lord’s parables as being unbelievers (p. 99). They are cast into the outer darkness—which he says is a description of hell—and weep. Since no believer can be cast into hell, the unfaithful servants in these parables must represent those who only think they are saved. Hitchcock specifically mentions Zane Hodges as one who misinterprets these passages (p. 101). Hitchcock believes that all true believers will be faithful and will invest in the kingdom of God, but to different degrees (p. 103). The overcoming believers in Revelation 2–3 are a description of all believers (p. 71).

At one point Hitchcock describes being saved as a four-step process. First, one must admit that he is a sinner, but Hitchcock does not say to whom the admission should be made. Second, one must acknowledge that he can’t do anything to save himself. Once again, to whom this acknowledgement should be made is not stated. Third, one must accept that Jesus is the substitute for his sins. Finally, one

must call upon the Lord. (p. 148). The simplicity of John 3:16 is lost in such a presentation.

Because, according to Hitchcock, only faithful believers are truly saved, only faithful believing people will be at the Judgment Seat of Christ. At this judgment there will be no rebuke, but only praise. The Lord will only address in any negative way good works done for wrong motives, and there will simply be no reward given for such works (pp. 46-47). The only remorse felt will be for the loss of rewards, not for a sinful or unfaithful lifestyle, since no believer could persist in such a lifestyle.

In chapter five, Hitchcock answers questions that might come up when one is confronted with the doctrine of rewards (pp. 57-74). He rightly points out that salvation cannot be lost, but that rewards can. Remorse for loss of rewards will not go on for eternity. Our lives before conversion will not be considered at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Hitchcock also correctly lists what some of the rewards will be, including being praised by the Lord (p. 76; 1 Cor 4:5). Rewards will impact how we co-rule with Christ (p. 77). Certain crowns will also be given out (p. 81). While he does not discuss it specifically, it seems clear that he believes all believers will rule with Christ.

In chapter eight, Hitchcock lists fourteen things that will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ (pp. 107-126). Many of these seem straightforward, such as how we treat and serve others. Others, however, have little Biblical support. For example, he says our rewards will also be determined by how many souls we have won for Christ and how passionately we have prayed.

Throughout the book, Hitchcock makes good observations about rewards. He says that the length of time one is a Christian will not necessarily determine his rewards (p. 136), nor will who one is, whether Jew or Gentile, rich or poor (p. 137). God is a generous rewarder (p. 139). Hitchcock also correctly states that in the lake of fire there will be differences among unbelievers (p. 152).

This book is an excellent study of how a Lordship Salvation teacher tries to fit his understanding of eternal rewards into the doctrine of eternal salvation that cannot be lost. He knows that both are true, but finds contradictions. That is why many things said in this book are Biblically correct, while others are not. Hitchcock's understanding

of the gospel of eternal salvation will simply not allow him to see that there are unfaithful believers who do not serve the Lord. Not all believers will reign with Christ. Not all believers are overcomers. Many believers will be rebuked at the judgment. I recommend this book for those interested in a Calvinist's struggle to deal with what the Scriptures plainly teach.

Kathryn Wright  
GES Missions Coordinator  
*Columbia, SC*

---

***Where Do We Go from Here? How Tomorrow's Prophecies Foreshadow Today's Problems.*** By David Jeremiah. Nashville, TN: W Publishing, 2021. 243 pp. Hardcover, \$26.99.

David Jeremiah is an extremely popular author and speaker. This book is easy to read and deals with ten events that Jesus prophesied. Jeremiah believes that in today's news we are seeing precursors to these events, indicating that the tribulation is near. As we see these events, we are not to be discouraged, but to proclaim the truth of the gospel.

Jeremiah contends that the rise of socialism in the U.S. is an example of the Lord's prediction that in the last days it will be as it was in the days of Noah (Matt 24:37). Socialism appears tailor-made for the rise of the Antichrist's rule (p. 5). It is a system inspired by Satan (p. 9). As Christians, we should therefore resist the growth of socialism (p. 22).

The destruction by leftwing radicals of U.S. historical monuments is also seen as a sign of the times. It is a violation of the Biblical command to remember one's past (p. 13). Globalism—seen in the growth of powerful billionaires and Big Tech companies—is another sign of the times and will eventually lead to a one-world government (p. 31). Jeremiah says that Christians should also be globally-minded by taking the gospel around the world.

The COVID pandemic could also be a foreshadowing of the coming tribulation. God uses diseases to accomplish His purposes (p. 53). The Lord said that there will be pestilences in the last days (p. 54).

The economic chaos of our day is also foretold in the Bible. The technology of the current economic system could be used for the future mark of the Beast (p.75). Digital currency, which Jeremiah calls “sinister,” also points to this. The current chaos is causing gross financial inequalities. Revelation 6 describes how this will become the norm during the tribulation (pp. 77-81).

The moral depravity of our culture is also an indication that the tribulation is soon to begin. In 2 Tim 3:1-5, Paul speaks of the rise in sinful activities during the last days (p. 121). Interestingly, Jeremiah says that the rise of social media is also a sign of the times because of its narcissism (p. 123).

Jeremiah draws a parallel between our cancel culture and Jesus’ teaching that many will be offended in the last days (Matt 24:10). People are canceled because they are not loved by their neighbor (Matt 22:37-39). The Lord’s words indicate that this hatred should not surprise us since we know that the rapture could occur at any moment (p. 143).

The Prophet Amos spoke of the spiritual famine of Israel in his day (Amos 8:11-12). In the best part of Jeremiah’s book, he encourages his readers to get back into the Word of God. That is the cure for any famine we are experiencing (p. 164). We should also have a burden for the spiritually dead. Pastors need to emphasize the teaching of God’s Word (p. 172).

Jeremiah also sees the need to focus on the current nation of Israel. We need to pray for it. He reminds the reader that the church will live in the New Jerusalem. He includes an interesting graph that shows the size of this future city (p. 190).

Even though the world at large is rejecting Christianity, Jeremiah is very encouraged by what he sees going on in the church. He sees great spiritual growth, especially among the young (p. 209). The gospel is going to triumph because Christ will overcome all obstacles. The author does not spell out what he thinks this will mean or what changes we can expect.

Jeremiah admits that all the signs of moral depravity we see today do not guarantee that the rapture is near, but he strongly suggests that these things point to it. One of the book’s weaknesses is that it discusses things that will occur *after* the rapture and says that these signs are seen in what happens *before* the rapture. Perhaps they do.

But the most we can accurately say is that we are living in a culture beset by blatant depravity.

Most readers of the JOTGES will appreciate that Jeremiah is pre-tribulational and premillennial. They will also appreciate his concern over the moral rot around us and his wondering about where it will lead. This book is a reminder that sin brings the wrath of God on any society (Rom 1:18-32). Another plus is that Jeremiah gives good practical advice. Christians should be active in a local church, should pray, and should study the Bible during these difficult times.

However, the book's terrible presentations of the gospel are an area of real concern. Jeremiah does not proclaim a Free Grace gospel. He teaches that apostates were never saved. True believers will persevere in good works and faith, based on Phil 1:6 (p. 100). He believes that the current lack of interest in Christ and the widespread falling away from the faith by believers are signs of the end of the age (2 Thess 2:1-3). He says that Christ Himself spoke of this in Matt 24:12.

Not surprisingly, then, Jeremiah says that in the Parable of the Four Soils, only the good soil represents believers (pp. 106-107). Professing believers need to examine themselves to see if they are truly saved (2 Cor 13:5). To be sure of his salvation, a person needs to repent of his sins. It might be helpful, with the help of someone else, to kneel and pray aloud (p. 108).

Jeremiah's presentation of the gospel is extremely confusing. He does not speak of eternal life, but of the ability to see that Christ is the way of joy and peace (p. 127). The unbeliever needs to give his life to Jesus (p. 132). In another example, Jeremiah says that the gospel is the unbeliever's realization that what he needs is not religion, but a relationship with God. The unbeliever can come to that realization by engaging in certain emotional, but spiritual, activities (p. 197).

The reader will likely have questions about how Jeremiah uses the Olivet Discourse to interpret what is happening around us today. One may also question some of the parallels he sees between the events of today and certain verses in the NT. These considerations—as well as Jeremiah's poor handling of the gospel—outweigh any benefits a reader may find in this book. For these reasons, I do not recommend it.

Kathryn Wright  
GES Missions Coordinator  
*Columbia, SC*

---

*The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of the Incarnation.* By Ian A. McFarland. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019. 249 pp. Paper, \$18.49.

McFarland is a professor at the University of Cambridge. This book is a scholarly treatment of the Person of Christ. It deals with how the human and Divine natures come together in the Lord. In McFarland's view, there have been two trends in church history that are in error. In the early church there was generally *an overemphasis* on the divinity of Christ. In more recent times, there has been *an unhealthy focus* on the humanity of Christ.

To avoid these errors, we must adopt a "Chalcedonianism without reserve" (p. 6). This is a reference to the early church council that met at Chalcedon in AD 451. It produced the almost- universally accepted orthodox statement of the hypostatic union of Christ. The fundamental principle from Chalcedon is that the divine nature is invisible. Therefore, when we look at the Man Jesus in the pages of the NT, what we see is His humanity only. This means that when we see Christ's miracles and righteousness, we do not see anything of His divinity. Everything He does is "fully and exclusively" human.

In other words, McFarland believes that the Deity of Christ was invisible. In the incarnation, the Word became flesh and thus assumed a created and visible human nature. Even though Jesus was God, His divine nature—by definition—remained invisible (p. 88). God is still completely transcendent. McFarland is saying, then, that we cannot see the divine nature in the Man Jesus. In simple terms, we cannot say things such as, "Jesus showed He was God by raising the dead or walking on water."

One of the problems with this view is McFarland's assertion that everything the Man Jesus did was part of what makes up human nature. In theory, at least, one could say that any human could do what He did (p. 89). The miracles Jesus performed were done through the power—or more accurately, the "energy"—of the Holy Spirit. McFarland claims that this is the mode of operation of the divine nature. The energy and the nature of God are two separate things. In Christ's case, His human nature participated in this divine energy while remaining completely human. Even though we cannot see the

divine nature in the Man Jesus, the characteristics of that nature were visible in the Person of Christ through the Holy Spirit (pp. 91-93).

This is what McFarland means when he says that although we cannot see the divine nature, Jesus is still the “Word made flesh.” God is “fully present and truly known” in the humanity of Christ. This is what was said at Chalcedon (p. 213).

This book will leave a student of the Bible with a troubling question: If we see God in Christ solely through the “energy” of the Holy Spirit working through Him, how was He different in that regard to a mature believer today who walks by the power of the same Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:16)? McFarland, no doubt, would say that Jesus did it perfectly. He does say that Jesus’ actions were done in the power and authority of God (p. 142), which probably means that He did so in ways believers today do not and cannot.

I assume McFarland would also say that Jesus could not sin. But doesn’t that force us to say, as well, that He was different from us because He was God? Further, the Lord explicitly said that we can see the Father in Him (John 14:9). While almost all readers of the *JOTGES* would probably understand those words to mean that we see the divine nature in the Man Jesus, McFarland would say they only mean that in Christ we are seeing how God operates—His energy.

An interesting aspect of the book is McFarland’s view of the doctrine of inspiration. The best description would seem to be that the Scriptures *contain* the word of God. He says that they give faithful witness to the life and character of Jesus (p. 142) At the same time, he maintains that the Scriptures are not historically accurate in every detail, but contain “inventions” and factual errors in some places. McFarland says this is “indisputable” (p. 141).

For Free Grace people, a favorite story from the life of Christ is the account of the Samaritan woman. McFarland addresses it, but does not touch on the gospel of eternal life. Instead, he shows that the Lord’s encounter with the woman demonstrates “his knowledge of the situations of those he encounters” (p. 144). McFarland seems to be saying that Jesus did not necessarily have divine knowledge about this woman’s past history (perhaps this is one of the Bible’s “factual errors”) but, based on what He saw, was able to size up what was going on in her life. That is something a human could do.

This is a difficult book to read. It is not for the casual reader. There are concepts that are hard to grasp. This reviewer found himself having to read certain parts more than once to try to understand what was being said. Part of the problem is that most Christians do not understand the historical background of the Council of Chalcedon. We do not know why the council formulated the doctrine as it did. Further, most readers will not appreciate McFarland's low view of the inspiration of the Scriptures. For these reasons, I do not recommend the book for the majority of *JOTGES* readers.

The book does have value for those interested in the complex history of how the church formulated the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Lord. For that small group of people, I recommend the book. Much of what McFarland holds is based on how the Eastern Orthodox Church has applied what was said at Chalcedon. Most evangelicals will conclude that Jesus did indeed reveal the Father, as John states (John 1:18). We see the Father in Christ. He did more than simply give off the energy of God. The reader will also find that throughout church history there have been many within Christendom who would classify McFarland as a heretic because of what he believes and says about the Person of Christ. Jesus is fully God and Man. There will always be difficulties in how we understand and try to explain that marvelous truth.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

---

***When Children Come Out: A Guide for Christian Parents.***

By Mark Yarhouse and Olya Zaporozhets. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022. 173 pp. Paper, \$20.00.

This book gives advice to Christian parents who are confronted by a child's announcing that he or she is homosexual. Most of the book deals with same-sex attraction, but the authors maintain that the information also applies to those who identify as transgender. Zaporozhets is a professor at Regent College. Yarhouse is the director of the Sexual and Gender Identity Institute at Wheaton College. It is



likely that most *JOTGES* readers were not aware that a Christian college would have such an institute. This probably indicates that many in Evangelical circles are not aware of how widespread this situation is.

As counselors, the authors do not give concrete answers about how to handle the situation. Instead, they show, through many examples, that parents will deal with it in various ways. Parents will make the journey at their own pace, following different paths. It is clear, however, that the authors believe parents should keep open lines of communication with their children and show love to them. The last thing parents should do is to be judgmental and refuse to dialogue with their child.

Through time, most parents in the book become more accepting of the circumstances in which they find themselves (p. 7). This usually means that they change how they view homosexuality. The authors believe this is a very positive thing.

A common thread is that these parents fear that if they do not accept their child's "coming out," the child will rebel against God. They feel that the child who loses his faith over this issue will go to hell (p. 9). After coming to terms with the situation, other parents take an entirely different view. They believe that their homosexual child can mature in the faith and walk with Christ even if they practice homosexuality (p. 10).

As one would expect, part of the process lies in differentiating between same-sex attraction and homosexual acts. At first, most parents see both as sinful. In addition, homosexuality is initially seen as a greater sin than others. Over time, however, most parents realize that sin is sin and come to believe that sexual attraction is not sinful. Some believe the acts are sinful, while others do not. Almost universally, parents gain acceptance of their children and do not try to get them to change their orientation (pp. 11-12). They accept that the child's homosexuality is not simply a passing phase (p. 114).

A common theme is the need to love their children. These parents are almost always devastated by their child's coming out. They often wonder what they did to cause the problem. All the parents interviewed said they now realize that was not the case. The child did not choose to be homosexual.

The authors and parents also point out that those in this situation must be concerned about the child's safety. Children who come out are in real danger of depression, which can lead to suicide (p. 49). This often leads to parents feeling that they must accept not only the child, but also his homosexual friends, who are often a lifeline for the child.

A disturbing aspect of the book is that many of these parents have changed their view of homosexuality. They relate that they prayed and searched the Scriptures and that God spoke to them in their prayers. Many say they saw that they were wrong in how they interpreted certain passages. Almost all said they gained greater empathy (pp. 35-36). It is true that we can change the way we interpret various Bible texts *when the evidence from Scripture convinces us*. However, it seems that in many of these cases the parents changed because of what their children were going through *and not because of sound exegesis*.

Some parents made insightful comments. They said that going through this caused them to rely upon God. This could be an example of suffering and learning to trust in Him (p. 89). Others, who say that homosexual acts are different from sexual orientation, rightly see that their child can suffer for the Lord in this area. They can remain single and demonstrate that the single lifestyle can glorify Christ (pp. 89, 130).

Unfortunately, a common experience for these parents is how unlovingly many churches treated them. Some churches said that a father could not have a leadership position if he had an adult homosexual son. Other families reported that church members gossiped about them. Some pastors were harshly judgmental and untrustworthy.

One of these parents' biggest problems is their theology, on three counts. First, they often do not understand the gospel. Second, they believe that God will speak to them in prayer. Third, they allow their situation to determine what is right and wrong. They often conclude that God says that what is right for their child may not be right for others. Sinful activity can change from person to person. You can ask God if homosexuality is all right for your child. In addition, some parents leave their church in order to find a church that is more accepting of the decisions they make (p. 102).

Particularly troublesome for this reviewer are some of the discussions on transgenderism. The authors and parents say it is a complex

issue, as is same-sex orientation. They maintain that parents do not have to agree with every decision their child makes, but that they do need to be there to support and love them. This would include supporting a desire to receive puberty blockers. It would include calling transgender children by their preferred pronouns (pp. 34, 96). One assumes it would also include surgery. The book indicates that churches should probably have transgender bathrooms to accommodate transgender members (p. 149).

Further, it seems that the authors do not consider transgenderism a mental illness. Today, many claim to be transgender as the result of social pressure. Also troubling is the authors' belief that the parents' acceptance of a child's homosexuality or transgenderism should be demonstrated in front of younger siblings (pp. 57, 84). The authors do not state that parents also have a responsibility before the Lord to speak the truth, which is always the real way to show love.

The book strongly encourages parents to find a small group of people to confide in (p. 33). It calls for people in churches to—like Christ—be loving, but does not mention church discipline for the homosexual who engages in sinful acts.

Most Evangelicals will conclude that the authors compromise certain Scriptural truths. However, they do bring up some good points. We can be hypocritical by judging homosexual sins much more harshly than heterosexual sins such as pornography and premarital sex. Free Grace people should lead the way in showing that a homosexual can be saved. We should also be gracious to them, while also speaking the truth. The authors are correct: Sometimes the answers will not be easy. But we cannot, out of misguided love for our children, deny what God has revealed.

This book is not for everybody. However, as time goes on—if the Lord delays His coming—this will probably become a bigger issue in churches. Those who are involved in any type of Christian counseling would benefit from this book. It would allow them to consider what the Scriptures say about this topic and to see what is going on in the wider Evangelical world. For those readers, I recommend it.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

---

***1 Peter: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching.*** Kerux Commentaries. Timothy E. Miller and Bryan Murawski. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2022. 294 pp. Cloth, \$32.99.

Miller is an Associate Professor of NT at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. He handles the exegetical portions of this commentary. Murawski teaches Bible and ministry courses at Cairn University. He covers the discussions of homiletics.

The commentary's format is user-friendly. After an introduction to each passage, there is a section titled *exposition*, followed by sections titled *theological focus*, *preaching and teaching strategies*, and *discussion questions*. Miller occasionally provides sidebars in which he discusses a particular subject that is found in the text and elsewhere in the NT (e.g., pp. 143, 144, 154, 156, 164). For example, when discussing 1 Pet 2:2, he has a sidebar about "Milk Analogies in the New Testament" in which he quotes 1 Cor 3:2, Heb 5:12-13, and 1 Pet 2:2 (p. 107). I found these sidebars to be helpful.

This commentary presents a Reformed view of 1 Peter. The word *elect* in 1 Pet 1:2 is understood to refer to the readers' being both chosen for everlasting life and being chosen exiles (p. 49).

Peter's readers are understood to be Gentiles (p. 11). The reference to the readers' being "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" is understood to be "four honorary titles for the readers, all derived from Old Testament statements about God's chosen people, Israel" (p. 124). While the expression *replacement theology* is not used, that certainly seems to be Miller's point.

Throughout the commentary, Miller suggests that the salvation of which Peter speaks is both already and not yet (p. 66). The future aspect of salvation is not merely a fuller experience of the life we already have, but of being with Christ forever in His kingdom. In other words, Miller understands Peter to be teaching that one must persevere in faith and good works in order to gain entrance into Christ's kingdom (pp. 86, 218-24, 234, 236, 259, 272).

Miller suggests that there is but one eschatological or final judgment where both believers and unbelievers will be judged in order to determine their eternal destinies (pp. 234, 259). "Elders, like the rest of God's people, will be rewarded with eternal life for the obedience that springs from the new birth" (p. 272).

There is much helpful information in this commentary, in terms of both exegesis and homiletics. This would be a very useful commentary for the well-grounded pastor, missionary, parachurch worker, or layperson. However, it would likely confuse new or untaught believers, even causing them to lose the assurance of everlasting life.

I recommend this commentary to those who are well-grounded in the faith.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

