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## **Editor's Page**

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Once again I apologize for the delay in getting out this issue. The lack of spring meetings for ATS for the past two years has led to a shortage of papers. We have been soliciting papers not connected with the meetings and have decided to do a double issue at this time in order to expedite getting back on track timewise. It is our goal over the next two issues to get caught up, but the process depends to a very great extent on the cooperation of a host of volunteers, from the writers and referees to the editors. We want to thank each of those who have had a part in helping us to accomplish what we have so far, and we encourage those of our readers who have something to contribute to this process to assist us by submitting papers or serving as referees, if requested. If you are willing to referee a paper for *JATS* but have not yet been asked, please contact me at [reynolds@southern.edu](mailto:reynolds@southern.edu) and let me know your qualifications and area of expertise. We will be happy to try to involve you in the process if we have papers written in your area.

It has been brought to my attention that we have been remiss in not publicizing our website, located at <http://www.atsjats.org>. On this website you can learn more about the vision, values, and goals of the Adventist Theological Society as well as sign up for membership, subscribe to publications, and access its resources. The ATS publishes not only this journal, but also a quarterly digest of articles written with a lay audience in mind (*Perspective Digest*) and some monograph studies on selected topics. *JATS* articles going back to volume 5 (1994) are available online, as are *PD* articles going back to volume 10 (2005). MP3 podcasts of ATS symposia since 2004 are also available on the website, and other publications can be purchased there online.

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We encourage you not only to read JATS, but to make full use of the resources available through ATS. The ATS also conducts Bible seminars around the world throughout the year. If you have an interest in more information about these, write to *info@atsjats.org*.

We are including in this double issue an update of our cumulative index. It is indexed by author. Of course, you can search our online database of articles by author, title, keyword, verse, issue, and so forth. We hope this adds to your reading and study pleasure.

## ***Ytr* as a Remnant Term in the Book of Jeremiah**

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The root *ytr* is of common Semitic origin and is widespread in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> It refers to the rest or remainder of an entity, expressing either the insignificance of that which has remained or its extraordinary surplus and abundance.<sup>2</sup> It occurs five times in the book of Jeremiah: 39:9 (used twice); 44:7; and 52:15 (used twice).<sup>3</sup> In order to appreciate the meaning of this word as used in Jeremiah, we need to take a cautious approach that examines “the individual semantic value of the various forms of *ytr* in their particular word-combination and sentence contexts.”<sup>4</sup> It is with this note that the root *ytr* as related to the remnant of Judah is examined in the book of Jeremiah. We will exegete each passage using the following plan: translation and textual considerations; structure; historical background; and interpretation.

### **Jeremiah 39:9**

#### **Translation and Textual Considerations**

(1) In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusa-

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Origin and Early History of the Remnant Motif in Ancient Israel,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1970), 182-194; T. Kronholm, “*Yētar* I,” *TDOT* (1990), 6:483-491; John E. Hartley, “*Yētar*,” *TWOT* (1980), 1:421-422; David Latoundji, “*Ytr* I,” *NIDOTTE* (1997), 2:571-574.

<sup>2</sup> Hasel, “Remnant Motif,” 185, 187.

<sup>3</sup> In both Jer 39:9 and 52:15 we find the noun *yeter* II. The noun *yeter* I is found only five times in the OT (Judg 16:7,8,9; Ps 11:2; Job 30:11) and means “bowstring” or “sinew.” *Yeter* II is found 96 times and is important to the remnant language and motif.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

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lem and besieged it. (2) In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city was breached. (3) And all the princes of the king of Babylon came and they sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebu, Sarsechim the Rabsaris, Nergalsharezer the Rabmag and all the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon. (4) When Zedekiah king of Judah and all his soldiers saw them they fled, going out of the city by night by way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls; and they went toward the Arabah. (5) But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, at Riblah, in the land of Hamath and he passed sentence upon him.<sup>5</sup> (6) And the king of Babylon executed the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; and the king of Babylon also executed all the nobles of Judah. (7) He put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon. (8) The Chaldeans burned the house of the king and the people and broke the walls of Jerusalem. (9) Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard deported to Babylon the remnant [yeter] of the people who remained [hanniš'ârîm] in the city and the deserters who deserted to him and the remnant [yeter] of the artisans<sup>6</sup> who remained [hanniš'ârîm]. (10) But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left [hiš'îr] the poor people who had nothing, in the land of Judah and he gave them vineyards and fields<sup>7</sup> on that day.

**Structure.** Verses 1-10 form a structural unit based on the movement of the action in the account:

1. The dates spanning the beginning and end of the siege of Jerusalem (vss 1-2)
2. The establishment of a military council (vs 3)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> MT *way<sup>e</sup>dabbēr 'ittô mišpātîm*, lit. "and he spoke with him judgments."

<sup>6</sup> BHS suggests correctly that *hā'ām*, "the people," should be read as *hā'āmôm*, "the artisans," as found in the same rendering of the text in Jer 52:15.

<sup>7</sup> The word *y<sup>e</sup>gēbîm* is of uncertain meaning. "Fields" is used here following Syr. and Tg. Perhaps *l'ôr<sup>e</sup>mîm ûl<sup>e</sup>yog<sup>e</sup>bîm*, "to be vinedressers and field laborers," in 52:16, is instructive here. See John Bright, *Jeremiah*, Anchor Bible 21 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 242, 243.

<sup>8</sup> Some commentators see 39:3 as a variant of 39:13. They take 38:28b as a dittography which must be linked with 39:3 and then transported to 39:13,14, to describe the first account of Jeremiah's release. See John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 645; cf. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 245, and Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremiah*, 3d edition, HAT 12 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), 225-237. The narrative would then read: (vss 3,13) "When Jerusalem was captured, all the officials of the king of

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3. The fate of the nobility (vss 4-7)
4. The fate of the city, i.e., the physical plant (vs 8)
5. The fate of the remnant (vss 9-10).

**Historical Background.** Verses 1-2 indicate that the occasion was the fall of Jerusalem. Scholarship is divided regarding the date of this event: July 587 B.C.E.<sup>9</sup> or July 586 B.C.E.<sup>10</sup> However, since Zedekiah was installed as a puppet king when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E.<sup>11</sup> and he reigned for eleven years (2 Kgs 24:18; 2 Chr 36:11; Jer 52:1) until the destruction of Jerusalem, it seems that 586 B.C.E. is more plausible. A month later (cf. Jer 52:12 and 2 Kgs 25:8), Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's bodyguard,<sup>12</sup> arrived in the city. He set up "a court or better, a military government,"<sup>13</sup> and

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Babylon came in and took their seats in the Middle Gate: Nergolsharezer, the Rabnag, Samgarnebo, Nebushazban the Rabсарis and all the other officers of the king of Babylon. (Vs. 14) They sent and brought Jeremiah from the court of the guard."

<sup>9</sup> J. Barton Payne, "Jerusalem," *ZPEB* (1975), 3:472; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3d ed (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 329-330; E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), 125; Robert Davidson, *Jeremiah*, vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 130; Roland K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 157; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 291; M. Burrows, "Jerusalem," *IDB* (1962), 2:852; F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary, vol. 16 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 341; and Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

<sup>10</sup> G. W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 786, 794-798; Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 168-171; W. S. LaSor, "Jerusalem," *ISBE* (1988), 2:1016; Philip J. King, "Jerusalem," *ABD* (1992), 3:755-757; Julius A. Bewer, *The Prophets in the King James Version with Introduction and Critical Notes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 278.

Evidence of this destruction was widespread. See Yigal Shiloh, "The City of David Archaeological Project: The Third Season, 1980," *BA* 44 (1981): 161-170; idem, *Excavations at the City of David, I, 1978-1982*, Qedem 19 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), 32-35, 73.

<sup>12</sup> The term *rab-tabbāhīm* literally means "the butcher," an ancient title which is retained after the functions of the holder had altered. Cf. Gen 40:2. See Ralph H. Alexander, "Tabbah," *TWOT* (1980), 1:342. For a discussion on the names of the Babylonian officials who accompanied the captain of the guard, see Julius A. Bewer, "Nergalsharezer Samgar in Jeremiah 39:3," *AJSL* 42 (1925/26): 130.

<sup>13</sup> Bright, *Jeremiah*, 243.

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systematically burned and looted the city and superintended the deportation of its people.

**Interpretation.** With the fall of the city, the king and courtiers attempted to escape, only to be captured and brought to an ignoble demise. The nobles were summarily executed, an act which may be seen as a just, rather than a cruel fate, according to the canons of Near Eastern warfare.<sup>14</sup> Zedekiah was blinded, bound in chains, and deported to Babylon. The city was then destroyed by fire.

After Nebuchadnezzar had dealt with the leadership, he turned to the non-nobility: those who are described as the remnant. Two roots that reflect the idea of the remnant are here used: *šʾr* and *ytr*. They appear together five times in vss 9-10. The first has been aptly demonstrated as functioning as the main remnant term both in contexts of judgment and salvation in the book of Jeremiah.<sup>15</sup> The fact that *ytr* is juxtaposed with *šʾr* in Jer 39:9-10 adds significance to the remnant motif. In fact, the remnant is described in parallel phrases: *yeter hāʾām*, “remnant of the people” and *hannišʾārîm bāʾîr*, “the remnant in the city.” They both denote the defeated Jerusalemites. These two phrases “are in turn designated with the synonymous phrase *šʾērît hāʾām*, ‘the remnant of the people,’ in Jer 41:10, 16. Therefore, it is safe to say that *yeter* is used synonymously and interchangeably with *šʾērît*. . . .<sup>16</sup> The biblical author deliberately uses two related terms in almost excessive proportion in such a small space to exclaim about the absolute worthlessness of those who survived the Babylonian onslaught. This is the first assessment of the historical remnant as a group of people who have survived an actual disaster.<sup>17</sup> Prior to this they were spoken of in a prophetic manner. From this point onward it is a historical reality. The point is sharp with dramatic irony: although they survived they lack status, statehood, and power. It is this dramatic reversal from nationhood to nothingness that is effectively captured in bringing together both terms.

The remaining skilled craftsmen or artisans is a reference to 2 Kgs 24 where eleven years earlier, after the fall of Jerusalem under Jehoiachin (597 B.C.E.), Nebuchadnezzar had exiled large numbers of people, including artisans, who had voluntarily given themselves up to the

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<sup>14</sup> Harrison, 159.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth D. Mulzac, “The Remnant Motif in the Context of Judgment and Salvation in the Book of Jeremiah” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Hasel, “Remnant Motif,” 190.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “Remnant,” *ISBE* (1988), 4:130, defines the “historical remnant” as the survivors of a catastrophe.

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Chaldean king. At that time, all the artisans were taken. Within that eleven year period, more were probably contracted, and now rounded up.<sup>18</sup>

Only the poorest people (*dāllîm*), probably peasants, were left and allotted holdings for survival. In all likelihood, they were the ones who would cause the Babylonians the least amount of trouble.<sup>19</sup> John Calvin comments that the irony of the landless man becoming a landowner must be noted. Further, the envy of the exiles must be aroused, for on the day of their demise, “they saw that they were more severely and cruelly tested than those lowest of men.”<sup>20</sup>

Finally, while Jer 39:1-10 is substantially the same as Jer 52:4-16 and 2 Kgs 25:1-12, leading some scholars to conclude that it is a secondary insertion,<sup>21</sup> Nicholson has correctly shown that its position here is quite fitting: “The nation had rejected the word of God proclaimed to it by Jeremiah (chaps. 26-36), and had sought to destroy the prophet himself (chaps. 37, 38). The judgment declared against Judah and Jerusalem was now *violently realized*.”<sup>22</sup> Judah had been reduced from a populous nation to a small surviving group of people that was poor, demoralized and lacking in any real military prowess, posing no apparent threat to the ruthless invaders. The judgment had rendered Judah a small insignificant historical remnant.

**Jeremiah 44:7-10**

**Translation and Textual Considerations**

(7) *And now, thus says the Lord, God of Hosts, the God of Israel,*<sup>23</sup> “*Why are you doing great evil against yourselves, to cut off from you man and woman, infant and child, from the midst of Judah leaving [hôtîr] for yourselves no remnant [š<sup>e</sup>ērît]?* (8) Why do you provoke me

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<sup>18</sup> The fact that only a residue of skilled craftsmen was left mildly suggests that after the deportation (2 Kgs 24), those who came along were of inferior quality, having no master craftsman to train them since these were all taken away. Further, it may suggest that even some of these craftsmen had defected to the Babylonian camp.

<sup>19</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, The Expositors Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:623, expresses that the Babylonians did this because they felt that gratitude would prevent the settlers from rebelling.

<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 4:32.

<sup>21</sup> Holladay, 292; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 245; Hyatt, “Jeremiah,” 1079, adds that this was the work of a deuteronomic editor.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholson, 125 (emphasis mine).

<sup>23</sup> LXX reads *kurios pantokrator*, “Lord Almighty,” i.e., “Lord of Hosts.”

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to anger with the works of your hands, sacrificing to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to live so that you cut yourselves off and become a curse and a taunt among all the nations of the earth? (9) Have you forgotten the evil of your fathers, the evil of the kings of Judah, the evil of their wives<sup>24</sup> and your own evil<sup>25</sup> and the evil of your wives which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? (10) They have not humbled themselves<sup>26</sup> even to this day, nor have they feared.<sup>27</sup> And they have not walked according to my law and my statutes<sup>28</sup> which I gave to you and your fathers.<sup>29</sup>

**Structure.** Jer 44:7 is found in the second unit, vss 7-10, of chap. 44.<sup>30</sup> There is an inclusio that is indicated by several factors:

1. The introductory formula, “Thus says the Lord of Hosts the God of Israel,” is found in vss 7 and 11, clearly demarcating the pericope.

2. The expression *yôm hazzeh*, “this day,” is found at the end of vs 6 and again in vs 10.

3. While all three sections (vss 2-6; 7-10, and 11-14) have almost the same introductory formula, the latter two have distinct markers that stand at the beginning: vs 7 - *w<sup>ec</sup>attah*, “and now”; vs 11 - *lāken*, “therefore.” Verse 2 has no such marker.

4. There is a distinct change from the declaratory statements of unit 1 to the rhetorical question form of unit 2.

Verses 7-10 may be schematized as follows:

1. Introductory formula, “Thus says the Lord,” introduced by the marker, *w<sup>ec</sup>attah*, “and now” (vs 7a).

2. Body, consisting of three rhetorical questions:

Why do you commit great evil against yourselves? (vs 7b)

Why do you provoke me to anger by your doings? (vs 8)

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<sup>24</sup> LXX reads *kai tōn kakōn tōn archontōn humōn*, “and the evil of your officials.”

<sup>25</sup> LXX lacks “and your own evil.”

<sup>26</sup> MT *lō’ dukkēû*, lit. “they were not crushed” (Pual of *dk’*). LXX, *kai ouk ep-ausanto*, “and they have not ceased.” As *BHS* observes, the versions render different readings.

<sup>27</sup> LXX lacks, “nor have they feared.”

<sup>28</sup> LXX reads only *tōn prostagmatōn mou*, “my ordinances,” the equivalent of *b<sup>e</sup>hu-qqōtāy*.

<sup>29</sup> LXX reads “their fathers” instead of MT “your fathers.”

<sup>30</sup> There are three distinct sections in 44:2-14: (1) vss 2-6; (2) 7-10; (3) 11-14. See K.-F. Philmann, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Jeremiabuches*, FRLANT 118 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 168-172.



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Have you forgotten both your forebears' and your own wickedness?  
(vs 9)

3. Concluding statement (vs 10), with the expression *yôm hazzeh*, "this day."

**Historical Background.** Sometime after the remnant had sought refuge in Egypt, the divine oracle was given to Jeremiah (43:8-44; 14). In fact, chap. 44 provides the account of the accusations of God (44:2-14) and Jeremiah (44:20-30) leveled against the refugees because of their practice of, and open defense of idolatry (44:15-19).<sup>31</sup>

Jeremiah's address concerned all the Jews living in Egypt: at Migdol,<sup>32</sup> Tahpanhes, Memphis,<sup>33</sup> and the land of Patros.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that Jewish settlements already existed in Egypt before the arrival of these refugees.

Since no indication is given as to how much time had elapsed since the word and action of 43:8-13, we may agree with Holladay that it is difficult to envisage the implications of chap. 44. On the one hand, it suggests a kind of general epistle to all the Jews living in Egypt; but, on the other hand, vss 15, 19, and 20 suggest that this is an address to an assemblage, and it appears implausible to imagine that all the Jews living in Egypt would gather for such an occasion.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Such idolatrous practices were not new to the Lord's people. Jeremiah had earlier condemned such in his "Temple Sermon" (7:16-20). Davidson, 150, claims that as a tolerated minority in a foreign land, it appeared sensible to adapt, as far as was possible, to local Egyptian customs.

<sup>32</sup> "Migdol" is a NW Semitic word which means "tower" or "fortress." It is known from the Tell el-Amarna letters (14<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) as Ma-ag-da-li. The exact site is unknown. Thomas O. Lambdin, "Migdol," *IDB* (1962), 3:377, identifies it as Tell el-Her. A more recent explanation claims a site labelled simply as T. 21, about 24 miles east-northeast of Taphanes. See Eliezer D. Oren, "Migdol: A New Fortress on the Edge of the Eastern Nile Delta," *BASOR* 256 (1984): 7-44.

<sup>33</sup> Memphis (Heb. *Noph*) was one of the main cities of Lower Egypt. It was located about 13 miles south of modern Cairo.

<sup>34</sup> The expression "Land of Pathros" suggests a region, perhaps in Upper Egypt. Thomas O. Lambdin, "Pathros," *IDB* (1962), 3:676, indicates that the Hebrew *Patrôs* is a rendering of the Egyptian *p3-t3-rsy*, "the Southern Land." It is also known that there was a Jewish community at Elephantine in the fifth century B.C.E. Their Aramaic documents tell much of their society. See A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923).

<sup>35</sup> Holladay, 303.

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**Interpretation.** The first unit, 44:2-6, gives a review of Judah's *past* disobedience and her consequent destruction by the Lord.<sup>36</sup> This second unit, vss. 7-10, addresses the *present* situation of the Jews, accusing them of the same behavior as their fathers, and hence endangering their own lives to the extent of being cut off (*krt*) without a remnant (*š'ērît*).

The people are indicted for committing great evil in spite of the fulfillment of the terrible judgments against Jerusalem. The refugees had learned nothing. Hence, the language of condemnation is strong: there will be no survival for those who had fled to Egypt.<sup>37</sup>

"Evil" (*rā'āh*) is a key word that is woven throughout the first two units.<sup>38</sup> This motif of evil and desolation in operation against Judah and Jerusalem is found throughout the book.<sup>39</sup> It must be noted, however, that the Lord's evil, as expressed in 44:2, that is, his destruction of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, is different from the evil committed by the people. The latter "refers to the moral injury that is self-inflicted through idolatry."<sup>40</sup>

Against this background of evil and judgment, Jeremiah now confronts the people with a series of rhetorical questions (introduced by *w'attāh*, "and now"<sup>41</sup>): Why do you commit great evil against yourselves? Why do you provoke me to anger by your doings? Have you forgotten both your forebears' and your own wickedness?

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<sup>36</sup> The description of the cities of Judah as a waste or ruin (*ḥorbāh*) without inhabitants favored the exiles in Babylon because it left the land vacant for their return. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 729.

<sup>37</sup> Some commentators point out that the similarity in language between chap. 44 and other prose passages in the book is an indication that the passage was freely compared by a deuteronomistic editor who decided to expand the declaration of judgment in 43:8-13. So Nicholson, 152, and Rudolph, 239, who regard only vss 2, 7, 8 as the original words of Jeremiah, the remainder coming from the prophet's sermons. However, Thompson, 664, refutes this view, claiming that even if some expansion took place, there is no reason to question the essential historicity of the incidents recorded in chap. 44.

<sup>38</sup> See Jer 44:2,3,5,7, and 9. In vs 9 alone it appears five times.

<sup>39</sup> See Jer 25:11; 34:22; 35:17; 36:31; 40:2-3.

<sup>40</sup> Carroll, 729. See to W. Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45*, WMANT 52 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 72. The evil, particularly idol worship, as committed by the people of Judah and Jerusalem should have cautioned these refugees to better behavioral practices.

<sup>41</sup> This phrase is frequently used in the OT when a conclusion to an argument is to be drawn. Thompson, 676. Cf. Exod 19:5; Deut 4:1; Josh 24:14; 1 Sam 8:9.

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Even though the interrogative form is used, the conclusion is already implied: persistence in pagan worship<sup>42</sup> is a flagrant dismissal of covenant faithfulness and can only result in a cutting off, that is, destruction<sup>43</sup> of the entire community: men, women, children, and toddlers. In short, there will be no progenitive factor in the community. This effect is described as “leaving (*hôtîr*) . . . no remnant (*š<sup>e</sup>ērît*).” The hiphil infinitive *hôtîr* is here associated with *š<sup>e</sup>ērît*. Connected with the preposition of negation (*l<sup>e</sup>biltî*), the expression *l<sup>e</sup>biltî hôtîr lākem š<sup>e</sup>ērît* may best be rendered, “leaving for yourself no remnant.” Again, as in 39:9-10, both *ytr* and *š<sup>r</sup>* are combined, though not with the same frequency. The effect, however, is similar in that the combination draws the reader’s attention to the essential “remnantlessness” nature of the community. Indeed, precisely this idea of “remnantlessness” is emphasized in the repetition of the “cutting off” motif, self-inflicted, so to speak, because of the people’s idolatrous practices. Such repetition serves as a stylistic device to call attention to the gravity of the situation.

Instead of a remnant, they would degenerate into a universal curse and taunt (44:8).<sup>44</sup> Such a punishment is indicative of unfaithfulness to the covenant. Failure to heed its precepts leads inevitably to being reduced to an object of cursing and shame. This implies the result of violating the covenant, just as blessing implies the result of obedience to the covenant.

Verse 9, which more or less reflects the diction of vs 2 (as vs 8 does vs 3), highlights the evil of the people and their failure, as well as their forefathers’, to acknowledge their actions as being wicked. Finally, this recalcitrant remnant stubbornly refuses to repent. This is underlined in the concluding statement (vs 10). Feeling no contrition (*lō<sup>ʔ</sup> dukk<sup>e</sup>û*, “they

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<sup>42</sup> The question, *lāmāh ʾattem ʿōšîm rāʿāh g<sup>e</sup>dōlāh*, “Why are you doing great evil?” (vs. 7), suggests, “Why do you continue to do great evil?”

<sup>43</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Gerhard F. Hasel, “*Kērat*,” *TDOT* (1995), 7:339–352.

<sup>44</sup> The curse (*q<sup>l</sup>ālāh*) comes from the idea of being treated lightly. To discredit someone or depreciate something was to make light of that person or thing. Hence, the idea of dishonor is considered as a curse. The curse is frequently used in combination with other demeaning ideas: curse and taunt (*herpāh*) in 42:18; 44:8,12; curse and horror (*šammāh*) in 42:18; 44:12,22; curse and waste (*hōreb*) in 49:13; curse and object of whistling (*š<sup>r</sup>rēqāh*) in 25:18. One can say that here in Jer 44:8 the remnant is described as an object of ridicule and a reproach before all the nations.

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did not humble [themselves]),”<sup>45</sup> they deliberately rejected the Lord’s sovereignty.<sup>46</sup>

The remnant that fled Judah and resided in Egypt completely violated the covenant with God. They risked being cut off, annihilated without a trace. We glimpse a threat that there would not be a remnant of the remnant. Hence, we see the people of Judah being progressively reduced by calamity to a mere decimal of their former population until in the end, none survives. Already reduced to a fraction by successive blows, the Judeans constitute merely a “remnant,” and even this is threatened.<sup>47</sup>

The people’s willful disobedience to God’s law will bring about drastic repercussions. This historical remnant, those who had survived the fall of Jerusalem and had fled to Egypt against God’s command, had disregarded or ignored the results of their evil (44:1-6). Such covenant disloyalty becomes the typical representation of the remnant. Now they follow the same practices of idolatry (here called “the great evil”) that led to the “cutting off” of Jerusalem. Therefore, the same fate awaits them.

Two factors are important here: (1) the people were responsible for the predicted judgment; (2) the judgment was all-encompassing: man, woman, infant, and toddler would experience it. Therefore, the expression “leaving (*hōtîr*) to yourself no remnant (*š’ērîr*)” is like placing the period at the end of the final chapter of a dramatic prophecy of destruction and catastrophe.

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<sup>45</sup> The verb *dk’* appears only here in the book of Jeremiah. It is in the form of a plural and means “crushed with remorse,” that is, the people failed to humble themselves before the Lord. However, LXX reads *kai ouk epausanto*, “and have not ceased.” *BHS* is uncertain if this is equal to *nikl’û* (Niphal of the root *kl’*, “to be restrained, held back”). Both *BHS* and Rudolph, 260, propose *nik’û*, (Niphal of the root *k’h*, “to be disheartened”). MT seems best in light of the fact that the root *dk’*, “crushed,” is also used in the sense of being humbled: Isa 19:10, *m’dukkā’îm* (pual part.), i.e., “crushed by remorse.” Cf. Isa 3:4; Pss 34:19 (Eng. 18); 51:19 (Eng. 17). Further, linking it with disobedience to the Lord’s laws suggests a lack of repentance. Hence, the idea here is that they have not humbled themselves. See further H. F. Fuhs, “*Dākhā’*,” *TDOT* (1978), 3:195-208.

<sup>46</sup> This is reflected in their refusal to reverence God or walk in His ways. For the motif of not walking in the Lord’s *tôrāh*, see Jer 9:13, 26:4 and 32:23. The equivalent of this is seen in 2:8, 6:19, and to a lesser extent in 8:8 and 18:18. This rejection of the law and covenant statutes is recurrent in the book of Jeremiah: 7:23-26; 11:1-13; 17:19-27; 34:8-22.

<sup>47</sup> Sheldon H. Blank, “Traces of Prophetic Agony in Isaiah,” *HUCA* 27 (1956), 90.

**Jeremiah 52:12-16**

**Translation and Textual Considerations**

(12) In the fifth month, in the tenth day<sup>48</sup> of the month, that is, in the nineteenth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,<sup>49</sup> Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard who served the king of Babylon [came] to Jerusalem.<sup>50</sup> (13) And he burned the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem and every great house he burned with fire. (14) And the Chaldean army which was with the captain of the guard demolished the entire wall surrounding Jerusalem. (15) *Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, exiled some of the poor of the people<sup>51</sup> and the rest [yeter] of the people who remained [hanniš'ārīm] in the city and those who had deserted<sup>52</sup> to the king of Babylon and the rest [yeter] of the artisans.<sup>53</sup>* (16) *But some of the poor*

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<sup>48</sup> 2Kgs 25:8 records it as the seventh day.

<sup>49</sup> LXX lacks "in the nineteenth year of the reign of king Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon."

<sup>50</sup> MT *ʿamad lipnē melek-bābel bīrūšālāim* reads literally, "he stood before the king of Babylon in Jerusalem." It means that Nebuzaradan was a high official who was acting on the king's authority. This is especially so with the revocalization of *ʿama* to *ʿomēd*, "he who stands." 2 Kgs 25:8 makes him the king's servant. Hence, Nebuzaradan came to Jerusalem on the king's authority.

<sup>51</sup> This phrase, "some of the people," is lacking in the MT of Jer 39:9 and 2 Kgs 25:11, which are parallel accounts of the same event. Hence, the inclusion of the phrase here in the MT is difficult to account for. It has been suggested, and reasonably so, that the phrase is partially dittographic from vs 16. The LXX offers no help since vs. 15 is lacking. This may be due to haplography since both vss 15 and 16 begin with *ūmiddallōt*, "and some of the poor." See John Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 6 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973), 20-21.

<sup>52</sup> MT has literally, "the falling ones who had fallen [away] to the king of Babylon."

<sup>53</sup> MT *hāʾāmôn* means "architect" or "builder." This is different from the other parallel accounts: 1 Kgs 25:11, *hehāmôn*, "the crowd"; Jer 39:9, *hāʾām*, "the people," hardly suits the context which points more toward skilled craftsmen. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 64, proposes a revocalization of the MT to read *hāʾommān*, (cf. Akkd. *ummānu*), "skilled artisans," "craftsmen." As Thompson, 773, n. 11, indicates, "The point need not be pressed since the Chaldeans would have been as much interested in architects and builders as in craftsmen. In either case, the noun is singular grammatically, although the sense may be collective."

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*of the land,<sup>54</sup> Nebuzaradan,<sup>55</sup> captain of the guard left, [hiš'îr] vinedressers and plowmen.<sup>56</sup>*

**Structure.** Jer 52<sup>57</sup> may be divided into four sections:

1. The fall of the city and capture of Zedekiah (vss 1-16)
2. The sacking of the temple (vss 17-23)
3. The numbers deported to Babylon (vss 31-34)
4. The release of Jehoiachin from power (vss 31-34).

The first section may be further sub-divided:

a. Introduction to Zedekiah's reign (vss 1-3), as demarcated by a specific time line, namely, Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king

b. The siege of the city (vss 4-5) as demarcated by a specific time line, namely, the "9<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, in the 10<sup>th</sup> month, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day"

c. The fall of the city and the fate of its king (vss 6-11) as demarcated by a specific time line, namely, "the fourth month, the ninth day of the month"

d. The fate of the property and the people in Jerusalem (vss 12-16) as demarcated by a specific time line, namely, "in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month."

The last section, vss. 12-16, now occupies my attention.

**Historical Background.**<sup>58</sup> Jer 52:3 makes clear one detail that is absent in the account in chap. 39; it was Zedekiah's rebellion against the

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<sup>54</sup> LXX replaces the phrase "some of the poor of the land," with *kai tous Kata-loipous tou laou*, "and the remnant of the people."

<sup>55</sup> Both the LXX and 2 Kgs 25:12 lack this name.

<sup>56</sup> The meaning of the Hebrew *ûl'yôg'bîm* is uncertain. It may mean "plowmen," or "field laborers." The LXX understands it this way, for it translates *kai eis geôgous*, "and to be laborers, tillers of the ground."

<sup>57</sup> This chapter forms an appendix to the book of Jeremiah, as may be deduced from the final words of chap. 51, "Thus far the words of Jeremiah." This appendix describes the fall of the city in identical terms, a few minor variations excepted, to that of 2 Kgs 24:18-25:30. However, while 2 Kgs 25:22-26 gives a brief description of the assassination of Gedeliah and the escape of the group to Egypt, Jer 52 does not. But this is hardly a problem, since chaps 41-44 describe these details. Further, Jer 52:28-30 adds a register of the totals of the deportees to Babylon which is lacking in the account of 2 Kings.

<sup>58</sup> Jer 52:15,16, with minor variation, is a near duplication of 39:9,10. Indeed, Jer 52:7-16 is a near duplicate of Jer 39:4-10. In fact, chap 52 (except for vss 28-30) has very small variations from 2 Kgs 24:18-25:30. Therefore, the historical details are the same in all three accounts.

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Babylonian king that provoked the siege and consequently led to the fall of Jerusalem.

Further, it must be added that both 2 Kgs 25:8 and Jer 52:12 specifically indicate that it was approximately one month *after* the fall of Jerusalem that Nebuchadnezzar commanded the destruction of the city by fire.<sup>59</sup> The question of the elapsed time is hard to answer. Two suggestions are: (1) the Babylonian troops waited for their commander to arrive;<sup>60</sup> (2) they waited to see who else would venture forth through the breach and be slaughtered.<sup>61</sup>

**Interpretation.** Nebuzaradan came a month after the breach in the walls to supervise the destruction of the city. The exact date is not certain since 2 Kgs 25:8 gives the seventh day but Jer 51:12 gives the tenth day. After the burning of the temple, the palace, and other important buildings (vs. 13) came the task of dismantling the city wall (vs. 14). The verb *ntš*, “pull down,” is a key word, occurring several times throughout the book: Jeremiah is appointed to “pull down” kingdoms (1:10); the Lord Himself is involved in “pulling down” (19:7; 31:28). So the idea of judgment and destruction is at the fore here.<sup>62</sup>

After the destruction of physical properties, the Chaldeans turned their attention to the people (vss 15,16). As in Jer 39:9, we find the same deliberate parallel descriptions for the remnant: *yeter hā'am*, “remnant of the people” and *hanniš'arîm bā'îr*, “the remnant in the city.” Since the same historical milieu is in focus, it may be safe to suggest that the same theological idea is intended: the defeated Jerusalemites constitute a historical remnant, mere survivors of the Babylonian onslaught. They included poor people, those left in the city, deserters, and artisans. It is a mixture of people who are deported to Babylon.

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<sup>59</sup> It has been argued that the occurrence of this destruction in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of King Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 51:12) must be a mistake, since the 18<sup>th</sup> year is given in 52:29. But as Feinberg, 689, shows, there is no contradiction between vs 12 and vs 29. In the first text, the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar has been included. In the second, it has been excluded.

<sup>60</sup> Bright, *Jeremiah*, 367.

<sup>61</sup> Carroll, 863. He claims that these possibilities may have “derived from the story teller’s presentation of the breach as something made by the besieged rather than by the besiegers.”

<sup>62</sup> For the motif of “pulling down,” see also Jer 33:4 and 39:8.

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However, vs 16 denotes that from the remnant who survived the catastrophe, Nebuzaradan left a remnant to carry on agricultural pursuits.<sup>63</sup> They are the “poorest of the land.” This idea of leaving only the dregs of Judean society behind after the sacking of Jerusalem and the deportation of its people suggests that those “left behind were ‘bad figs’, the poorest people.”<sup>64</sup>

John Bright offers a fitting conclusion in this context:

Perhaps the editor felt that on account of the fall of Jerusalem, the event that brought the vindication to Jeremiah’s lifelong announcement of divine judgment, would furnish a fitting conclusion to the book because it would allow history itself to give its silent witness to the truth of the prophetic word.<sup>65</sup>

In the appendix, the conclusive idea concerning the remnant of Judah is that it is meaningless. The final account of the remnant in the book of Jeremiah is that they constitute the scornful dregs of a once prosperous Judean society. In their condition, even the Babylonian overlords are not interested in them. The effect of the judgment is that Judea has been reduced to an insignificant and wanton remnant.

### **Conclusion**

While the book of Jeremiah employs the root *ytr* sparingly, it is notably used. Several conclusive ideas may now be drawn:

1. It is used consistently in combination or connection with *šʾr*. This repeated juxtaposition of both words indicate an underlying intentionality. Its forcefulness cannot be disregarded or overlooked. The remnant is in trouble.

2. The word is used only in the context of judgment. Indeed, it appears only *after* the fall of Jerusalem, the ultimate form of judgment against Judah, because of her infidelity to the covenant. While all other remnant terms (*šʾr*, *mlt*, *plṭ*, and *šrd*) have both positive and negative uses in Jeremiah,<sup>66</sup> such is not the case with *ytr*. It is absolutely negative. As such, there is an implicit idea of covenant curse attached to this word in Jeremiah. While the Babylonians were the *instruments* of judgment,

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<sup>63</sup> J. N. Graham, “‘Vinedressers and Plowmen,’ 2 Kings 25:12 and Jeremiah 52:16,” *BA* 47 (1984): 55-58.

<sup>64</sup> Thompson, 777.

<sup>65</sup> Bright, *Jeremiah*, 370.

<sup>66</sup> See Mulzac, 287-365.



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Yahweh himself was the *agent* of judgment. Yet, this is, in a sense, self-inflicted by the Judeans. They are culpable of covenant violation.

3. The way that *ytr* is used in these closing chapters in Jeremiah leaves a sour taste in the mouth. It may be that the point is being subtly made that these do not constitute the carriers of the divine election promises. As a remnant community they are insignificant.

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## **The Message of God’s People in the Old Testament**

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The principal task of God’s people in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup> was to worship and serve the Lord (Exod 4:22–23a; 15:13–14a; 19:5–6), and to present a right picture of God (Deut 4:5–8; Isa 66:19; Ezek 36:22–24; 37:27–28), a picture which, at the beginning of human history, had become distorted in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1–6).<sup>2</sup> Sinfulness makes humans naturally afraid of God (Gen 3:10), and a twisted view of God

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<sup>1</sup> There are two important delimitations of this article: (1) It is assumed that the Old Testament people formed the so-called Old Testament Church. For further study, see my article, “The Concept and Notion of the Church in the Pentateuch,” in *“For You Have Strengthened Me”: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin Pröbstle, Gerard A. Klingbeil, and Martin G. Klingbeil, (St Peter am Hart: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007), 3–22; and Joseph E. Coleson, “Covenant Community in the Old Testament,” in *Wesleyan Theological Perspectives* 4 (1984): 3–25. (2) This paper does not analyze the teaching of the Old Testament in its entirety (wisdom literature, legislative material, rebukes, calls for repentance, etc.), but mainly evaluates the message of the Old Testament people which needed to be carried and transmitted to others. I can only deal with the topic in the form of a summary, highlighting principle points, and thus I have to simplify. (3) This is not an exegetical but a theological study, therefore the reader should not expect a depth exegesis. However, the author of this article strongly believes that good theology must be built only on a solid exegesis; this is why supportive exegetical material for different theological points is provided in the notes.

<sup>2</sup> See my article “The Nature and Definition of Sin: A Practical Study of Genesis 3:1–6,” in *The Word of God for the People of God: A Tribute to the Ministry of Jack J. Blanco*, ed. Ron du Preez, Philip G. Samaan, and Ron E. M. Clouzet (Collegedale: School of Religion, Southern Adventist University, 2004), 289–306.

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worsens the situation. This is why the primary mission of the Old Testament Church<sup>3</sup> was to present the correct character of God and His loving and righteous acts (Pss 67:1–7; 96:2–9; 105:1–2; 126:2–3; 145:11–12). Only when people are attracted to God and are convinced of His unselfish love toward them personally and toward the world will they trust Him, enjoy His company, follow Him, and live gratefully according to His Word.

### **I. The Content of the Message**

What was in essence the message of the Old Testament Church? To epitomize the content of the Hebrew Scriptures in a few points is an almost impossible task. I will dare to summarize it into five principal themes that are dominant throughout the Old Testament:

**1. God Is the Creator.** The message of the Old Testament people opens with a cornerstone proclamation: God is the Creator (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” [Gen 1:1]).<sup>4</sup> This marvelous confession was the bedrock of all their proclamations because on this premise and critical recognition (Heb 11:3,6) hung the rest of divine revelation. God’s people do not try to prove God’s existence and His creative activity; they simply assume it and boldly declare it. The Creation account testifies to how God created humans in His image and in total dependency on Him. When the prophet Jonah, first missionary to the Assyrians, was asked by sailors who he was, he confessed that he worshiped “the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” (Jonah 1:9). The theme of Creation permeates all biblical material, which is full of references to the God Creator (e.g., Gen 14:19–22; Deut 32:6; Pss 8; 19; 33:9; 104; 139; Isa 40:28; 41:20; 45:7–8; 46:9–10; 55:11; Jer 10:6–16; 51:15–19).

For the Old Testament people of God, the doctrine of Creation was an article of faith on which their message depended. All their thinking was tied to Creation, and their essential doctrinal points can be directly or indirectly traced to their Creation roots. Without protology (the biblical doctrine of first things; i.e., the Creation and the Fall), there is no soteriology (the biblical doctrine of salvation), nor eschatology (the biblical

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<sup>3</sup> We use the phrase “Old Testament Church” in a broad sense which encompasses Old Testament people who believed in and worshiped the true living God from the time of Adam and Eve onward. Israel was a nation from the ethnic point of view, but also a Church when they worshiped the Lord. Thus, we do not equate the Old Testament church with Israel, even though it is included as a community of faith.

<sup>4</sup> All translations of the biblical text are taken from the New International Version.

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doctrine of last things—i.e., the Second Coming of Christ, the Judgment, and the New Earth).<sup>5</sup>

The message of Creation is about life, and the essence of genuine life is about relationship. In the Creation stories, God is presented as the One who is transcendent and universal, establishes relationships, because the purpose of the first Creation narrative (Gen 1:1–2:4a) is about establishing a close relationship between God and humans. The second Creation account (Gen 2:4b–25) is about building a relationship in the most nuclear human cell—marriage.<sup>6</sup> These two relationships, vertical and horizontal, are complementary and must always come in their described, ordered sequence so that human life can be meaningful, beautiful, and happy and humans can develop all their potential. We were created in a total dependency upon God; therefore, only from Him can humans receive all they need for building deep bonds of lasting relationships. First comes a cultivation of a loving relationship with God, then with one's marriage partner, and finally with other people. Trust is the foundation of these relationships. The people of the Old Testament thus presented the living God and the God of relationships! This emphasis on the Creator helps the people of God to have a wall of defense against the infiltration of idolatry (Isa 40:18–28; Jer 10:3–12), which is the primary denial of God's creative power and His uniqueness (Exod 15:11; 20:2–6,23; Deut 4:35,39; 6:14–15; Neh 9:6; Ps 86:10; Isa 44:6–11; 45:18) and is a constant danger and an attractive alternative (humans are like a “factory” for fabricating idols—unfortunately, a very successful “factory”).

Claus Westermann accurately observes that the biblical message about our Creator is always in the context of praises. One cannot understand God as the Creator without admiring and praising Him at the same time. This conjunction with the exaltation of God is vital—He is unique,

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<sup>5</sup> Claus Westermann, *Beginning and End in the Bible*, Biblical Series, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 1, 7, 17–20; 33–39; Norman R. Gulley, “The Impact of Eschatology on Protology,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11/1–2 (2000): 51–101.

<sup>6</sup> From the Garden of Eden until today, we have two precious God-given gifts: the Sabbath (the climax of the first Creation account) and marriage (the apex of the second Creation narrative). For a more detailed interpretation of the biblical-creation accounts, see Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 43–66; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation/Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 3–23; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco: Word, 1987), 1–72.

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alive, no one is like Him, He is above all, and only He can create life. This is why He is worthy of our praise and adoration (see, for example, Pss 8:1–9; 19:1–4; 104:1–3,31–35; compare with Rev 4:11).<sup>7</sup>

**2. The Messiah Will Come.** The message of the Old Testament people gravitates around God's promise of the Seed<sup>8</sup> who will overcome the serpent (Satan) and bring victory over evil. This expectation was their theological center. This promise, given by the God Creator and Judge in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned (Gen 3:15),<sup>9</sup> is the foundational hope of the Old Testament people (Gen 4:1; Num 24:17; Deut 18:15, 18; Isa 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:2). This hope focused on the victorious substitutionary death of the Messiah on our behalf (Isa 53; compare with Gen 22:13–14) and was incorporated into the sacrificial system (Lev 1–7; 16) with blood playing the pivotal role (Exod 12:13,22–23; Lev 17:11), thus pointing to the death of the Lamb of God for sinners.<sup>10</sup> The people of God bore witness to this expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and their eyes were fixed on the future fulfillment of this crucial promise (Isa 11:1–9; 52:13–53:12; Jer 23:5–6; Ezek 34:23; 37:24–28; Hag 2:7; Mal 3:1).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, trans. and intro. by Norman E. Wagner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 37.

<sup>8</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., made the strong point about the centrality of this promise in the Old Testament message. See his *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> See Afolarin O. Ojewole, "The Seed in Genesis 3:15: An Exegetical and Intertextual Study" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Angel M. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1979); J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 422–444; Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> See Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003); Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Fredrick C. Holmgren, *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus*, foreword by Walter Brueggemann (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992).

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Truth about the Messiah as the Promised Man, His identity, and function was unfolded more fully during the ongoing time. The Pentateuch lays down the solid foundation for messianic expectations. First, God gave the promise about the Victorious Seed in Gen 3:15, which is rightly called the “mother prophecy”<sup>12</sup> that gave a basis for all other messianic promises, and then Eve added her understanding of this statement in the hopeful words: “I have received a man that is the Lord” (Gen 4:1; translation is mine); it means that according to her understanding, the Messiah would be divine.<sup>13</sup> Afterwards it was stated that God would “dwell in the tents of Shem” (Gen 9:27); He would come from Abraham’s offspring, and through Him the blessing would be truly mediated to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3). The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10), would act as a victorious king (Num 24:17), but at the same time He would be a prophet (Deut 18:18). This person would bear different titles like Seed, Shiloh, Scepter, Star, King, and Prophet. Later in the Messianic Psalms, His mission was more defined (Pss 2; 22; 24; 110); and in the figures of the Davidic King (Isa 11:1–10; Jer 23:5–6; Ezek 34:23–26; 37:24–28), the Servant of the Lord (Isa 42; 49; 50; 52:13–53:12; 61:1–3), and the Son of Man (Dan 7:14), these messianic expectations were brought to a climax. In addition, the prophetic material contains many messianic predictions and new titles for Him (for example, Isa 4:2; 7:14; 9:6; Jer 23:5–6; Ezek 21:25–27; 34:23–31; 37:15–28; Dan 9:24–27; Hos 3:3–5; Mic 5:2; Hag 2:6–9; Mal 4:2).<sup>14</sup>

**3. God Will Establish His Kingdom.** The message of the Old Testament people was about God’s kingdom. On the one hand, they rejoiced over the gift of life with an emphasis on the present joy of the physical dimensions, because God’s creation was “very good” (Gen 1:31); but on the other hand, they pointed to the future where the Lord would be totally in control and sin would be no more (Isa 24–27; 65–66; Ezek 38–48; Dan 2). God is the Sovereign Ruler of the whole universe; He reigns, knows the end from the very beginning, and will accomplish His purposes (Job 1:6; Isa 46:9–10). He is the Director of human history (Dan

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<sup>12</sup> James E. Smith, *What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah* (Nashville: Nelson, 1993), 38.

<sup>13</sup> See Kaiser, *The Messiah*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Kaiser argues for sixty-five direct messianic passages in the Old Testament (six predictions in the Pentateuch, four in Job, five prior to and during the Davidic Era, eleven in Psalms, and thirty-nine in the Prophets of the Old Testament). See the summary chart in his book *The Messiah*, 240–242.

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2:21) and will bring it to its climax by establishing His kingdom (Zech 14:9; Dan 2:44; 7:27). He is the mighty Warrior (Exod 15:1-3; Deut 7:1-2; Josh 5:13-15).<sup>15</sup> God Himself (not humans by their political or religious achievements) will establish this kingdom on earth, and He will come personally to inaugurate it (Dan 2:45). The faithful people of God will inherit the kingdom of God (Dan 7:22,27). God is the King and Restorer of the lost paradise (Dan 2:47; Pss 24:7; 47:7,9; Isa 32:1; Jer 30:9; Hos 3:5). The resurrection of the dead will accompany this unique intervention of God in human history by establishing the kingdom of God (Job 19:25-27; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2).

**4. Salvation/Redemption Comes from the Lord.** The biblical message reveals its straightforward paradigm—from Creation (Gen 1-2) through de-Creation (the Fall [Gen 3] and the Flood accounts [Gen 6-7]) to re-Creation (Gen 8-9; and fully in Rev 21-22).<sup>16</sup> It is a deliberate design, and between Creation and the ultimate new Creation lies the story of redemption, of how God deals with sin and how He saves those who believe in Him.<sup>17</sup> God's people testify that God is their Savior and Redeemer (Deut 32:15; 2 Sam 22:3; 1 Chr 16:35; Job 19:25; Pss 18:46; 19:14; 43:5; Isa 44:6; 48:17; 59:20; Jer 14:8; Hos 13:4) and that salvation comes from the Lord (Pss 62:1; 118:14; Isa 12:2; Jonah 2:9) as a result of His grace (Gen 6:8; Exod 34:6; Ps 103:8-11). Righteousness is received from the Lord as a free gift through faith (Gen 15:6; Ps 51:10-12; Hab 2:4; Isa 61:10), otherwise we are all sinful and our robes dirty (Isa 64:6; Ps 51:4-5; Eccl 7:20; Jer 13:23; 17:9). Only the Lord forgives transgressions, blots them out, and brings a solution to the sin problem (Exod 34:6; Pss 32:1-2; 103:12; Isa 1:18; 38:17; 43:25; 44:22; Jer 32:34; Mic

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<sup>15</sup> Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, 10 (Sheffield: Academic, 1997.), 80-82, speaks about the creation—uncreation—re-creation theme in relationship to Gen 1-11.

<sup>17</sup> Let us not forget that redemption and salvation are nothing more than a spiritual re-creation which culminates in the restoration of all things in Christ (Eph 1:10; 1 Cor 15:20,53-57). In this way a new concept of time is introduced which flows from the beginning of human history (Creation) to the ultimate end (establishment of the kingdom of God). This understanding of time is called “linear” in contrast to a “cyclical” pagan view of time. This is presented by the Old Testament people as a result of God's revelation.

7:19). The people of the Old Testament proclaimed this essential truth about the kingdom of grace.<sup>18</sup>

**5. God Is the Ultimate Judge of All People.** An indispensable part of the message of the people of God in the Old Testament was that God is the Judge of humanity, of all nations and people, because He is the God of justice. This message lay at the heart of God's revelation and gave a profound paradigm to their thinking because next to the fundamental proclamation that God is the Creator (Gen 1–2), the Lord is presented as the Judge: in the Garden of Eden there is the first reference to a trial judgment (Gen 3:8–24).<sup>19</sup> Thus, from the very beginning of divine revelation, God is repeatedly presented in that capacity (Gen 3; 4; 6–9; 11; 18–19; etc.), and judgment is understood as an integral part of His nature, His divine prerogative, and His very fundamental characteristic.<sup>20</sup> News about divine judgment saturates biblical revelation (Pss 7:8–9; 76:8–9; Isa 35:4–5; Ezek 7:3–4; 9:1–11; 18:30; Dan 7:22,26). Abraham calls God “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen 18:25). Two biblical books

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<sup>18</sup> There is no clear distinction made in the Old Testament between the first and second coming of the Messiah. Both pictures merge together, and the reader needs to pay close attention to the context and hints in the text as to where to put its timing. It is like the distance of stars in constellations. For example, it seems to human eyes that in the constellation of Orion all stars are on an equal level and the same distance from the earth. However, in reality we know with the help of telescopes that each star is a different distance, some relatively close and others much farther away. The depth is different for each star, but to us all of Orion's stars seem like they are hanging on the same level. Similarly, to the Old Testament people, the first and second Advents were seen as one future event (see, for example, Isa 52:13–15; Zech 9:9–13; 12–14). Only later revelation provided precise insight into this time related matter.

<sup>19</sup> Claus Westerman, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Ausbur, 1984), 254: “The purpose of the trial scene is to make clear to the man and the woman what they have done.” In this judgment the grace and justice of God are intermingled. Grace was demonstrated because the first couple did not die on the day when they ate the forbidden fruit as was stated by God (Gen 2:16–17; 3:9; compare with Rev 13:8), and the proto-Gospel with the promise of the Seed and victory over the serpent was given (Gen 3:15). Justice was exhibited because they were expelled from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24) and later they died (Gen 5:5).”

The very first question of God: “Where are you?” was manifold in purpose. It was an invitation of grace to a dialogue, then a help to materialize where they were in their relationship with God (instead of enjoying His presence they were afraid of Him and hiding), and finally it was also a call to responsibility for past sinful action.

<sup>20</sup> For details of the judgment theme in the Bible, see my article, “Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment (An Overview of a Theocentric-Christocentric Approach),” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15/1 (2004): 138–165.



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carry the concept of judgment in their titles: the book of Judges and the book of Daniel.<sup>21</sup> Prophets, as servants of the covenant, speak eloquently about God's impending and eschatological judgments (e.g., Joel 3:12; Jonah 3:4; Hos 1:8; 2:23; Amos 5:18–20; Isa 6:1–13; 26:9–11; Jer 11:20; Ezek 7:3–4; 9:1–11; 18:30). Additionally, wisdom literature paints a judgment picture (e.g., Job 19:25,29; Pss 50:6; 96:13; Eccl 12:13–14).

Thus, humans are accountable to God, and they are responsible for their work. The message of God's people is to call all to repentance, to come back to God, to respect, love and obey Him, and do what is right and good (Deut 10:12–12; 30:6; Isa 58:6–12; Joel 2:12–14; Jonah 3:2–9; Mic 6:8). To understand His judgments means to know God better and comprehend His values and priorities. God actually invites us to apprehend His judgments in order to be able to deliberately declare that He is the God of love and justice (Pss 34:8; 51:4; compare with Rom 3:4; Phil 2:10–11), because His word and character were challenged and ridiculed from the beginning (Gen 3:1–5; Ezek 28:16 [the Hebrew root *rakal* can also mean “go around to gossip or slander”<sup>22</sup>]; Isa 14:12–15; Job 1:6–12).<sup>23</sup>

## **II. How Was the Message of the Old Testament People Conveyed?**

There are at least four main ways the message was carried by the Old Testament people to each successive generation and those who were interested to learn about the true God, His truth, and the plan of salvation:

**1. Through Words: Stories, Teaching, and Preaching.** The Old Testament people of God recounted God's mighty acts, His instructions,

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<sup>21</sup> The book of Judges is called in Hebrew *shophtim*, derived from the root *shapat*, “to judge.” The Hebrew name “Daniel” means “God is my Judge.” In a sense we all bear the symbolic name Daniel, because God is Judge of all of us. In the book of Revelation, the last, seventh church is named “Laodicea” (Rev 3:14–22), which means “people of judgment.” See also the following studies on judgment: Eric Alan Mitchell, *A Literary Examination of the Function of Satire in the mišpaṭ hammelek of 1 Samuel 8* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical, 2007); Temba L. J. Mafico, *Yahweh's Emergence as “Judge” Among the Gods: A Study of the Hebrew Root špt* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “Satan's Celestial Slander,” *Perspective Digest* 1/1 (1996): 31–34.

<sup>23</sup> See also Jose M. Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1985). It is important to notice that all five principal thoughts of the Old Testament Church (God is the Creator; belief in the Messiah Jesus; hope in the establishment of God's kingdom; salvation as God's gift; and God as Judge) are capsuled in the Three Angels' Message of Revelation 14:6–13.

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and His law to their children and other families (Deut 6:6–9; Ps 145:4–7). They retold the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures—the accounts of Creation, Flood, patriarchs, Exodus, judges, kings, etc. (i.e., the plan of salvation in the form of stories). According to Exod 12, parents had to provide appropriate answers to the inquiring questions of their children (12:26–27).

Another way believers in the Old Testament times proclaimed the truth about God was their usage of different designations for God—His different names and titles. There are nuances of meaning associated with the names of the Deity. For example, *Yahweh* (Gen 2:4) is a personal, immanent, close God, the God of the covenant and His people; *Elohim* (Gen 1:1) is a transcendent God of all human beings, the powerful Creator; and *El Shadday* (Gen 17:1) is an omnipotent powerful God.<sup>24</sup> The people of God also praised the Lord by stressing His attributes in different actions. They described the true God as being holy (Lev 11:44; 19:2; Isa 6:3), loving (Deut 6:5; Ps 103:10–11; Isa 63:8), gracious (Joel 2:12), compassionate (Ps 103:13), patient (Ps 103:8), faithful (Deut 7:9; Ps 33:4; Isa 49:7; Lam 3:23), kind (Jer 9:24); good (Exod 33:19; Pss 23:6; 34:8), knowing the end from the beginning (Isa 46:9–10), true (Jer 10:10), just (Gen 18:25), truthful (Pss 31:5; 40:10), forgiving (Exod 34:6; Ps 32:1–2), merciful (Deut 4:31; Neh 9:31), jealous (Exod 20:5; Exod 34:14), powerful (Ps 29:4; Jer 32:18), caring (Exod 19:4), etc. The psalmists very often praised God’s goodness, steadfast love, and faithfulness (Pss 100; 117; 137).

**2. Through the Sanctuary Services.** The spiritual life of the Old Testament people was concentrated around the sanctuary/temple where God’s presence resided (Exod 25:8; 40:34–35; 2 Chr 7:1–3; Isa 6:1–4). All services in the sanctuary were an object lesson of God’s plan of redemption.<sup>25</sup> There God explained how He dealt with sin and revealed how He saved people. Sacrifices foretold the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus.

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed discussion on this point, see Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch: Eight Lectures* (Jerusalem: Magnes, The Hebrew University, 1983); and Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper, 1958).

<sup>25</sup> See Roy E. Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Frank B. Holbrook, *The Atoning Priesthood of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1996); Edward Heppinstall, *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1972); Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner, eds., *The Sanctuary and*

**3. Through Celebrating Festivals.** The religious calendar of God's people during the Old Testament time commemorated the most important events from the story of redemption, pointed to divine interventions in human history, and thus facilitated a better understanding of God and His plans. The liturgical anchors were incorporated into the yearly cycle around the spring and fall festivals (Lev 23; Num 28–29), where three feasts were dominant and each Israelite had to attend them: the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Exod 23:14–17). The message in rituals helped people to become familiar with God's instructions, because repetition of religious activities in celebration of different festivals year after year was a powerful way to experience the message. Faith had to be lived tangibly and not only confessed.<sup>26</sup>

**4. Through Legislation.** Divine law, especially the Decalogue, is an expression of God's character because His law reveals who is God. The Legislator's imprint is seen in the different laws, codes, and precepts. God's law was a warrant of life, therefore it was a joy for the Old Testament people to meditate on God's instructions day and night (Pss 1:2; 119; Prov 3–4). By keeping the law of God, people proclaimed in tangible, everyday life the message of their God (Deut 4:5–10).

In addition, the practical message of the Old Testament people of God was also carried through songs, prayers, sign-actions (e.g., Prophet Ezekiel performed twelve symbolic acts), re-establishments of the covenant, and recitation of confessions of faith like the *Shema* (Deut 6:4–9), the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–17; Deut 5:6–21), or the Exodus story (Exod 12:25–27; Deut 26:5–11) because these practices revealed the theology of God's people and their value system. Thus, truth became a part of their everyday lifestyle.

### III. The Main Characteristics of the Message of the Old Testament People

The basic question is, what are the main characteristics of the Old Testament message? The message's content and how it was conveyed

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*the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> Activities of the Church religious calendar should be centered on God's salvific events and not primarily focused on anthropocentric programs scheduled on special days during the year. We need to rethink our practices and learn from the liturgical calendar of the Old Testament people in order that our yearly cycle be theocentric, oriented vertically on the main events in the plan of salvation, and celebrate God's work for humanity, which will help to create a right attitude and joyful service.

nanced the characteristics of the truth which the people of God presented during Old Testament times.

**1. Revelational.** The message of the Old Testament people is revelational; this means that it is revealed by the Lord to human instruments who transmit the message (Jer 1:2; Ezek 1:3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; compare with 1 Thess 3:16–17; 2 Pet 1:20–21). The message is thus not of human invention, and in reality it is a self-revelation of God stated sometimes directly (Exod 20:1–17; 34:6–7), but mainly indirectly (for example, the prophetic formula: “Thus says the Lord”; Exod 4:22; 5:1; Isa 7:7; 37:6; 48:17; Jer 2:2,5,27; 5:14; Ezek 2:4; 3:11,27, etc.). In other words, the message of the Hebrew Scriptures comes from above, from an outside source. One can know the God of the Old Testament only on the basis of God’s revelation (Amos 3:7; Deut 29:29). The people of God can know God because He has made Himself known to them! Revelation is a verb (*gālāh*, “to reveal”) and is used in the passive forms (when it is employed with the idea of revelation; i.e., “it was revealed”; “it has been uncovered”) in order to demonstrate the dynamics of the process of revelation that is given by God to prophets or other writers.<sup>27</sup>

Old Testament people lived by what God said about Himself, from what He revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:6–7; Deut 8:3).<sup>28</sup> This self-revelation of God is the backbone of the biblical message and theology; it is the golden thread of the Old Testament, and the rest of the Old Testament explains what it means and is a commentary on it (see, for example, Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

**2. Theological.** The message of the Old Testament people is theological in nature. The Hebrew Scriptures are not only coming from God, but it is primarily a message about God. The nature of God’s revelation is to present the right picture of God and genuinely testify about the character of the true living God and who He is. It means that the message of the Old Testament people is theocentric and must be presented from

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<sup>27</sup> See Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 98–101. Smith reports: “Hebrew does not have a noun for revelation” (99).

<sup>28</sup> This highest description of the goodness of God (see Exod 33:18–19) is repeated by Moses (Num 14:17–19; Deut 4:31), David (Pss 103:8; 145:8), and many prophets and Bible writers (Neh 9:17; Joel 2:13; Nah 1:2–3; Mic 7:18; Jonah when he wanted to excuse his disobedience [4:2]).

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that perspective; the message is Messiah-centered (see John 5:39–40; Luke 24:27, 44; 1 Cor 10:1–4).<sup>29</sup>

**3. Historical.** The message of the Old Testament people is historical in nature. God speaks in time and space. Salvation history is factual, real, and is presented with a linear understanding of time, in contrast to a cyclical pagan understanding of time. In other words, the Old Testament message is rooted in history and actually happens (including Gen 1–11). This is in sharp contrast with philosophical Greek platonic or gnostic thinking in which only the world of ideas is good, but not actual physical events in history. Kerygma is good, but so is history.<sup>30</sup>

**4. Relational.** The message of the Old Testament people is relational. The relationship with God is a **faith relationship** based on trust (Gen 15:6; Isa 53:1). God's desire to build a personal relationship with His people is well explained in Exod 19:4: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and *brought you to myself*." True religion is about a personal, intimate, and close relationship with God that is then manifested in right relationships with others (Lev 19:18)! The stress on relationship with God is attested to in different parts of the Hebrew Scriptures (Num 15:41; Deut 10:12; 2 Chr 30:9; Neh 1:9; Jer 24:7; Lam 3:40; 5:21; Hos 6:1; 12:6; 14:1; Joel 2:12; Amos 5:4, 6; Zech 1:3). God is always in search of humanity; He takes the first step. When Adam and Eve sinned, they tried to hide from God,

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<sup>29</sup> See especially, Brian Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). The celebration of the Passover (Exod 12) was an integral part of the religious cycle of God's people. In this celebration, the symbolism of the blood played a very significant role. Theologically speaking, the blood of the lamb was a sign of protection, salvation, and life (Exod 12:13) and pointed to the blood of Jesus (Rom 3:25; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:18–19; Heb 9:11–28).

<sup>30</sup> The relationship between message and history is a very significant hermeneutical problem in modern scholarship. The issue is how one understands history. Can we really have a true message without being rooted in history? Salvation history is real history (see Paul's underlining the factuality of the physical resurrection of Jesus—1 Cor 15:12–20).

Separating faith and history is like neo-Docetism or neo-Platonism. These models of interpreting the historicity of events do not match with biblical realism because they dissect the physical and spiritual realms. To try to find only a historical core in the biblical narratives and reject the rest can be compared to an "onion" effect. You peel off different layers of the onion in order to get to the core, but after taking off all the layers, you discover that there is no core because an onion is only composed of various layers. To build theology only on kerygma or abstract faith is a very dangerous enterprise; it may be that at the end nothing will be left. It is like making out of theology a philosophy that is built on appealing ideas that have no relevance to time and space.

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but He was looking after them, calling them back (Gen 3:9). This is the pattern of God's love for human beings.

The message of the Old Testament stresses a **love relationship**. Not only that God is love (Isa 63:9), but also the human's response to God needs to be motivated by love. The first and greatest commandment underlines this fact: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:5; see also Deut 10:12; 30:6).

This relationship is built on a **covenant relationship**. The covenant formula, "I will be your God and you will be my people" (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Deut 26:17–18; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 31:33; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 34:30; 36:26–28; compare with Exod 19:5–6; Isa 51:16; Hos 1:9; Zech 8:8), is the heart of His covenantal promise and speaks eloquently about the close relationship God wants to build with His followers.<sup>31</sup> A covenant, a legal establishment of a relationship, is a means by which God expresses His faithfulness and care for His children and demonstrates His lasting will. He wants His people to maintain an exclusive and meaningful relationship with Him. Thus, the message of the Old Testament people was carried also by the re-establishments of the covenant of grace in which fundamental stipulations were incorporated in order that the people might maintain the right relationship with the Lord (Gen 6; 9; 12; 15; 17; Josh 24; 2 Sam 7; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 11:19–20; 18:31; 36:26–27).

This relationship leads to a concrete **community of faith**. Individuals need to make their decisions for God (Ezek 14:14; 18:4,21,32; Hab 2:4), but they need to be integrated into the fellowship of faith in order to participate in the life of this community and holy congregation (Josh 2; Ruth 1:15–16; Lev 23:3; Lev 17–18). The Old Testament Church is a result of God's activity for humanity. The community of faith forms people who are called by God to follow Him in faith and obedience.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998); Gerhard F. Hasel, *Covenant in Blood* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1982); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980); John H. Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); D. J. McCarty, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1972).

<sup>32</sup> In the biblical flood story only eight people were saved; they were the only ones left from the rest of the antediluvian world that was destroyed (see the key word *sha'ar* "to be left" or "remain" used in 7:23). Thus, the idea of the faithful remnant is introduced in this account.

**5. Monotheistic.** The message of the Old Testament people is monotheistic. The basic confession of faith of the people of the Old Testament, “*Shema Yisrael, Adonay Elohenu, Adonay ‘echad*” (“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one”; Deut 6:4),<sup>33</sup> was their straightforward, fundamental, and unequivocal proclamation of monotheism. Any form of polytheism, pantheism, or henotheism was rejected. In a polytheistic society, this Hebrew monotheistic belief was a striking declaration. God is one, ultimate, and He is above all. The idea of the uniqueness of God is stressed several times in the Old Testament because He alone is the true God Creator and besides Him there is none (Exod 15:11; Deut 4:35,39; 32:39; 1 Kgs 8:60; Neh 9:6; Ps 86:10; Isa 44:6–24; 45:5–18; 45:22–24; 46:1–4; Zech 14:9).

**6. The Great Controversy/Spiritual Warfare Framework.** The message of the Old Testament people is framed by the great controversy imagery. God is love, but His enemy Satan discredits Him and fights against Him (Job 1:6–12; Gen 3:1–6, 15). Thus, the message of the Old Testament people explains the enmity between God and Satan, good and

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It is worthwhile to note that reformers have made a distinction between the visible and the invisible church, but this terminology reminds of the platonic categories of “ideal” and “real.” However, in the Pentateuch, the followers of God always formed a visible community. The church as a gathering of the believers in God cannot be hidden. The Pentateuch made a clear distinction between the true followers of God (remnant) and the others who somehow relate to Him by name but not in a genuine way (Num 13–14; 16; Deut 10:16; 30:16). Later on, the prophets would vividly reinforce the concept of the remnant (especially Isa 11:11; Jer 23:3; Zech 8:12), and the same is true for Paul when he stresses that not all from ethnic Israel belong to the true Israel (Rom 9:6; compare with Rom 2:28–29; 1 Cor 10:32; Gal 3:26–29; 6:16). About the concept of the remnant, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, Andrews University Monographs Studies in Religion, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1974), who differentiates between historical, faithful, and eschatological remnant.

It is accurate to stress that Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology is clustered around the concept of the remnant, or to state it differently, Adventist ecclesiology is principally a remnant theology.

<sup>33</sup> For the discussion on the *Shema*, see Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 142; Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 168; S. H. Gordon, “Yahweh is our God, is ‘One,’” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970): 198; S. D. McBride, “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh Alone,” *Interpretation* 27 (1973): 274; Dwight A. Pryor, “One God and Lord,” a paper presented at A Consultation on Christianity’s Hebrew Foundations with the Hebraic Heritage Christian School of Theology, Association of Jewish and Christian Believers, and Restoration Foundation, Kingwood, TX, 23–24 April 2004.

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evil, truth and lie, light and darkness, and points to God's victory, because the death of the *Ebed Yahweh* (the Suffering Servant) will be a victorious death (Isa 53). The results of this spiritual warfare will be decisive and lasting, because God fights only with moral power (and not physical strength), i.e., with a pure arsenal of love, truth, justice, and freedom. For deeper insights into the cosmic conflict or spiritual warfare from an Old Testament perspective, one needs to study passages like Job 1–2; Gen 1–3; Isa 14:12–15; and Ezek 28:11–19.<sup>34</sup> God will prevail, He is the Victor, and He will establish His kingdom at the end of human history (Isa 24:23; Dan 2:44; 7:27).

**7. Eschatological.** The message of the Old Testament people is eschatological in scope. The eschatological nature of the message of the Old Testament time believers is well attested because the hope in the coming of the Promised Seed, the Messiah, is introduced in the midst of the darkness of the first apostasy of Adam and Eve: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3:15). This text is rightly called a protoevangelium.<sup>35</sup> This eschatological hope permeates the Old Testament from the Pentateuch to the end.<sup>36</sup> The Old Testament Church was an eschatological community: the Messiah was expected and with Him also God's kingdom (Isa 24–27; 65–66).

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<sup>34</sup> See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1950); idem, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1947); Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil”; Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); idem, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); Jiří Moskala, “Issues in the Cosmic Controversy Between God and Satan According to the Prologue of the Book of Job,” in *The Cosmic Battle for Planet Earth: Essays in Honor of Norman R. Gulley*, ed. Ron du Preez and Jiří Moskala (Berrien Springs: Old Testament Department, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2003), 47–67; Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior*. Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> Kaiser, *The Messiah*, 37; see also Ojewole, 4.

<sup>36</sup> For the eschatological focus of the Pentateuch, see, Gerald Klingbeil, “Studying the Eschatological Concepts in the Pentateuch,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 174–187; for the eschatological scope of the Old Testament, see Richard M. Davidson, “The Eschatological Literary Structure of the Old Testament,” in *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan*, ed. Jiří Moskala (Berrien Springs: Old Testament Department, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2000), 349–366. See also, Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2001).



**8. Worship Oriented.** The message of the Old Testament people was worship oriented.<sup>37</sup> True knowledge of God leads to gratitude and worship, which is a response to received grace and mercy, and about re-establishing a genuine relationship with and attitude toward God. Abram built altars and called on the name of the Lord as His witness (Gen 12:8; 13:4,18), and the worship of the Old Testament people was centered around the sanctuary, which was to be “a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa 56:7).

On the basis of the story about Abel's and Cain's worship (Gen 4:2–9), God's people provided a very significant insight into true and false worship and taught what are the crucial elements of a genuine approach to God. In order to know the answer to this issue, one needs to ask, Why did God accept the sacrifice of Abel but reject the worship of Cain? There are at least five hints in Gen 4:3–9 that give insight into the characteristics of authentic worship:

*A. The Kind of Sacrifice.* Abel's sacrifice was a bloody sacrifice, but Cain offered only vegetation.<sup>38</sup> Thus, true worship must always be theocentric, in view of the coming Messiah, the Savior (the symbolism of blood in an animal sacrifice plays a key role).

*B. The Nature of Sacrifice.* Cain only brought something from the products of the land (“some of the fruits of the soil”; v. 3), but Abel offered the best of the best (“fat portions from some of the firstborn [animals]”; v. 4). True worship must be our best response to God's love—a submission of our entire life to Him, and not only a portion of it. Gratitude for His grace and goodness leads us to give the best—i.e., ourselves—to Him.

*C. Genuine Motivations.* Verses 4b and 5a underline that God looked first upon the persons (Cain and Abel) and then upon their sacrifices. God's interest is in people and not only upon what they are doing! He looks first upon our heart in worship. True worship must be done from

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<sup>37</sup> For the understanding of worship from the Adventist position, see Raymond C. Holmes, *Sing a New Song: Worship Renewal for Adventists Today* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1984). See also Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> It reminds the reader of the Genesis situation after sin (Gen 3:7,21), when Adam and Eve made for themselves garments out of fig leaves (vegetation), but God then provided skin garments (the sacrifice of an animal is thus anticipated). The first couple could not cover their nakedness (i.e., guilt) by their own works; they needed God's solution to their alienation from God and their sin. Human self-righteousness is pitted against the righteousness of God that can only be received as a precious gift and needs to be put on!

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the unselfish heart, from true motives. Acceptable worship must always be authentic, sincere, and honest.

*D. Willingness to Obey.* Cain played with God; he wanted to manipulate Him through his sacrifice. This is indicated by God's statement to Cain: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Gen 4:7a). Cain wanted to do things in his own way without obedience, to manipulate God, to appease Him, but Abel was willing to listen and follow God's instructions. True worship must be connected with a willingness to obey. The pagan principle in worship can be summarized by the Latin phrase "*do ut des*" (I give in order that you give).

*E. Humble Attitude.* The whole story teaches that we can come to God as we are but not in any manner—only with a contrite spirit and humble heart (Isa 57:15). A right attitude toward God and consequently toward humans is the key factor in worship.<sup>39</sup>

**9. Ethical.** The message of the Old Testament people was ethical, calling for response. Their message was not philosophical and was not given in the form of a sophisticated tractate; it was an ethical call for right decisions and obedience. The God of the Old Testament people is a God of action. He expects His followers to act similarly and out of gratitude for His mighty acts to live according to His will. God's gracious salvific activity leads to obedience (Gen 2:16–17; Exod 20:1–2; Deut 6:5–9; Mic 6:8). God called His people out of Egypt, intervened on their behalf, and then gave them the gift of the law. The Sabbath is a special sign of that unique relationship between God and His people (Exod 31:12–13; Ezek 20:12,20). In this way, God's people call others to obey His voice and follow Him. The Prophet Isaiah predicted that people from other nations would come to the temple to learn about the true God and keep the Sabbath day holy (Isa 56:2–8).

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<sup>39</sup> Cain wanted to dismiss the "cause" of his trouble without repentance, without changing his offensive attitude toward life. According to his view, God "favored" Abel, and Cain envisioned that he needed to get rid of Abel in order to receive God's favor and blessing, so he killed his brother. He wanted to force God in order to secure God's acceptance.

Note that the first murder was done in connection with worship. Worship is a matter of life and death; and in the dramatic story of Cain and Abel, not only the false and true systems of worship are introduced, but also presented are the differences between true and false worshipers. There are two different attitudes toward God, and the Old Testament Church needed to cultivate a wholehearted connection with God in truth, because it is not enough to perform religious acts, claim God's presence, and pray.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer eloquently explains: "In the Bible 'rest' really means more than 'having a rest.' It means . . . turning our eyes absolutely upon God's being God and toward worshipping him."<sup>40</sup> God is entering into His rest, and He makes it possible for humans to rest. John Walton correctly states: "The divine Sabbath is seen as the cause of the human Sabbath."<sup>41</sup> When we pause, we participate in divine rest; we rest in Him. "God does the work, human beings enjoy the results."<sup>42</sup> Karl Barth explains it precisely by pointing out that God's rest day is man's first full day, that man rests before he works—man's life therefore begins with the gospel, grace, and not the law, in freedom to celebrate with joy the seventh day and not with an obligation to work.<sup>43</sup> The Sabbath is thus the actual start for life. First must come a relationship with God and then work and service for others. First humans need to be charged with energy and then they can work! Sabbath in this sense becomes a starting point of life, because it is a cultivation of His presence in life. The Sabbath teaches us to enjoy fellowship and not performance. A relationship is what matters and not achievements. The Sabbath is a deep lesson teaching us that we as humans need to be God-oriented and people-oriented beings and not thing oriented or work oriented. The Sabbath helps us to start every week refreshed, to start anew.

The message of God's people underlined that obedience is the result of God's re-creative work in them. It is a matter of a new heart (capitulation, dedication, and a new orientation in life) and accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joshua aptly stated: "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins" (Josh 24:19). The prophet Ezekiel profoundly

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<sup>40</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 40.

<sup>41</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 153.

<sup>42</sup> Gregory P. Nelson, *A Touch of Heaven: Finding New Meaning in Sabbath Rest* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1999), 30. Samuel Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1988), 69: "Thus on and through the Sabbath, God invites us to view our work in the light of His accomplishments."

<sup>43</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.4:52: "It is only by participation in God's celebrating that he [man] can and may and shall also celebrate on this seventh day, which is his first day. But this is just what he is commanded to do. Hence his history under the command of God really begins with the Gospel and not with the Law, with an accorded celebration and not a required task, with a prepared rejoicing and not with care and toil, with a freedom given to him and not an imposed obligation, with a rest and not with an activity."

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explains that obedience is possible only through God's intervention in our lives: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow [cause you to obey] my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek 36:26–27).

**10. Mission Oriented.** The message of the Old Testament people was mission and service oriented. The followers of God are called to be His witnesses. The Old Testament Church was a witnessing and serving community (Exod 18:9–11; Josh 2:8–11).<sup>44</sup>

**Conclusion**

The people of the Old Testament (or it might be better to say "Older Testament," "First Testament," "Hebrew Scriptures," or "Scriptures of Jesus and the Apostles"<sup>45</sup>) are called to embrace a divine, authoritative revelation and announce the truth about God, His character, and His plan of salvation, which presents God as the Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. Thus, the message of the Old Testament Church was primarily about God. They boldly proclaimed that He is the Creator and humans are His children created in His image and that they are accountable to Him. It is also a message about humanity, our sinfulness, alienation from God, and lostness. Humans have no solution to the problem of sin; only God can resolve this enigma. This is why the hope of the people of God in the Old Testament gravitates and centers around the Promised Seed, the Messiah, because forgiveness, salvation, and restoration comes uniquely from the Lord. He will come to establish His eternal kingdom. To declare and live this message was the mission of the people of God in the Old Testament.

The first task of the Old Testament people was to paint a correct picture of God before the people because it had been distorted by Satan from the very beginning (Gen 3:1). The community of believers began with the first couple (Adam and Eve) and continued in the line of families that wanted to build a right relationship with God and to serve others (like Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses). This community of faith believed in One God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. One family witnessed to another family about the mighty acts of God (Ps 145:4).

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<sup>44</sup> For details, see my follow-up article "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament" (forthcoming).

<sup>45</sup> See Philip Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

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After the Exodus from Egypt, Israel was formed as a nation and a church at the same time in order to be a living witness for God in the world.<sup>46</sup> The people of God worshiped the Lord God who made a covenant with His people (Exod 19:4–6), were gathered together for a holy assembly on Sabbaths (Lev 23:3), and came to the tabernacle to learn more about God, His will, the plan of salvation, and how to follow Him. Robert Reymond rightly states: “The church of God in Old Testament times, rooted initially and prophetically in the *protoevangelium* (Gen 3:15) and covenantally in Genesis patriarchs (Rom 11:28), blossomed mainly within the nation of Israel.”<sup>47</sup>

The Old Testament people of God constitutes people who are called by God to form a community of believers in the Lord (*Yahweh*) and His promised Messiah.<sup>48</sup> These people of God are called to be His witnesses for the expectation of the Messiah, establishment of His kingdom, His truth, and unselfishly serve others in order that they can also know the true God, His message, and become His disciples. Worship is an integral part of this community, but not its goal per se, because the reason for their existence is in accomplishing its mission for others by serving them and teaching them the true worship. Genuine worship is a response to God's love and is built on His Presence and on a true respect of His word/law.

In the Old Testament, the community of God's people is never called to be the kingdom of God. Its members are not building the kingdom of God on earth, but they are expecting the kingdom of God that comes from above as a result of His activity. The people of God in the Old Testament should live in a loving, dependant, and responsible covenant relationship with their Creator in order to worship Him, witness about His goodness, and serve others in need. The Old Testament prophets, as servants of the covenant, called people to the original intent of the covenant, to renew a right attitude toward God and accomplish its mission (Jer 31:31–33; Ezek 36:22–32).

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<sup>46</sup> Robert L. Reymond correctly explains: “The true covenant community of God was then, as it has ever been, the remnant *within* the external community of the nation (Isa 10:22; Rom 9:27)” (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nashville, T: Thomas Nelson, 1998], 806).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 806.

<sup>48</sup> Reymond gives an insightful definition of the church: “The church in Scripture is composed of all the redeemed in every age who are saved by grace through personal faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, ‘the seed of the woman’ (Gen 3:15) and suffering Messiah (Isa 53:5–10)” (Reymond, 805).

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The message that was proclaimed in Old Testament times is the same in principle that we are commissioned to preach. The eternal Gospel has to be preached to our contemporary world (Rev 14:6), and this message needs to be interpreted theocentricly, otherwise it is not an eternal Gospel. We need to be on guard against falling into Marcionic tendencies in the interpretation of the Gospel by creating a gap between the Old and New Testaments or speaking about two systems of salvation.<sup>49</sup> Our emphasis in presenting truth may be different because we are not expecting the first but the second coming of the Messiah; however, presenting God as the Creator, Re-Creator, and Judge was and is an integral part of the Gospel.<sup>50</sup>

I conclude that the message of the Old Testament people was about love, faith, and hope! A relationship of love was always the most essential constituent of the true religion because our God is a God of love and of relationships. Their message was the Gospel; it was good news about our God, Creator, Redeemer, Judge, King, and Lord, and His purposes for this world and beyond. This message started with the Gospel according to Moses, was developed throughout the whole Old Testament, was centered on the Promised Seed (the coming of the Messiah), and culminated with the message about the resurrection and the kingdom of God that would be established by God through His intervention in our history. This kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom. The Old Testament community of faith was a witnessing community with a worldwide mission.

“God is love”; “God with us”; “God cares”; and “God rules” are the capstones of the message of the Old Testament people. In order to summarize in a few words the purpose of their message and mission, I want

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<sup>49</sup> The New Testament Church is the basic continuation of the Old Testament Church (not a break from it, or its replacement, called as supersession). The New Testament Church is the remnant Old Testament Church and its enlargement, where the original intent of God is to be maintained and accomplished, where true followers of a living God are gathered from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages, and where the original mission of service to the whole world is cultivated (Rom 2:28–29; Gal 3:6–9,26–29; Eph 3:6–12; 1 Pet 2:9–10).

<sup>50</sup> Compare with Rev 14:7: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

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to paraphrase the prayer of Richard of Chichester: "To know God more clearly, to love Him more dearly, and to follow Him more nearly."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See the general introduction written by John C. L. Gibson in Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1983), v.

## **The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament**

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When God calls His people into existence, He gives them a mission. There were no Old Testament people of God without a mission; there is no election without a commission. God's call presupposes a call for action. Biblical theology is a mission-oriented theology.<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew Scripture knows nothing about an election for salvation but knows an election for mission (Exod 3:7–10; 7:1–2; 19:5–6; Jer 1:5)! The mission and the message of the Old Testament people,<sup>2</sup> even though both issues

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<sup>1</sup> For mission theology based on biblical material, consult Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, foreword by Alan R. Millard, ed. David W. Baker, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Evangelical Theological Society Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Jon L. Dybdahl, "Doing Theology in Mission: Part I," *Ministry* (November 2005): 19–22; idem, "Doing Theology in Mission: Part II," *Ministry* (January 2006): 19–23; Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: The Glory of Christ in All Time and Space, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003); and Russell L. Staples, *Community of Faith: The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Contemporary World* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1999); Gerald Anderson, *Theology of the Christian Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961); David Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles Too: The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 1994); Roger E. Hedlund, *The Mission of the Church in the World: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Richard D. Ridder, *Disciplining the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> The doctrine of the church is a hot potato, and an interpretation of the biblical teaching related to this matter is strong dynamite. The first reformation (mainly John Wycliff and Jan Hus in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.) started with a sharp revision of ecclesiology. It put the Christian church into turmoil, stirred enormous controversy, and



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can be separated, belong firmly together. The mission includes the proclamation of the message.<sup>3</sup>

However, some scholars object and argue that in the Old Testament there is no specific call to evangelize the world. Schnabel, for example, challenges Old Testament scholars, theologians, and missiologists by the claim that there is no commission in the Old Testament (in contrast to the New Testament) to go and “evangelize” the world. Abraham, Israel, and others are only passive witnesses for God, “a light to the world,” but not actually engaged in mission per se. He argues that there was nothing like an active programmatic plan to proclaim God’s message to the whole world during the times of Israel’s monarchy or intertestamental Judaism; thus they did not engage in mission.<sup>4</sup>

In response to this claim, one must first acknowledge that the modern reader of the Hebrew Scripture might have different questions and expectations than one can readily find answered in the biblical text because the basic characteristic of the Old Testament is that of a storybook

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led to thousands of people being severely persecuted and even put to death. To demonstrate this ecclesiological sensitivity, it is sufficient to mention the case of John Hus, who was the first, to my knowledge, to write a publication about the church and published it in Latin in order for it to be widely read among educated people (see Mistr Jan Hus, *O církvi* [Praha: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1965]. Hus finished his treatise *De Ecclesia* [On the Church] in 1413. He proclaimed his disobedience to Rome, accepted only Jesus Christ as the head of the church, and wanted the world to know why. The material he presented was very explosive, and he was burned at the stake in Constance, Germany, on July 6, 1415. Thus, the first person who wrote about the Church was not Johann of Rafusa in 1433/34, as mistakenly stated by Veli-Matti Kaerkkainen in his *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002], 11).

<sup>3</sup> About the summary and characteristics of the Old Testament message, see my article “The Message of God’s People in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19/1–2 (2008): 1–22.

<sup>4</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004). See also Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament* (Naperville: Allenson, 1965), 20: “There is an absence of a divine commission for the purpose and of any conscious outgoing to the Gentiles to win them for belief in Yahweh.” Blauw states: “When one turns to the Old Testament to find a justification and basis for missions in the current meaning, that is, as ‘foreign mission,’ one is bound to be disappointed” (Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 42). Bosch claims that “there is, in the Old Testament, no indication of the believers of the old covenant being sent by God to cross geographical, religious, and social frontiers in order to win others to faith in Yahweh” (David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology and Mission* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991], 17).

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with a metanarrative on salvation and not a handbook on mission with its philosophy, neither a blueprint for a programmatic missiological behavior. Also, the biblical language and imagery employed in regard to the mission are different from what we use today. One should not be surprised to find a lack of direct commands to mission, but instead stories in which are expressed hints and observations as well as some explicit statements that uncover the mission of God's people in Hebrew Scripture. These accidental expressions witness about the mission strategy in a different form and not as straightforward as one would wish.

In addition, the metanarrative of the Old Testament only progressively unfolds God's universal plan for the whole world. It helps to realize that God had a global plan, a blueprint for the people of God to actually fulfill, but it was not always plainly perceived. Christopher Wright fittingly states that "the mission of God is to bless all nations on earth. . . . Israel in the Old Testament was not chosen *over against* the rest of the nations, but *for the sake of* the rest of the nations."<sup>5</sup> God's plan (*missio Dei*)<sup>6</sup> for humanity can be expressed by the statement found in Isaiah: "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other" (Isa 45:22).<sup>7</sup> Bosch wittily states: "If there is a missionary in the Old Testament, it is God Himself who will, as his eschatological deed *par excellence*, bring the nations to Jerusalem to worship him there together with his covenant."<sup>8</sup> If this is so, then one can deduce that God will not do it Himself, but His working method will utilize humans to accomplish His objective (Gen 12:1–3; Exod 19:4–6). McIntosh defines God's mission as doing everything possible to communicate salvation to the world.<sup>9</sup> Thus, God's universal purpose is actually the "basis for the missionary message of the Old Testament."<sup>10</sup> God has a mission, and the believers in Him are to participate in it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 99–100.

<sup>6</sup> The Latin expression *missio Dei* means literally "the sending of God."

<sup>7</sup> Biblical quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> John A. McIntosh, "Missio Dei," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 631–632.

<sup>10</sup> Blauw, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Moltmann excellently underlines the point while writing about the mission of the church: "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill to the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, creating a church as it goes on its way" (Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* [New York: Harper and Row, 1977], 64).

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1. *Twofold Mission.* The mission of the Old Testament people was twofold:<sup>12</sup> (1) for Israel's children and the following generations—an inward focus (centripetal). Parents had to repeat the stories of deliverance to their children (Exod 12:24–27; Deut 6:4–9; Isa 38:19): “One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works” (Ps 145:4–5)! The account of God's goodness had to be passed on from each generation to the next. “Tell your children and grandchildren” (Exod 10:2) is God's crucial instruction. And (2) for the other nations, the Gentile world (even to the islands; Isa 66:19)—an outward focus (centrifugal). The mission of the people of the Old Testament was directed toward others who did not belong to the community of faith. There is a growing number of scholars who take the Old Testament as a basis of biblical mission.<sup>13</sup> Henry, for example, speaks about Moses as “the first missionary of whom we have any knowledge.”<sup>14</sup> Bosch mentions that “stories of pagans like Ruth and Naaman who accepted the faith of Israel” indicate the missionary nature of the Old Testament.<sup>15</sup> Others recognize individuals such as Abraham, Melchizedek, Jethro, Balaam, and Jonah as agents of God's mission.<sup>16</sup> Prophets of God were not only speaking to their own people, but they prophesied about many nations as well; God will judge all (see especially

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<sup>12</sup> Kaiser, *Mission*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Martin-Achard, “Israel's Mission to the Nations,” *International Review of Missions* 51/4 (Oct 1962): 482–484; Johan H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960); Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); Francis M. Debose, *God Who Sends: A Fresh Quest for Biblical Mission* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983); Ferris L. McDaniel, “Mission in the Old Testament,” in *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach*, ed. William J. Larkin, Jr., and Joel F. Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 12–13; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Israel's Missionary Call,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), 11. Kaiser uses three basic texts—Gen 12:1–3; Exod 19:4–6; and Ps 67—to make it clear that God sent Israel with the mission to the Gentiles.

<sup>14</sup> Harold Henry, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Kingsgate, 1944), 15.

<sup>15</sup> David J. Bosch, “Reflection on Biblical Models of Mission,” in *Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Christian Mission*, ed. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 175–176.

<sup>16</sup> Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*; Bryant Hicks, “Old Testament Foundations for Mission,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of the World Mission*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 53–62; Verkuyl, 96.

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Isa 2:4; 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Amos 1–2; Joel 3:12; Jonah; Obadiah; Mic 4:3). God was concerned with all nations, and the message of the Old Testament people transcended Israel’s borders. God did not provide warnings to people without a purpose, He always wanted to steer them to repentance (see Gen 6:3; Jonah 3).<sup>17</sup>

2. *Universal Mission.* One can speak about the mission of the people of the Old Testament only after the appearance of sin when two different ways of life were chosen (see two lines of genealogies—Cain and Seth—in Gen 4 and 5). The followers of God were to carry the message of salvation to others (Isa 66:19; Pss 67:2; 96:3). This mission was universal in scope and was gradually disclosed. Unfortunately, God’s people did not always succeed in their mission. Because of his fall into sin, Adam, the head of humankind, failed in his mission to lead all his family to God.<sup>18</sup> Glasser aptly states: “God called Adam and Eve to accept responsibility for this world as his viceregents, to serve and control it under his direction and for his glory.”<sup>19</sup> The power of evil was such a destructive force: it broke down good while letting evil triumph and degrade people to such an extent that God had to intervene with the Flood (Gen 6:5–6, 11–13).<sup>20</sup>

The first hint about intentional mission activities in the Bible can be detected in Gen 4:26b when Seth “began to proclaim/preach the name of the Lord.” This possible translation can be found in Martin Luther’s and Robert Young’s versions. It seems that this mission was first family oriented and gradually enlarged as humanity grew.<sup>21</sup> The posterity of Seth’s

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<sup>17</sup> God did not send, for example, Jonah to Nineveh in order that the Ninevites would later die as informed sinners. The message had power to create a right response in them.

<sup>18</sup> Allusion to this function can be seen in Gen 1:28. This implicit role for Adam and Eve derives also from the fact that they were directly created by God Himself and created first. It follows that they should keep the creation order and lead humanity in respect, admiration, and obedience to God in order to maintain a right relationship with Him.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur F. Glasser, “Biblical Theology of Mission,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 127.

<sup>20</sup> The biblical Flood account is about God’s grace, as He wants to save and gives many chances to people to repent (Gen 6:3,8; 8:1). If God had not intervened at that time, the avalanche of evil would have destroyed all that was good and valuable (only eight people were willing at that point in history to cooperate with God). There would have been no possibility of the Promised Seed (Gen 3:15) being born into a God-fearing family, and our enemy would not have been defeated. Consequently, God’s word would have failed, and humans would have lost all hope of salvation.

<sup>21</sup> For details, see my article “The Concept and Notion of the Church in the Pentateuch” in *“For You Have Strengthened Me”: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin Proebstle, Ger-

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descendants continued the proclamation, as is suggested by the phrase that “Enoch walked with God” (Gen 5:24; compare with Gen 6:9; Mic 6:8).<sup>22</sup> But as they mixed with the descendants of Cain’s line, they failed, and faithful people almost disappeared (see Gen 6:1–8).<sup>23</sup>

Genesis 1–11 is universal in scope.<sup>24</sup> Before the Flood, when the iniquity was rapidly growing, the Spirit of God was striving with people to call them to repentance, but unfortunately in vain (Gen 6:3,5). In addition, God called Noah to be His messenger, to be a preacher of righteousness to the antediluvian world (2 Pet 2:5), and to call all people to make the right decision for God and enter the ark. The biblical flood was worldwide;<sup>25</sup> therefore, his mission had to be worldwide, too. He was like a savior for his generation, but the Tower of Babel soon finished the good beginning after the Flood (Gen 11:1–9). God, for the third time, had to start from scratch, but this time with Abraham (Gen 12:1; 15:7).

The universality of the mission was explicitly mentioned for the first time in regard to Abraham. The Great Commission of the Old Testament declares: “And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3).<sup>26</sup> The Lord stresses it three times to Abraham (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). He is to be a blessing to “all families on earth,” i.e., a light to the whole world. God’s seven-fold blessing contained the key imperative phrase (in the center position): “I will bless you. . . . Be a blessing! . . .

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ald A. Klingbeil, and Martin G. Klingbeil (St. Peter am Hart, Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007), 13–14.

<sup>22</sup> The expression “walked with God” replaces the word “lived” in similar descriptions for other individuals, thus pointing to the quality of the relationship between Enoch and God—he did not merely “live.” This phrase may hint to Enoch’s witnessing activities (see Jude 1:14–16).

<sup>23</sup> Sven Fockner, “Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 (2008): 435–456.

<sup>24</sup> Claus Westermann, *Beginning and End in the Bible*, Biblical Series, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood,” in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement*, ed. John Templeton Baldwin (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 79–92; idem, “The Flood,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 261–263; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987), 155–166.

<sup>26</sup> The New King James Version renders this text in the following way: “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). The proper translation depends on the understanding of the Hebrew preposition “b” (“in,” “by,” “through,” “on,” etc.) and its syntactical function (taken here as an instrumental *bet*).

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and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:2–3).<sup>27</sup> Note the imperative in the divine statement, which is usually overlooked! God commands Abraham to be a blessing to others because He blessed him. The Lord’s blessing cannot and should not be taken selfishly. Abraham needed to live for others.<sup>28</sup> Gen 12:2–3 was therefore God’s programmatic statement for Abraham and those who would follow the same faith. Walter Kaiser accurately articulates that this text provides “the formative theology” for “a divine program to glorify himself by bringing salvation to all on planet earth.”<sup>29</sup> Abraham thus became the special messenger, missionary, to the entire world,<sup>30</sup> with a mission which would only later be carried by Israel and fully fulfilled by *Ebed Yahweh* (Isa 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12; 61:1–3) on an even larger scale because He would be the Salvation (not only that he would declare, bring, or proclaim it) for the whole world (Isa 49:6)!<sup>31</sup>

In many places where Abraham traveled and lived, he built altars and called on the name of the Lord (Gen 12:7,8; 13:4,18; 22:9–13). In this way, he witnessed about his unique God. However, Abraham’s first “missionary” journey to Egypt failed because of his disbelief, and he had to be escorted out (Gen 12:10–20). Later he fulfilled his prophetic role in

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<sup>27</sup> My translation. God’s promise that He would through Abraham bless “all the families of the earth” (*kol mishpechot ha’arets*) is repeated in various forms in Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 and 28:14. The Hebrew phrase *kol mishpechot* is rendered in the Septuagint as *passai hai phulai* “all the tribes” (12:3; 28:14), but the Hebrew expression *kol goyeh* is used in Gen 18:18; 22:18; and 26:4 and is translated in the LXX as *panta ta ethne* (“all the nations”). The intention of the text envisioned the whole world with all families or clans (as this word is used in the case of Achan’s tribe/family, see Josh 7:14).

<sup>28</sup> Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven’t Heard* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 124: “God’s ultimate promise to Abraham, a challenge also, lies in the bringing of blessings to others.” Sarna comments on the statement “you shall be a blessing” in the following way: “As a consequence, you [Abram] will serve as the standard by which a blessing is invoked” (Nahum Sarna, *Genesis* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 89).

<sup>29</sup> Kaiser, *The Messiah*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> It is significant that the seventh promise is quoted in Acts 3:25 with reference to the Jewish people who listened to Peter’s sermon, but in Gal 3:8 it is used in reference to the Gentiles. In this way Abraham’s physical and spiritual descendants are included. The mission of the Christian church is the same: to be a blessing to the whole world (Matt 5:16; John 15:5,16; Eph 2:10; 1 Pet 2:9).

<sup>31</sup> The literal translation of Isa 49:6 highlights this point plainly: “And he says: ‘It is a small thing that you be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel. I will even give you for a light to the Gentiles (nations) that you will be my salvation to the end of the world’” (translation is mine).

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regard to the king of Sodom (Gen 14:17–24). He grew through his defeats (described in Gen 16 and 20), struggles, and victories (see Gen 18:16–33; 22:1–19) in such a way that at the end God stated that “Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees, and my laws” (Gen 26:5). The knowledge about the God of Abraham was to grow in the world in such a way that even “the nobles of the nations [will] assemble as the people of the God of Abraham” (Ps 47:9). Abraham’s God would meet them, and they were to follow Him. “All nations on earth will be blessed through him” (Gen 18:18) because God’s ultimate wish is always to bless all humanity.<sup>32</sup> Abraham is a model of God’s mission.

Genesis 10, a previous chapter containing a table of seventy nations (a symbolic number standing for the totality of nations),<sup>33</sup> introduces the narrative about Abraham, which means that Abraham was to be a blessing to the whole world. However, Abraham also needed to be a teacher to his children. He was to teach them about the true God, instruct them about God’s ways, and direct them to keep His law in order that they might live according to “the way of the Lord” and do everything according to the will of God (Gen 18:19).<sup>34</sup>

Abraham’s universal mission was repeated to Isaac (“And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed,” Gen 26:4), and reaffirmed to Jacob (Gen 28:13–15; 35:11–12; 46:3) and Moses (Exod 3:6–8; 6:2–8). Moses together with Israel needed to continue this universal mission to the whole world, starting as being light to the Egyptians, spreading out by the Exodus (Josh 2:8–12), and continuing on throughout the many centuries (Isa 42:6–7). The purpose of the ten plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea was not only to show that the

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, “Old Testament Theology of Mission,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 707.

<sup>33</sup> The number seventy in Gen 10 comprise the following: the Japhethites—fourteen nations; the Hamites—thirty nations; and the Semites—twenty-six nations. On the symbolism of numbers, see John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968).

<sup>34</sup> Abraham was to direct his family to keep “the way of the Lord,” which can imply that they would be taught by Abraham not only to do “what was right and just,” but also to live for others, as God’s concern was to bless the whole world. Thus, the “way of the Lord” becomes a missionary paradigm for God’s followers to be a blessing to all people.

It is significant to stress that the Old Testament Church was built first of all around the family circle: God’s directions for life are very important for all, and in this way a family is to be a light to the world, not only to an individual.

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Egyptians' gods were nothing (Exod 12:12), but also to help "the Egyptians to know" that God was the Lord (Exod 7:5,17; 8:22; 14:4,18).

God called Israel to an ethical distinctiveness (Lev 11:44–45; 18:3; 18–19; Deut 14:1–3; Mic 6:6–8). They were to be committed to a holy life, because only in this way could they live to the glory of God and His name, attract people to Him, be a light to the nations, and the nations could see their wisdom (Deut 4:6; Isa 58:8; 60:1–3; 62:1–2; Ezek 36:23). Moses's exhortatory speech to Israel, when he stressed the importance of obedience to God and His law (Deut 4:5–8), implies the visibility and some kind of missionary activities of Israel.

The mission of the Old Testament people can be summarized by God's ideal for Israel:

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests [thus, a mediatorial role of Israel for other nations is anticipated; they should be the means of bringing people to God] and a holy nation. (Exod 19:5–6)

See also Isa 42:6: "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles." God's purpose was to bless all nations through Israel.<sup>35</sup>

*3. Specific Examples of Missionary Activities.* The question remains: Was Israel's witnessing passive or active? Did they actually go to foreign countries to speak about their living, loving, and holy God? As we mentioned above, opinions differ. There are only a few examples of active witnessing. One may consider the following cases of how God called specific individuals or people and sent them to accomplish particular tasks. For example, (1) Joseph was brought to Egypt by jealousy and the intrigues of his brothers, but God changed it in such a way that he became a savior for Egypt and his family and a witness for a true God (Gen 45:5–8; 50:19–21). (2) God called Moses and sent him to Egypt to encounter Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods (Exod 12:12). It is explicitly stated that God sent him there, which means that Moses was commissioned by God to present to Egypt a living Lord (Exod 3:10–15; Deut 34:11; 1 Sam 12:8; Ps 105:26). (3) For Naaman, the commander of the

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<sup>35</sup> C. Gordon Olson, *What in the World Is God Doing?: The Essentials of Global Missions* (Cedar Knolls: Global Gospel, 1989), 17.



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army of the king of Aram, it was through the initiative and witness of a young slave Israelite girl who was in captivity in Syria that he became acquainted with the true God of heaven (2 Kgs 5:15). (4) The prophet Elisha went to Damascus, and when he was there, Ben-Hadad king of Aram sent his messenger to him to inquire if he would recover from his illness (2 Kgs 8:7–15). (5) The most obvious missionary activity is recorded in the book of Jonah. This prophet was not willing to go and fulfill God's commission. At the end, he wondered what was wrong with God when He saved the cruel Ninevites. Jonah saw the salvation of Ninevites as evil, and he refused to agree with this unprecedented compassion of God (John 3:10; 4:1).<sup>36</sup> In a dramatic way, God taught His follower about the universality of God's salvation (Jonah 4:6–11). The Lord demonstrated His unselfish love for all, even for the enemies of His people. (6) Prophet Isaiah, at the conclusion of his book, declares that God will send missionaries to the whole world. The Lord "will send survivors [of the people of Israel] to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Rosh, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations" (Isa 66:19). The result will be that "'from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh [it means, all nations] come to worship before me,' saith the LORD" (Isa 66:23). (7) Prophets Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel dedicate large portions of their books (even Obadiah's whole book) to pronounce judgments against other nations, which suggests that God was purposely working for these nations. They were responsible for their behavior and accountable to the Lord. (8) Jeremiah sent Seraiah to Babylon with a scroll, which first had to be read aloud, and then a symbolic act of sinking the scroll had to be performed (Jer 51:59–64). Seraiah's case offers a unique example of a prophetic message that could be heard in a foreign land and provides the evidence that the oracles against foreign nations could be actually delivered in the foreign countries.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jonah 4:1 reads literally: "It was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and he became angry." This great evil is described in a previous verse (Jonah 3:10) as God's compassion on the Ninevites! Salvation seemed evil to Jonah.

<sup>37</sup> God gave the message to Jeremiah to be proclaimed in Egypt, in some of her important cities, concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, to attack Egypt, and about God's judging hand against her gods (Jer 46:13–14, 25–26). We do not exactly know how the message was delivered to Egypt, but there were Jewish settlements in Egypt at that time (see Jer 43:5–7; 44:1; compare with 2 Kgs 23:34) and some communication was going on between Israel and Egypt. Notice how another message of Jeremiah's was rejected by a large assembly of Jews living in Egypt (see Jer 44:15–18).

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(9) Daniel and his three friends witnessed to Babylon's top officials and the king about the true God (see Daniel, chaps. 1–3). They helped Nebuchadnezzar to know the Most High God. After his conversion, described in Daniel, chap. 4, he wrote a letter to all nations about the mighty Most High God who had humbled him and the King of heaven who would reign forever (Dan 4:1–3, 37). Daniel also witnessed to the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar (see Dan 5), to Darius the Mede and the high Medo–Persian officials (see Dan 6), and possibly even to Cyrus (Dan 1:21; 6:28; 10:1), who issued the decree to allow the Jews to return home from Babylonian captivity (2 Chr 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4). Glover rightly describes Daniel as a missionary.<sup>38</sup> (10) Witnessing to Gentiles is presented in the Psalms, the missionary book par excellence: “I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples” (Ps 57:9); “Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples” (Ps 117:1–2).

It is also true that the geographical location of Israel (placed at the main crossroads of Middle East international routes, between Egypt and Assyria or Babylon) was a very significant factor in the Israelites' being witnesses for their God and an object lesson for the nations.<sup>39</sup> Different cultures, merchants, religions, nations, and people were meeting there, and people were confronted with a different system of beliefs.

The importance of the world-wide mission of Israel is underlined in the fact that the temple in Jerusalem would be the mega-world center for

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<sup>38</sup> Robert H. Glover, *The Bible Basis of Mission* (Los Angeles: Bible of Los Angeles, 1946), 21: “Daniel was another great foreign missionary [together with Jonah] whose divinely given commission, . . . took him before kings and rulers. He witnessed for God in the courts of four successive heathen monarchs, and so effectively as to lead them to recognize and proclaim his God to be the most high God, whose kingdom was universal and everlasting.” See also John N. Oswalt, “The Mission of Israel to the Nations,” in *Through No Fault of Their Own?: The Fate of Those Who Never Heard*, ed. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 93–94. Sung Ik Kim concludes his study, “Proclamation in Cross-Cultural Context: Missiological Implications of the Book of Daniel” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2005): “Daniel and his friends were aware of God's sovereignty in human history and of 'God's salvific purpose for all people.' Furthermore, the book of Daniel demonstrates some strategies used in *missio Dei*, such as God's use of committed individuals, dreams and visions, prayer and spiritual formation, power encounter, and spiritual conflict” (285).

<sup>39</sup> The importance of biblical geography and the geographical position of Israel is stressed by William S. LaSor, “Biblical Geography,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:445–446; C. C. McCown, “Geography of Palestine” in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 3:626–639.

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a true worship (Isa 2:2) and that everyone would come there and learn how to worship the true God (Isa 2:3–4; 56:2–8; 62:9–11; Jer 3:17; 33:9; Mic 4:1–2). The Israelites would become teachers of righteousness: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, “Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you”’” (Zech 8:23).<sup>40</sup> During the time of the Exile, Daniel pronounced a blessing on those who would lead others to righteousness (Dan 12:3). It is noteworthy to stress that his message has an international connotation and perspective (Dan 2:31–47; 7:1–14). It is God who “changes times and seasons; sets up kings and deposes them” (Dan 2:21). Blauw points out that Dan 7 presents God’s purpose for the whole world.<sup>41</sup>

4. *Additional Biblical Support.* The righteous acts of God during the Exodus were heard by many other nations (see, for example, Josh 2:8–11). Hiram, the King of Tyre, spoke very highly about the Lord, God of Solomon: “Because the Lord loves his people, he has made you their king. . . . Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth!” (2 Chr 2:11–12). The queen of Sheba visited Solomon because Solomon’s fame had reached her far country (1 Kgs 10:1–9; 2 Chr 9:1–8). These narratives suggest that other nations also heard about the God of Israel and Solomon’s wisdom. Paradoxically, sometimes God’s people needed to go through troubles or even be sent into exile so that they might accomplish their primary mission—to be a light to the world.<sup>42</sup>

Two missionary Psalms (Pss 67 and 96) express very eloquently a universal mission and focus on God’s promise to Abraham that he and his posterity would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Ps 67 is

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<sup>40</sup> In this context it is significant to observe that Isaiah speaks about “Galilee of the nations/Gentiles” (Isa 9:1) because Galilee will become a part of their territory where they will worship the true living God of Israel.

<sup>41</sup> Blauw, 65. On “universalism” in the Old Testament, which has the whole world in focus, see *ibid.*, 15–54. The universality of God’s mission lies in the ultimate goal to establish God’s universal kingdom on earth (Dan 2:44; 7:26–27).

<sup>42</sup> See the examples of Joseph as a vizier in Egypt (Gen 39:2–6, 20–21; 41:37–41); Moses as a leader of Israel in confrontation with the Egyptian pharaoh (Exod 5–15); an anonymous slave Israelite girl who witnessed to Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1–19); Daniel as a prime minister and president of the scientific academy in Babylon (Dan 1:20–21; 5–6); Daniel’s three friends in the fiery furnace (Dan 3); people of God as “singers” of religious songs on the demand of Babylonians (Ps 137:1–3); Esther as a queen in Medo-Persia (Esther 4:12–16); and Nehemiah as a leader in the midst of great tensions in the Persian court (Neh 2:1–10).

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built on the Aaronic benediction from Num 6:24–26 in which the name of the Lord, *Yahweh* (which expresses the idea of a personal God of His covenant people), is changed for God (*elohim*) to stress the universal call of God to all nations to praise Him: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him” (Ps 67:1–7).

In Ps 96:2–9, the psalmist calls believers to proclaim (v. 3 is the only place where the imperative intensive form of the verb to “declare” is used in the book of Psalms) God’s salvation among the nations:

Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

There are also other texts in Psalms that call for missionary activities among the nations: “Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts” (Ps 105:1–2). “I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame” (Ps 119:46). “Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy” (Ps 126:2–3). “They [the Lord’s saints, according to v. 10] will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom” (Ps 145:11–12). “My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever” (Ps 145:21). The psalmists thus declare that they will praise God among the nations (Pss 57:9;

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108:3), and the kingdoms of the earth should “sing to God” (Ps 68:32). Thus, the whole earth will “be filled with his glory” (Ps 72:19).

As a result of these witnessing exercises, Egyptians and Ethiopians will submit to the Lord (Ps 68:31), “all kings will bow down” and “all nations will serve” the Davidic King, the Messiah (Ps 72:11), God will be “feared by the kings of the earth” (Ps 76:12), God will judge all the nations as His inheritance (Ps 82:8), “all the nations . . . will come and worship” before the Lord (Ps 86:9), foreigners then will be like the natives enjoying the benefits of citizenship (Ps 87:4–6), and “all men” will know of God’s “mighty acts” (Ps 145:12).

The Prophet Isaiah explained that the descendants of Israel would be a spectacle to all nations of God’s goodness to them:

Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed. I delight greatly in the Lord, . . . He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, . . . For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. (Isa 61:9–11)

God foretells the bright future of Zion and Jerusalem in these terms: “The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow” (Isa 62:2). Isaiah speaks about missionaries who “will proclaim my [the Lord’s] glory among the nations” (Isa 66:19). Isaiah continues by stressing what the Lord will do: “I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites.”<sup>43</sup> The book of Isaiah ends with the international and worldwide dimension of worship: “‘From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the Lord” (Isa 66:23).<sup>44</sup> In this context it is interesting to notice Isaiah’s rebuke to King Hezekiah for not fulfilling his God-given mission by not sharing God’s salvation message with the Babylonian

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<sup>43</sup> Walter Brueggemann appropriately explains: “Yahweh will dispatch ‘survivors,’ that is, restored Jews, to all parts of the known world. These messengers (missionaries?) will go where the news of Yahweh has never been before. . . . From among these *goyim*, these Gentiles nations, some will be designated and ordained as priests and Levites, priests to handle Jewish holy things and Levites to interpret Jewish torah” (*Isaiah 40–66* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 258–259).

<sup>44</sup> See also Mic 4:1–5; Zech 2:11; 8:20–23; 13:8–9; 14:16–19.

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emissaries but instead showing his royal treasures (2 Kgs 20:12–19; 2 Chr 32:31; Isa 39:1–8).

Prophet Zephaniah strikingly notes that “the nations on every shore will worship him [the Lord],” not in Jerusalem but “every one in its own land” (Zeph 2:11), and remarkably states that God will “purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder” (Zeph 3:9). God projected that even from beyond Cush (Ethiopia) will come His worshipers who are called His people to serve Him: “From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings” (Zeph 3:10). The NIV Study Bible comments: “Israel’s God will be acknowledged by the nations, and God’s people will be honored by them (cf. vv. 19–20).”<sup>45</sup> Greg King underlines that God’s true worshipers “will be the recipients of international fame and honor”<sup>46</sup> and that “peoples from the most distant places . . . will experience salvation and will worship Yahweh on His day. He is the redemptive King not only of the Judahites, but also of people from many nations.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, “on two occasions (2:11; 3:9–10) Zephaniah depicted worship of Yahweh taking place on a worldwide basis by those who are delivered from the judgment. . . . There will be so many that they will stand shoulder to shoulder, serving Yahweh unitedly (3:9).”<sup>48</sup> Because of that, God is depicted in a unique activity (never again mentioned in the entire Old Testament): He is singing over His people with joy: “The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph 3:17).

The prophetic word of God was to be promulgated to others, but this word needed to be accompanied by godly behavior. In this way, the God of Israel would be attractive to all nations, and they would come and worship Him (Isa 56:6–7; 61:9–11; 62:2).<sup>49</sup> As a result of such activities, kings would issue edicts in favor of Jerusalem’s temple (Cyrus, Darius

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<sup>45</sup> *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1398.

<sup>46</sup> Greg A. King, “The Remnant in Zephaniah,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (October–December 1994): 424.

<sup>47</sup> Greg A. King, “The Day of the Lord in Zephaniah,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (January–March 1995): 21.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>49</sup> Amos mentions that nations (note the plural form) will bear the Lord’s name (Amos 9:12)! This text is quoted in Acts 15:17 as the fulfillment of God’s promise of proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles and as the confirmation of His intention to save them (Acts 15:14–15).

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and Artaxerxes; see 2 Chr 36:22–23; Ezra 3–7; Dan 6:25–28; Neh 2:1–10). Otherwise, the people of God would be a byword and object of scorn (Joel 2:17; Ezek 36:20–21). God is either dead or alive in people's minds. Consequently, it depends to a great degree on the behavior of His followers; their deeds are a stronger witness and speak louder than words as to whether their God is alive in their lives or not (Ezek 20:41; 36:23; Hos 1:9; 2:21–23; compare with Matt 5:16). If God's remnant people truly accomplish His task, then people will come to the Lord and become His faithful followers. Isaiah and Micah prophetically envisioned a time when "many peoples/nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to . . . the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths'" (Isa 2:3; Mic 4:2). Zechariah underscored it very emphatically: "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people" (Zech 2:11).

The people of God in the Old Testament were to be an object lesson for other people and nations. When nations saw what God had done for them, they should have recognized the God of Israel as a living God and followed Him because He was the true King. Thus, God was showing Himself holy through His people in the sight of many nations (Josh 2:9–14; Isa 61:9–11; Ezek 20:12; 36:23; 38:23; 39:7,27–29). This is a different type of evangelism than what Christians usually have in mind: not so much by going outside and preaching, but by being a living example of God's intervening grace. Witnessing without practical lifestyle support is empty, harmful, and destructive. It can never be overemphasized that the exemplary conduct of God's people was and is the best witness for the Lord. God declares: "I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I show myself holy through you before their eyes" (Ezek 36:23; see also 36:33–38).

5. *God's Working with Gentiles (Outside of Israel)*. God called His people to a certain mission, and His people needed to fulfill that mission, but God also worked outside of Israel. The Old Testament remnant was not an elect elite group who would be uniquely saved, but they were elected for a mission! However, it does not mean that God did not also use other individuals or did not work for other people outside of the main community of faith. How it was done is not always revealed to us; it is simply stated. Examples of God's working with different people outside of Israel include:

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a. Melchizedek, king of Salem and the priest of the God Most High (Gen 14:18–20). Melchizedek appears suddenly on the scene as an unknown character, blesses Abraham, and expresses his strong belief in the Creator God who gave victory to Abraham over their enemies. Abraham, as an expression of his love and gratitude to God for all he received from God, gave his tithe to Melchizedek. Because Melchizedek faithfully served the Lord, he became a type for Christ (Heb 7:1–3; 7:11–17).

b. Jethro, the priest of Midian and Moses’s father-in-law (Exod 18:1). Jethro, after hearing from Moses what the Lord had done for Israel in Egypt, praises Yahweh: “Praise be to the Lord, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly” (Exod 18:10–11).

c. Balaam, a prophet of God. Balaam pronounces messianic prophecies (Num 24:17–19) in the midst of his apostasy (Num 22–24), which cost him his life (Num 31:8; compare Rev 2:14).

d. Rahab, the prostitute in Jericho. Rahab heard about the God of Israel, believed, helped two Israelite spies, saved her family from destruction, and joined the people of God (Josh 2:1–21; 6:17, 25; compare with Matt 1:5; Heb 11:31; James 2:25). Rahab later married Salmon, son of Nahshon, one of the prominent princes of Judah (Num 7:12; Ruth 4:18–22; 1 Chr 2:11–12; Matt 1:1, 5–6), and became an ancestor of the Messiah.<sup>50</sup>

e. God worked with other nations, e.g., the Cushites, Philistines, and Arameans. Prophet Amos boldly proclaims God’s intervention for these nations: “‘Are you not Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?’ declares the Lord. ‘Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?’” (Amos 9:7). There are no historical records about these activities of God, and there is no other biblical passage which witnesses about them except this text in Amos.

f. God gave the Canaanite people 400 years of grace to repent and return to Him (Gen 15:13–16). Similarly God, before the flood, offered 120 years of grace (Gen 6:3). However, in both cases rebellion against God prevailed.

g. The nations were judged by God. As already mentioned, many prophets uttered oracles against foreign nations (Isa 13–23; 28–33; Jer

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<sup>50</sup> Richard M. Davidson, *In the Footsteps of Joshua* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1995), 52.



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46–51; Ezek 25–32; Joel 3:1–3,12; Amos 1–2). It suggests that God has revealed to them the truth and that they were accountable for their actions to God (see especially the books of Jonah and Obadiah; Jer 51:59–64).<sup>51</sup>

h. Nebuchadnezzar, the famous Babylonian king, wrote a letter to the pagan world about his dramatic conversion story and powerfully witnessed about God's eternal kingdom and the Most High God who humiliated him and revealed His sovereignty to him (Dan 4).

God ultimately puts together these two different groups (God's faithful remnant—people from the mainstream of His church, and people who work outside of this pattern). “Insiders” and “outsiders” belong together! For example, Melchizedek came in contact with Abraham (Gen 14:18–20); Rahab with Israel (Josh 2); Jethro with Moses (Exod 3 and 18); Naaman with Elisha (2 Kgs 5); Nebuchadnezzar with Daniel (Dan 1; 2; and 4); Ahasuerus [Xerxes] with Esther (Esth 1–9). Moabite Ruth expressed this so eloquently to Israelite Naomi: “Your people will be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Isaiah describes this achievement with amazing words and provides a vivid picture: “In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance’” (Isa 19:23–25). This is a stunning, surprising, and unique statement, because not only Israel, but also Egypt and Assyria are called the people of God, and they are to worship together!<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Not only nations are judged, but also God's judgment is pronounced upon false gods, as in the case of the Babylonian god Marduk or Bel (see Isa 46–48). In addition, the event of the Exodus is powerfully described as God's victory over the Egyptian gods (Exod 12:12). As a result, their defeat could liberate people's minds from serving them.

<sup>52</sup> It is very important to note that the prophet Isaiah mentions, in the midst of judgment over ten nations, three positive passages regarding the Gentiles (chaps. 13–23): 14:1–2 (aliens will join God's people and unite with them); 18:7 (nations will bring gifts to the temple); and 19:17–25 (altar and pillar to the Lord will be erected in Egypt; the Egyptians will cry to the Lord; He will make Himself known to them, and they will worship Him).

### Conclusion

God is the Missionary with His breathtaking mega-plan (*missio Dei*) to bless and save the whole world. However, for that purpose, He uses human instruments, and through them He leads people to Himself (Isa 45:22). From the very beginning, the horizon of mission for the Old Testament people was to be worldwide. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, prophets, and others had their mission to fulfill. The ultimate, deliberate purpose of God in electing Abraham, or Israel, was to become a blessing, light, and witness to the entire world about the true God so that everyone could come to a saving knowledge of the living and loving Lord. The goal of God's plan was always to invite all human beings to salvation, because from the very beginning the plan of redemption was never concealed nor reserved only for one family, group, or nation. Through Abraham and his posterity, all the families of the earth were to be blessed. The Old Testament vision of mission was all-inclusive.

Mission is not so much about going somewhere, sending someone, or doing something. Mission is primarily about being—being a special people with a special message which needs to be modeled in real life. This has implications for Christian ecclesiology, and particularly for Adventist ecclesiology, which can be summarized in several points:<sup>53</sup>

(1) Mission means identification with God's ultimate goal for saving humanity and working out this plan.

(2) Being is more important than sending. The call to ethical lifestyle and living tangibly the message of God was a crucial focus that is to be emphasized in our modern times.

(3) The worldwide scope of the mission of God's people did not change. As God had a deliberate plan to save the world during the time of the Old Testament dispensation, so He has it today.

(4) The mission and message are inseparable. The essentials of the message did not change. It has had new and different emphases during the passing of time, but basic principles of salvation were valid all the time. Paul, for example, built the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ on key texts derived from the Hebrew Scripture according to the structure of the Hebrew Canon: Gen 15:6 (Torah);

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<sup>53</sup> Striking similarities with the Three Angels' Message of Rev 14:6–13 should not be overlooked: all major concepts are included there in core. Our Adventist message and mission should be thus a continuation of the message and mission of the Old Testament people.

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Hab 2:4 (Prophets), and Ps 32:1–2 (Writings). God's people of today ought to proclaim the "eternal Gospel."<sup>54</sup> This is against the Marcionite view, which underscored the discrepancy between Old and New Testaments and stressed the inferiority of the Old Covenant.<sup>55</sup>

(5) The Old Testament community of faith and its message was eschatological and future oriented.<sup>56</sup> The biblical-eschatological paradigm should provide a pattern for our thinking today. God is coming to establish His eternal kingdom. This eschatological focus provides powerful fuel for mission.<sup>57</sup> The hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ is the hope of all hopes.

(6) Prophets constantly spoke against false religious systems and warned against the infiltration of paganism into true worship. So the task of God's people today is to present first of all the true picture about God, reveal His true character, who He is, and point the attention of all to Jesus Christ while also unmasking firmly, but lovingly and wisely, the Antichrist with its apostate religious system.

(7) God uses two different groups: (A) insiders, i.e., the faithful remnant (principal stream of the community of believers); and (B) outsiders, i.e., those who serve God faithfully according to their light but work outside of His eschatological movement. The faithful remnant has a special God-given mission, but besides the mainstream God has His messengers, individuals, or communities who also proclaim the truth. The Lord desires to put these two different streams together by drawing them closer

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<sup>54</sup> According to Rev 14:6, the message proclaimed before the second coming of Christ is called "the eternal Gospel." This expression is a *hapax legomenon* in the entire Bible, and this purposeful fact stresses the continuity and unchangeability of the Gospel that prepares the world for the return of Christ. This message is not new, but was always preached, was and is always valid, is the same, and is final. It has had specific emphases, but nevertheless its basics and foundation are unchanged. There is only one Gospel according to God or the Bible. What is preached before the parousia is not and should not be a new invention, but a confirmation of the eternal Truth and eternal Covenant about the relationship between God and humans.

<sup>55</sup> About Marcion, his ideas and theology, see Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2006), 24–49.

<sup>56</sup> The same principles of worship observed in the practice of the Old Testament people needs to be followed in our religious experience today. The religious calendar of the Old Testament people was centered on salvific events. These liturgical anchors and theological emphases need to be implemented in our liturgical practices.

<sup>57</sup> Amedeo Molnár, "Eschatologická naděje české reformace" in *Od reformace k zítřku* (Praha: Kalich, 1956), 13–101; Sakae Kubo, *God Meets Man* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1978), 105–111.

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to each other because His ultimate goal is to have only one flock (Isa 14:1; 56:3–8; see also John 10:16). We need to recognize God’s work outside of our community of faith.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Compare with Rev 18:1–4: “Come out of her, my people!” This means that God has His children in spiritual Babylon, and He works for these faithful people in different denominations and churches. We need to genuinely love and work with Babylonians while denouncing Babylon as a fallen religious system!

It is striking that all crucial aspects (mentioned above) can also be found in the eternal Gospel as it is summarized in the form of the Three Angels’ Message of Rev 14:6–13. Thus, the remnant (Rev 12:17; 14:12; 19:10) is and should be a continuation of the mission of the Old Testament people. This end-time message needs to prepare people to meet the Lord. Note, for example, God’s program to preach the Gospel to the whole world: “He [the messenger] had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people” (v. 6). See the stress on an ethical life in making a decision in respect to God and living to God’s glory: “Fear God and give Him glory” (v. 7a). Observe the emphasis on worshipping the Creator, which implies the observance of God’s law (quotation from the fourth commandment of Exod 20:10): “Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (v. 7b). Notice that the eternal Gospel not only puts emphasis on living in the Lord: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on” (v. 13), but also warns against the Antichrist: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries” (v. 8). Note the radical call to follow God’s instruction, for eternal death will meet the wicked: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath” (vv. 9–11). In addition, observe the accent on the perseverance of the saints in mission, their obedience to the Lord, and their keeping the faith of and in Jesus: “Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (v.12; NKJV).

## **The Decalogue Predates Mount Sinai: Indicators from the Book of Genesis**

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A general consensus exists that the Decalogue has exerted more influence on ethics and law than any other part of Scripture, or any document outside of Scripture. In Roman Catholic moral theology, in Protestant ethics, and in Western law the Ten Commandments have been foundational for millennia. Legal codes of the Middle Ages were often prefaced with the Ten Commandments. Many commentaries have been written on the Decalogue by both Christian and Jewish authors.<sup>1</sup>

The Decalogue is the towering ethical document in Scripture. It is quoted by almost every biblical writer following the Exodus, including the psalmists,<sup>2</sup> prophets<sup>3</sup> and historians.<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament, Jesus Himself refers to the Decalogue and affirms its exalted nature.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Philo, *The Decalogue*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 320, ed. F. H. Colson (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958-1962); and Thomas Aquinas, *God's Greatest Gifts: Commentaries on the Commandments and the Sacraments* (Manchester: Sophia Institutes, 1992). The Reformers continued in this same tradition: Luther, in his *Larger Catechism* and *Treatise on Good Works*; Calvin in his *institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, 8.

<sup>2</sup> “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Ps 19:7).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Jeremiah: “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My People” (Jer 31:33).

<sup>4</sup> One example, Ezra: “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezek 7:10).

<sup>5</sup> For example: When a young man came and asked Jesus, “what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Jesus responded “. . . if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” The young man asked, “Which ones?” Jesus responded, “You shall

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Apostle Paul likewise speaks of the far-reaching claims of God's law. He often quotes it in his various letters and epistles.<sup>6</sup> The great apostle's cross-cultural ministry finds him instructing new Christians on how the Law's boundaries extend deeply into human thoughts and motives continuing the Old Testament tradition. The biblical canon closes with the book of Revelation and its pointed reference to those "who keep the commandments of God" (Rev. 14:12).

In light of this scriptural emphasis, one might ask: do ethical concerns in the canon commence only at Mt Sinai? Presently much confusion exists in Pentateuchal criticism, which often supposes an evolution of the Decalogue.<sup>7</sup> It is the position of this paper that a close reading of the received book of Genesis suggests that even before the Fall, Adam and Eve, in newly-created perfection, were given a *command* by God not to eat from a certain tree. We find a divine commandment *before* sin: "And the LORD God *commanded* the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *you shall not eat . . .*'" (Gen 2:16-17, emphasis added). With the presence of law before sin, we can be instructed concerning the positive protective nature of divine law.

This pre-fall restriction invites consideration. From what is God protecting Adam and Eve? Could it be subtly implying that there is a standard of right and wrong operating before Adam and Eve disobey? This

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not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and your mother . . ." (Matt 19:16-19f).

<sup>6</sup> One example: "For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness . . . You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?" Rom 2:11-15, 21-23.

<sup>7</sup> See Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), chapter one, "The Documentary Hypothesis," (13-33) for a survey of the present discussion.

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pre-fall restriction at least suggests that the human couple needed to be protected from something.<sup>8</sup>

The content of the divine command in Genesis 2:16-17 is also significant. God first makes a positive statement to Adam and Eve: “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden.”<sup>9</sup> This same feature can be seen later in the opening words of the Decalogue: “I am the LORD God who has redeemed you from slavery.” Only after this statement is the prohibition given, both in Genesis 2 and in Exodus 20. Even then, the command is not presented as an abstract ban such as “it is forbidden.” Instead, the personal pronoun is used, likewise later in the Decalogue.

The command in Genesis 2:17, “you shall not eat,” closely resembles the initial words of eight Decalogue precepts. The prohibition in Genesis 2 applies to only a single tree. Apparently Adam and Eve could “freely eat” from all other trees. Bruce Waltke is correct: “These first words of God to man assume man’s freedom to choose and thus his formed moral capacity.”<sup>10</sup>

From the very beginning, human beings had the power of choice. They were free to make genuine decisions. The divine command to them was to assist them in making the right choice, but the choice was theirs. After the Fall, in the Genesis narratives, God continues giving commandments to humans.<sup>11</sup>

**Pre-Sinai Evidence for the Decalogue Commandments**

The law given later at Mount Sinai can be seen less as a new law than as an authoritative expression of an already existing system of morality. As Terence Fretheim sensitively observes about patriarchal history: “These ancestral texts also demonstrate that law cannot be collapsed into the law given at Sinai. At the same time, they show that Sinai

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<sup>8</sup> From what is God protecting Adam and Eve? The implication includes the notion that sin is found in the universe before Adam and Eve disobey and that God seeks to protect Adam and Eve from such.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Hamilton notes: “the serpent [in Gen 3] discreetly avoids any reference to God’s generous permission but magnifies God’s prohibition, which is the reversal of these two verses.” Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17 in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 172.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 87.

<sup>11</sup> For example: of Noah it is recorded twice that “according to all that God commanded him, so he did. (Gen 6:22; 7:5); and the patriarchs are commended for obeying God’s commands (Gen 18:19; 21:4; 22:18; 26:5, emphasis added).

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law basically conforms to already existing law . . .”<sup>12</sup> In this paper we propose that intriguing hints embedded within the Genesis narratives have often been overlooked when ancient morality is reviewed. There we observe the ten precepts of the Decalogue already operant in human lives. Working within the received text,<sup>13</sup> we will review a number of examples.

**Creation/Sabbath (Gen 2:1-3).** The Sabbath appears in numerous, varied OT texts. The Pentateuch contains what is considered the earliest references to it. This day plays a prominent role in the opening chapters of Genesis at the climax of the creation account (Gen 1:1-2:4a). The passage (Gen 2:1-3) reveals God finishing his creative activity in six days, after which he “rested” (*sabat*) on the “seventh day.” The seventh day is mentioned three times, marking its importance over the other previous six days.

The phonetic linkage between *sabat* and *sabbat* is generally perceived to indicate sabbath-rest because of the sabbath terminology which Genesis 2:1-3 has in common with the fourth commandment of the Decalogue: “seventh day” (vv. 2-3; Exod 20:10), “bless” (Heb *barak*, v. 3; Exod 20:11), “sanctify/make holy” (Heb *qiddas* [pi’el], v. 3; Exod 20:11; cf. 31:14), “make” (Heb *asah*, vv. 2-3; Exod 20:9-10; cf. 31:14-15).

“The ‘seventh day’ sabbath is ‘blessed’ as no other day and thereby imbued with a power unique to this day. God made this day ‘holy’ by separating it from all other days. Rest-day holiness is something God bestowed onto the seventh day. He manifested Himself in refraining from work and in rest as the divine Exemplar for humankind. The sequence of ‘six working-days’ and a ‘seventh [sabbath] rest-day’ indicates universally that every human being is to engage in an *imitatio Dei*, ‘imitation of God,’ by resting on the ‘seventh day.’ ‘Man’ (*adam*), is made in the *imago Dei*, ‘image of God,’ (Gen 1:26-28) is invited to follow the Exemplar.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 136. See also: “The character of the law of the Hebrew Bible . . . [supports] the idea of a rational, knowable, accessible foundation for moral judgments that was, at least in principle, available to all humanity” (Barr, *Biblical Faith*, 100).

<sup>13</sup> Dating of the Pentateuch is broadly historical and chronological, as argued by Duane Garrett.

<sup>14</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “Sabbath,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, editor-in-chief (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:851. When the Sabbath is



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The creation week cycle is later again grounded by God in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue.

The weekly cycle is also incidentally mentioned functioning within the Flood narratives (Gen 7:10; 8:10, 12).

**Cain and Abel/Worship of God (Gen 4:3-4).** Cain and Abel are found in worship outside the Garden of Eden. The brothers' actions reveal a knowledge of divine worship and involve time. Verse 3, often translated "in the course of time" (NASB); "in the process of time" (NKJV), reads literally "at the end of days." The only time frame given in Genesis so far is the weekly cycle set in place in Genesis 1 and 2. Thus "the end of days" in Genesis 4:3 could imply the end of the week, or the seventh-day Sabbath. Though sin has resulted in preventing direct contact with God as occurred in the Garden before sin, God has not broken off contact with the human beings. "Eden is off-limits to humanity, but God is not restricted to Eden's compound."<sup>15</sup>

How the brothers were instructed regarding the worship of God, the reader is not informed. Yet it is apparent that knowledge of and means of this worship is known.<sup>16</sup>

**Cain/Murder and Lying (Gen 4:3-16).** This narrative is a tragic account of sin's rapid degradation of human nature. Long before the commandment against murder was proclaimed from Mount Sinai, Cain kills his brother Abel. This horrifying deed is obviously stressed, for the word "brother" is repeated over and over in the passage. When God addresses Cain, he cites this relationship three times in three verses alone (vv. 9-11). Within Gen 4:1-17, "Abel" and "brother" occur seven times. All of

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accented in the wilderness wanderings before Sinai, it is clear that it is not being introduced as something new (Exod 16:28).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>16</sup> Victor Hamilton suggests three chiastic sentences in Gen 3:2-5, highlighting the contrasts between the offerings of the two brothers:

**A** and became **Abel** a keeper of **flocks**

**A'** and **Cain** became a **tiller** of the soil

**B** and brought **Cain** from the fruit of the soil . . .

**B'** and **Abel** brought, also he, from the firstlings . . .

**C** and looked favorably Yahweh on **Abel and his offering**

**C'** and on **Cain and his offering** he did not look favorably

See F. I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 122 [Davidson emphasis]; Hamilton, 219.

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these repetitions jar the reader's attention to the heinous nature of the crime.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of this grievous murder, Cain (as was the serpent in Gen 3) "is placed under a curse. This is the first occasion in Scripture where a human is cursed, indicating the gravity of his crime against God and creation."<sup>18</sup> Gordon Wenham sensitively notes that the overall pattern of this Genesis 4 narrative is unmistakably similar to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3, with the scenes closely parallel:

1. The central scene in each chapter is a terse description of the sin (3:6-8//4:8) that contrasts strikingly with long dialogues before and afterwards.

2. The following scene in each case where God investigates and condemns the sin is also remarkably alike: cf. "Where is Abel your brother?/" "Where are you?" 4:9; "What have you done? 3:9; 4:10; 3:13; "You are cursed from the land,"/"You are more cursed than all domesticated animals; The land is cursed because of you" 4:11; 3:14,17.

3. Both stories conclude with the transgressors leaving the presence of God and going to live east of Eden (4:16; cf. 3:24).

4. In Genesis 3:24, the LORD "drove man out of the garden." Cain's complaint is similar: "You have driven me from the surface of the land" (4:14).

These parallels between Genesis 3 and 4 suggest that the two narratives should be compared to give insight into the nature of human sin.

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<sup>17</sup> Alan Hauser elaborates: "It is not a foe, a stranger, or even a friend that Cain will kill, but his own flesh and blood. . . . Significantly, 'his brother' is applied never to Cain but always to Abel. In fact after v 7 Abel's name is never used without the accompanying 'his brother,' and the last three times the victim is mentioned we have only 'his brother' (vv 9b-11). The writer places so much stress on the fact that Abel is Cain's 'brother' because he wants to emphasize the violent and heinous nature of the act. Indeed the repetition of 'his brother' builds up like a crescendo, burning the deed into the mind of the reader." Alan J. Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links Between Genesis 4:1-16 and Genesis 2-3," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23/4 (1980): 300.

<sup>18</sup> So writes Kenneth Matthews, who continues: "Cain's culpability is emphasized by the direct accusation "from your [own] hand." The language "you are under a curse" is the same as the oracle delivered against the serpent: "Cursed are you above [*min*] all the livestock" (3:14) is parallel to "cursed are you from [*min*] the ground" (4:11). This linkage shows that like father like "seed," both the serpent and Cain are murderers who receive the same retribution. Because Cain has polluted the ground with innocent blood, he is "driven" from it as his parents were from the garden (3:24)." Kenneth A. Matthews, *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Genesis 1-11:26 in The New American Commentary New International Version*, E. Ray Clendenen, gen. ed. ([n.p.]: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 275.

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Fratricide graphically illustrates the defilement of sin. For example, in chapter 3, Eve has to be persuaded to disregard the Creator's advice by the serpent (3:1-5), whereas Cain is not dissuaded from his murderous intention by God's direct appeal (4:6-7). In chapter 3 there is no stark sense of alienation between Adam and Eve with God immediately. When God pronounces sentence on Adam, Eve, and the serpent, they accept it without demurring (3:14-20). Cain's negative attitude is perceptible from the outset when the LORD does not accept his sacrifice.

Clearly the writer of Genesis wants to mark parallels between the two narratives. However, the murder of Abel is not simply a rerun of the fall. There is further debasement. Sin's vicious nature is more graphically demonstrated and humanity is further alienated from God.<sup>19</sup> Genesis narratives proceed with deliberate linkages showing the curse of sin rapidly developing a deadly hold upon the human race. Human nature is now bent toward evil. Wenham is right: "Human beings should know what an octopus fastened its tentacles upon the race when sin took hold. With terrible realism the narrative continues."<sup>20</sup>

The Decalogue prohibition against murder has not yet been given. However, in Genesis 4, after the murder of Abel, God confronts Cain as a prosecutor and makes serious accusation. Cain is liable for shedding blood. A person cannot take another's life with impunity. Significantly, Cain himself is aware that murder is wrong. What is more, in addition to murdering his brother, Cain lies.

Retributive justice is not set in motion with the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus. It is already operant after this first tragic murder. Cain himself acknowledges his guilt and does not complain that God is too harsh toward him. He is only worried that other people might treat him unfairly.

The Genesis 4 narrative of Cain's murder of his brother also reveals and underscores the sacredness of human life in God's eyes. It is this same affirmation of life that is implied later in the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, which forbids murder. Moreover, the great anger of Cain, which the text describes ("So Cain was exceedingly angry, and his countenance fell" [Gen 4:5]), is an advance presentation of the principle Jesus

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<sup>19</sup> Adapted from Gordon J. Wenham: *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, David A. Hubbard & Glenn W. Barker, gen. ed. (Waco: Word, 1987), 98-100. Derek Kidner concurs: "Eve had been talked into her sin, Cain will not . . . confess to it, nor yet accept his punishment." Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, D. J. Wiseman, gen. ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1967), 74.

<sup>20</sup> Wenham, *ibid.*, 100.

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much later elucidates in His Sermon on the Mount, equating anger in the heart to murder.

**Lamech/Bigamy and Murder (Gen 4:19-24).** “Lamech took for himself two wives . . .” (Gen 4:19) He deliberately diverts from the divine ideal for marriage in Gen 2:24, the “echad” of one husband and one wife. The eighth commandment of the Decalogue forbidding adultery implies this same sacred view of monogamous marriage.

Lamech also brags of his murdering a person for wounding him, blatantly referring to Cain’s murder and his subsequent divine sentencing (Gen 4:23). “Lamech’s gloating over a reputation more ruthless than infamous Cain’s shows the disparagement of human life among Cain’s seed that was fostered by his murder of Abel.”<sup>21</sup>

In the literary structuring of Genesis, the genealogy of Cain, climaxing with Lamech, is juxtaposed against the genealogy of Adam/Seth, climaxing in righteous Enoch, who was translated without seeing death (Gen 4:16-24,26). This pairing makes the degradation caused by sin all the more glaringly obvious.

**Descendants of Seth/God’s Name (Gen 4:26).** All through Scripture, the name of God is declared holy: For example:

The Lord reigns; let the people tremble. He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved. The Lord is great in Zion; He is high above all the peoples. Let them praise *His great and awesome name*; He is holy. (Ps 99:1-3, emphasis added)

Long before Mount Sinai’s command to honor God’s name, people exalted it: “men began to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26). The command to honor God’s sacred name will later be enshrined in the third of the ten commandments.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mathews, 289. He continues: “God’s promise to avenge Cain’s life ‘seven times’ (v. 15) is interpreted by Lamech as a badge of honor for Cain rather than as a merciful provision by God for a shameful criminal (v. 24).” Derek Kidner expresses similar sentiments: “Lamech’s taunt-song reveals the swift progress of sin. Where Cain had succumbed to it (7) Lamech exults in it; where Cain had sought protection (14, 15) Lamech looks round for provocation: the savage disproportion of killing a mere led (Hebrew *yeled*, ‘child’) for a mere wound is the whole point of his boast (*cf.* 24)” (78).

<sup>22</sup> Textual linkages of Genesis narratives are assumed valid in this study. Mathews makes an interesting point: “Internally 4:1-26 also possesses evidence of cohesion. (1) The birth announcements at the three seams of the chapter have similar language (e.g., “lay with his wife,” vv. 1, 17, 25). (2) The narrative is built on the numerical congruity of sevens and multiples of seven: the emphatic “seven” for Cain (v. 15) and Lamech (v. 24);

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**Antediluvians/Morality (Gen 6:5,11-13).** The divine reason for the Flood implies that a standard of morality was being violated:

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. (Gen 6:5,11-13)

The phrase “the Lord saw” (v. 5) links with the creation story (1:31, “and God saw”) in a startling manner. Human evil is now presented even more graphically with biting force through the inclusive words “every . . . only . . . continually (6:5).” “A more emphatic statement of the wickedness of the human heart is hardly conceivable.”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, all of life is linked

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“brother” is found seven times, “Cain,” fourteen, and “Seth,” seven; the divine names of “God,” “LORD God,” and “LORD” together in 2:4-4:26 occur thirty-five times (5 x 7), equaling the same number “God” appears in 1:1-23, and the seventieth (10 x 7) occasion of deity’s name in Genesis is at 4:26b when men called on the “name of the LORD” (262). He also rightly notes: “At this time people ‘began to call on the name of the LORD’ (v. 26b). This concluding remark to the *toledot* section (2:4-4:26) serves as a linkage with the following genealogy, which formally presents Adam’s lineage through Seth down to the flood survivor, Noah (5:1-32). . . . ‘Called on the name of the LORD’ in 4:26b unites the Lord of the patriarchs and of Moses with the Lord of the antediluvian line of promise through Seth and shows thereby that the spiritual ancestors of Abraham’s family were those descended through Noah, the survivor of the flood’s purge. . . . This final note in the *toledot* section of 2:4-4:26 offers at last a bright spot among the dim accounts of sin and death that have dominated the garden story” (262; 291-292).

<sup>23</sup> Derek Kidner writes: “In verse 5, the expression *the Lord saw* invites bitter comparison with the creation story, 1:31. In the two halves of the verse man’s evil is presented extensively and intensively, the latter with devastating force in the word every . . . only . . . continually. ‘A more emphatic statement of the wickedness of the human heart is hardly conceivable.’ [citing Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Blackwell, 1960), 210] (78).

Kenneth Mathews elaborates further: “This horrid paragraph [Gen 6:5-8] is an expose on the degeneracy of the human heart. Collectively, society has decayed beyond recovery in God’s estimation. The progression in this small cluster of verses is arresting: “The LORD saw . . . The LORD grieved . . . The LORD said. . . . The justification for the calamity is the complete moral corruption of the human family and the defilement of the earth (cf. 6:6-7). The repetition of ‘corrupt,’ occurring in vv. 11-12, underscores God’s appraisal of the human condition (6:5) and proves the legitimacy of the extreme penalty he will invoke. ‘Earth’ also occurs three times in the passage, indicating that the fortunes of humanity and the earth are intertwined. This ‘corruption’ is further defined by the term ‘violence’ (*hamas*, v. 11) . . .” (339; 359).

together, for all living creatures share the same deliverance or divine death sentence.

After the Flood, God gives another injunction against murder: “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind” (Gen 9:5-6). This statement of God is precise, again underscoring the sacredness of life with grave consequences for its wanton destruction. The divinely pronounced principle declares that destroying human life is an offense against the Creator. The text speaks of human beings being made in the very image of God, strikingly linking to the transcendent value of life announced creation week (Gen 1:26-27). The divine image is still acknowledged in post-Flood sinful humans by God, explicitly linking post-Flood humanity to Adam.

Punishment for spilling the lifeblood of another human being is exacted by God. Twice it is mentioned in just two verses that God demands recompense for murder. This divine statement in Genesis 9:5-6 is addressed to humanity, long before the people of Israel are in existence. Retributive justice does not commence in the Mosaic Covenant. We find it here in the Divine Covenant with Noah, already operating since the first murder in Gen. 4, as we have seen above.

**Noah and His Sons/Filial Irreverence and Sexual Perversion (Gen 9:20-27).** This incident involves sexual irregularity connected with drunkenness.<sup>24</sup> The Hebrew *ra’ā* here means “to look at (searchingly)” (Song 1:6; 6:11b) and is not describing an innocent or accidental action. Ham’s “voyeurism” is of the worst sort, as the prophet Habakkuk later insists:

Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to  
your bottle even to make him drunk that you may look upon  
his nakedness! You are filled with shame instead of glory . . .  
(Hab 2:15,16a)

A discussion continues among scholars regarding the exact nature of the act of Ham, but all agree that sexual perversion is apparent, as is filial irreverence.

In contrast to the terse brevity with which Ham’s deed is described, the response of the two brothers, Shem and Japhet, is detailed. The narrative slows when the other two brothers refrain from further impropriety.

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<sup>24</sup> Derek Kidner speaks of the “loss of decency and honour which marks this first biblical story of strong drink . . .” (103).

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Notice how it is said twice that they went “backwards,” and that they covered and did not see “their father’s nakedness.” The fifth commandment of honoring a parent is apparently operant long before the pronouncement of it from Mount Sinai.<sup>25</sup> Also, the standard of sexual purity of the seventh commandment is implied.

**Tower of Babel/Making a “Name” (Gen 11:1-9).** This narrative is linked to Gen 4:26’s description of “calling on the name of the Lord”: “Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, . . . they said to one another . . . “*let us make a name for ourselves . . .*” (Gen 11:4, emphasis added) The motive of the Babel builders was to achieve independence from God, implying a blatant snub of the divine. Though created in God’s image, they wanted to divorce from that fundamental connection. The “name of God” later upheld in the third commandment of the Decalogue was deliberately disregarded.

Human desire to be autonomous is as ancient as human civilization, as even a casual perusal of history would suggest. Interestingly, the Babel builders were successful in making a name for themselves. However, its lasting sense is derogatory. The term “Babel” is still synonymous with confusion, as occasional media comments hint.

**Lot and His Daughters/Sexual Deviancy (Gen 19:1-38).** The moral compass of Lot and his daughters is very confused. We find lurid sexual perversion in their lives. The horrible depth of vice in Sodom is indicated by “young men and old” (Hebrew: “from young to old”) showing up at Lot’s house, revealing inter-generational corruption. The enormity of their sin is also indicated by the fact that the sacred duty of hospitality was so completely distorted by them that Lot’s *guests* were demanded for abuse, even though Lot urges them not to do “this wicked thing” (Gen 19:7).<sup>26</sup>

This narrative’s events display shocking depravity. Lot does not protect his daughters but offers them to inflamed men. His “hospitality” reflects moral confusion.<sup>27</sup> Later, these daughters will sexually abuse their

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<sup>25</sup> “It is the obverse of the fifth commandment . . .” Kidner, *ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> “The sin of Sodom’s act is presumably the worst sort of sexual offense: homosexual gang rape (cf. Judg 19; Jude 7)” (Waltke, 276).

<sup>27</sup> Kidner comments: “That a virtue can be inflated into a vice is glaringly plain here, for Lot’s courage in going out to the mob proves his sincerity. . . . It suggests that in any age human conventions will be a most fallible guide. Doing his best, Lot has jeopardized his daughters, enraged his townsmen, and finally required rescue by those he was

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father. The last picture of Lot, nephew of noble Abraham, is embedded in incest. Derek Kidner details the bleak picture:

The end of choosing to carve out his career was to lose even the custody of his body. His legacy, Moab and Ammon (37f.), was destined to provide the worst carnal seduction in the history of Israel (that of Baal-Peor, Num 25) and the cruellest religious perversion (that of Molech, Lev. 18:21). So much stemmed from a self-regarding choice (13:10f.) and persistence in it.<sup>28</sup>

Kenneth Mathews describes this Genesis 19 narrative as involving “a web of the most vile circumstances.”<sup>29</sup> Another example of not honoring parents is apparent in these verses, along with issues of “not committing adultery.”

**Abraham/Divine Worship (Gen 22:5; 24:26,48,52).** Though surrounded by pagan polytheistic nations, the Genesis narratives of Abraham picture him faithfully worshiping the one true God.<sup>30</sup> His godly influence obviously spread throughout his household, for even his servants testify to their faith in the true God. When on his journey to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham’s trusted servant describes how God answered his prayer for guidance:

And I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master’s brother for his son. (Gen 24:48)

In fact, Genesis 24 records this servant worshiping God three times!

**Abimelech, Pharaoh, Abraham and Isaac/Adultery and Lying (Gen 12, 20, 26).** Fundamental Decalogue principles are also seen operant beyond the Covenant line. God’s standard of righteousness is the same within the nations through which the patriarchs travel. The three

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trying to protect. The angels’ visit has shattered the uneasy peace in which he has lived too long” (134).

<sup>28</sup> Kidner, *ibid.*, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Mathews, 237. Kidner also notes: “At this early point in Scripture the sin of sodomy is branded as particularly heinous” (134).

<sup>30</sup> For example: “And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD” (Gen 13:3-4).



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“adultery narratives” of Gen 12, 20 and 26 involve three different places and rulers. In Gen 20, King Abimelech finds out about Abraham and Sarah’s marriage from a dream. He pleads his innocence to God because he was unaware of any existing marital relation between Abraham and Sarah. Open to divine instruction, this ruler displays a moral conscience superior to Abraham’s.<sup>31</sup>

Later, Isaac finds himself in a situation very similar to the one his father had been in two times. Like his father, Isaac bore “false witness,” involving the ninth commandment of the future-presented Decalogue. When confronted with his lie, Isaac admits that he had been afraid that men might have put him to death on Rebekah’s account. The pagan king scolds Isaac’s prevarication regarding his relationship with Rebekah. This ruler, though not of the covenant line, recognizes that adultery involves “guilt.” He insists, “she is your wife” (Gen 26:9).

Abimelech then administers a well-deserved rebuke to Isaac: “. . . and you would have brought upon us retribution” (v. 10). In attempting to spare his own life through deception, Isaac was risking the lives of everyone else.<sup>32</sup> Remarkably, Abimelech understands this principle when he makes the above statement. It is not only the immoral behavior that concerns him, but also the consequences of that behavior. Strikingly, “outsiders” of the Covenant line in Genesis are sensitive to precepts of the Sinai Decalogue (e.g., Egyptians, Canaanites, Aramaeans). Terence Fretheim is correct:

This functioning of law is also evident in the treatment of other characters and their activities throughout Genesis 12-50 . . . the oughts are presented as an organic [or creational] ethic by means of creational motifs that are embedded in the narrative . . . woven into the foundations of human experience.<sup>33</sup>

**Rebekah’s Deception and Jacob’s Lies (Gen 27); Laban’s Lies (29:21-26).** The deceptive conversations are included in each narrative,

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<sup>31</sup> As Gerald Janzen notes: “In this encounter between Abimelech and God, then, we have a remarkable picture of moral sensitivity and responsiveness on the part of a city-state king. Unlike the later pharaoh of the Exodus, when God’s word comes to Abimelech he responds in repentance and the fear of God (v. 8).” J. Gerald Janzen, *A Commentary on the Book Genesis 12-50: Abraham and All the Families of the Earth* (Eerdmans, 2003), 69.

<sup>32</sup> Just as Achan’s sin later brings divine wrath upon all Israel (Josh 7:1).

<sup>33</sup> Fretheim, 99.

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Rebekah with her son Jacob, Jacob with his father Isaac, and later Laban with Jacob. The deceiver of his father was subsequently deceived by his father-in-law. On the first occasion, Jacob understands that his mother's plan would be a deception: "Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, 'Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a *deceiver* in his sight . . .'" (Gen 27:11-12, emphasis added).

When in the presence of Isaac, Jacob utters two lies.

First, he claims to be Esau, and for good measure he adds *your firstborn*. This phrase will remind Isaac why father and son are getting together on this occasion. Second, he claims to have captured the game and now wants to share that with Isaac. He also reminds his father that he is there for his father's blessing, not just for some food and a chat. . . . The low point in Jacob's conversation with his father is his statement that he is back so quickly because God just put the game in front of him. Here is an appeal to deity in order to cover up duplicity.<sup>34</sup>

When Esau learns of what has happened, he expresses how he regards Jacob's prevarication: "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing" (Gen 27:36).

His anger is so great that he plans a revenge murder of his brother:

So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "the days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." (Gen 27:41)

Later, Laban exercises treachery on Jacob, dealing fraudulently with his daughter Rachel promised to Jacob after seven years of service (Gen 29:1-28). Jacob demands an answer from Laban: "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you *deceived* me?" (Gen 29:25, emphasis added).<sup>35</sup>

**Rahel/Stealing** (Gen 31): "Rachel *stole* her father's household gods" when Jacob determined to leave Laban's employment (Gen 31:19, emphasis added). Laban eventually caught up with the fleeing family and

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<sup>34</sup> Hamilton, 219-220.

<sup>35</sup> "As Jacob took advantage of his father's blindness to deceive him, so Laban uses the cover of night to outwit Jacob" (Waltke, 405). Esau uses the same word [*rama*] to describe Jacob's deceit as Jacob does to Laban.

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inquires of Jacob: “Why did you *steal* my gods?” (v. 30, emphasis added). The narrator mentions that “Jacob did not know that Rachel had *stolen* the gods.” (v. 32, emphasis added). Jacob defends his innocence, which implies that he knew stealing would be wrong. Rachel’s act of stealing is portrayed in the narrative as a wrongful act. However, the eighth commandment of the Decalogue is yet to be proclaimed from Mount Sinai.

**Shechem, Hamor, Simeon and Levi/Coveting, Rape, Murder, Lying (Gen 34).** Shechem, a determined young man, does not politely address his father when expressing his emphatic desire for Dinah.<sup>36</sup> Shechem will not allow anything to deter his compulsion for Dinah, and he is seen coveting what is not rightfully his. He takes matters into his own hands and abducts Dinah (“seized her,” v. 2b and v. 26). The verb sequence “saw . . . took” used of Shechem’s treatment of Dinah is the same sequence used for the sexually unrestrained in Genesis 6:2, which then leads directly to the Flood narrative.

Dinah’s brothers are furious, filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing.<sup>37</sup> Their word for the “infamous deed” (*nʾbala*) is an expression for the most serious kind of sexual depravity.<sup>38</sup> Their insistence that “such a thing ought not to be done” suggests they believed that inviolable norms had been breached (2 Sam 13:12).

Neither Hamor nor Shechem admit that anything wrong has been done. They both hope that a monetary payment may help smooth over the situation. Hamor even tries to paint an appealing picture of the advantages Jacob might accrue with such an arrangement.

However, Simeon and Levi (“full brothers of Dinah” v. 25), recoil from the sexual disgrace of their sister (“a thing that should not be done,” v. 6). They suggest an alternative. The brothers then add deceit (which involves the ninth commandment of the Decalogue) to the complex situation. Next they commit murder, breaking the future-proclaimed sixth commandment of the Ten Commandments. When defending their actions to Jacob, Simeon and Levi argue, “should our sister be treated like a harlot?”

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<sup>36</sup> Similar to Samson’s demand of his parents in Judg 14:2 (cf. 34:8).

<sup>37</sup> Similarly, David was rightly furious when Amnon raped Tamar (2 Sam 13:21). And Absalom, like Jacob’s sons, was also angry for his own sister.

<sup>38</sup> Other uses in the OT (Judg 19:23f; 20:6; cf. Exod 22:2) reveal that this kind of act involves a desecration before God.

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However, the very last word on this narrative comes later from Jacob on his deathbed: “[speaking of Simeon and Levi] Cursed be their anger” (Gen 49:5-7). Jacob gives voice to the much later NT Sermon on the Mount’s explicit link of anger and murder. Genesis 34 paints a portrait of grim violence including rape, deceit, and massacre resulting from wrongful coveting.

**Jacob/Idols (Gen 35:1-4).** When Jacob hears God’s call to return to Bethel, he feels a need for repentance and revival in his household. Thus he urges the family to put away their idols. Why was this part of Jacob’s response? The prohibition against idol worship in the Decalogue will be announced on Mount Sinai only much later.

**Joseph and His Brothers/Threat of Murder and Lying (Gen 39-50).** Jacob’s sons first suggest that they might murder their brother Joseph (“let’s kill him” [Gen 37:20]), but instead sell him to the Ishmaelites, then lie to their father about what happened to Joseph. The guilt they bear over this weighs heavily on them for years. This becomes evident later, when the brothers travel to Egypt because of a famine. Eventually they learn of Joseph’s high position. This constrains them to confess their long-lasting feelings of guilt and their lying several times:

1. Judah, when appealing to Joseph to allow Benjamin to return to his father: “Your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, ‘surely he is torn in pieces,’ and I have not seen him since. . . .’” (Gen 44:27-28);

2. Later, after burying their father Jacob: “When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘what if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!’ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father charged before he died, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph, “Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father’” (Gen 50:15-17).

Though the proclamation of the Decalogue from Sinai is yet far in the future, Joseph’s brothers’ consciences are obviously pricked regarding their falsehoods to their father and their treatment of their brother.

**Potiphar’s Wife and Joseph/Adultery (Gen 39).** The seventh of the Ten Commandments, regarding adultery, was apparently already part of Joseph’s morality when he was in Egypt. The narrative paints a vivid picture of a faithless wife who turns on a young man because he refuses her improper advances. Joseph’s answer to Potiphar’s wife’s seduction is specific: Potiphar, his master, has bestowed unlimited confidence on

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him. The baseness of betraying such trust would be wrong.<sup>39</sup> Next, Joseph emphasizes that she is withheld from him for she is a married woman, Potiphar's wife. Most importantly, such an adulterous act would be a "great evil" and a "sin against God." Joseph's detailed argument also implies that Potiphar's wife can and should understand him.

However, she is not deterred by any of Joseph's considerations. Nor is her seduction a one-time enticement. "Day by day" (Hebrew: *yom yom*) she approaches him.<sup>40</sup> Apparently she is so persistent that Joseph takes the precaution of staying away from her (Gen 39:10).

With one encounter, Joseph realized that the situation called for drastic action, for Potiphar's wife "caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled outside (*chut-zah*—"to the street").<sup>41</sup> To divert suspicion from her to Joseph, Potiphar's wife goes on the offensive to the household servants by raising an outcry and protesting her "innocence."

Her immoral passion for Joseph is now replaced with lying. Joseph's garment, which she holds, could be substantial evidence for her. She repeats what Joseph did and what she did, but cleverly reverses the order. The narrative has portrayed Joseph leaving his coat in her hand and fleeing outdoors (v. 12), and then Potiphar's wife shouting for help (v. 14). When Potiphar's wife retells this incident, she first mentions her screaming. Then she describes Joseph's leaving his cloak behind in his rapid exit (v. 15). Her clever reversal thereby depicts her as a "victim," underscoring the blatant nature of her lie. Moreover:

In relating Joseph's alleged misconduct to her servants, she identified Joseph as "a Hebrew fellow" (v. 14). In speaking to her husband, she identifies Joseph as *the Hebrew slave* (v. 17). Joseph has been shifted from an *is* to an *ebed*. The change is certainly deliberate. To be sexually attacked by an *is* is bad

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<sup>39</sup> Derek Kidner elaborates: "Joseph's reasons for refusal (vv. 8, 9) were those that another man might have given for yielding, so neutral is the force of circumstances. His freedom from supervision and his rapid promotion, which have corrupted other stewards (*cf.* Is. 22:15-25; Lk. 16:1ff.), and his realization that one realm only (v. 9) was barred to him (which others, from Eve onwards, have construed as a frustration) were all arguments to him for loyalty. By giving the proposition its right name of *wickedness* (v. 9) he made truth his ally . . ." (190).

<sup>40</sup> This kind of persistence Samson later unfortunately could not resist (Judg 14:17; 16:16).

<sup>41</sup> This is the second time Joseph loses a piece of clothing, both times of which lead to extreme difficulty for him.

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enough. To be sexually attacked by a foreign slave makes her accusation all the more damning. In choosing this term, she is putting Joseph in as despicable a light as possible. It should also demand as swift a redress as possible from Potiphar, the master who has been betrayed by his servant.<sup>42</sup>

She also cleverly attaches “secondary blame to her own husband. After all, it is Potiphar who brought Joseph into the household.”<sup>43</sup>

**Conclusion**

All ten precepts of the Sinai Decalogue are attested to throughout the Genesis narratives:

1. “You shall have no other gods before Me” (monotheism): Creation Week; Gen 2:1-3; 4:3,26; 12:1-3; 22:5; 24:48.
2. “You shall not make . . . any carved image . . . nor bow down to them . . .”: Jacob urging family to put away idols (Gen 35:2).
3. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain . . .”: “calling on the ‘name of the Lord’” (Gen 4:26).
4. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy . . . the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God . . .”: Creation Week; Cain and Abel’s worship time; weekly cycle operating (Gen 2:1-3; 4:3; 7:4,10; 8:10,12).
5. “Honor your father and mother . . .”: (Noah/his sons; Lot/his daughters (Gen 9:20-27; 19:1-38).
6. “You shall not kill”: Cain kills Abel and is held accountable by God; Lamech bragging of murder; Simeon and Levi killing (Gen 4:3-15; 4:23-24; 34).
7. “You shall not commit adultery”: Abraham/Sarah/Pharaoh; Lot/his daughters; Abraham/Sarah/Abimelech; Isaac/Rebekah/Abimelech; Joseph/Potiphar’s wife (Gen 12:9-20; 19:30-38; 20:1-7; 26:6-11; 39:7-21).
8. “You shall not steal”: Rachel steals idols (Gen 31:13-42).
9. “You shall not bear false witness”: Abraham/Sarah/Pharaoh; Abraham/Sarah/Abimelech; Isaac/Rebekah/Abimelech; Jacob/Esau/Leah; Laban/Leah and Rachel/Jacob; Dinah incident; Joseph/Potiphar’s wife (Gen 12:9-20; 20:1-7; 26:6-11; 27; 29; 34:13-27; 39).
10. “You shall not covet”: Dinah/Shechem; Joseph/Potiphar’s wife (Gen 34:1-4; 39).

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<sup>42</sup> Hamilton, 469.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 468.

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In light of these many Genesis indicators exhibiting the morality encoded later in the Decalogue, the commendation of Abraham given by God to Isaac is especially impressive:

I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham . . . because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. (Gen 26:5, emphasis added)

John Sailhamer is sensitive to the vocabulary of this statement: “These terms are well-known from the pages of Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 11:1; 26:17), where they are the stock vocabulary for describing the keeping of the Torah revealed at Sinai.”<sup>44</sup> This explicitly detailed statement of God “witnesses to the place of law in the pre-Sinai period and that the law given at Sinai stands in fundamental continuity with the law obeyed by Abraham.”<sup>45</sup> God could have merely stated to Isaac that Abraham had been obedient. Instead He becomes very precise, mentioning specifically what Abraham had been obedient to.

Genesis does not record how human beings were provided with God’s laws, commandments, and statutes. But they are specifically mentioned here (Gen 26:5), implying that knowledge of them was in place.<sup>46</sup> By these selective terms, the Pentateuch’s author indicates that divine

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<sup>44</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 148.

<sup>45</sup> Fretheim, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Strikingly, God again becomes this specific in Exod 16:28, when chiding Israel for not observing His Law, though they had not yet gotten to Sinai: “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?” (Exod 16:28). Some of the children of Israel had gone out to gather manna on the seventh day, disregarding the directives of Moses: “Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none” (Exod 16:26).

The Sabbath, given at Creation, is implied even before the manna miracle in the wilderness. Notice when Pharaoh prods Moses and Aaron: “And the king of Egypt said to them, ‘Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor.’ And Pharaoh said, ‘Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!’” (Exod 5:5, emphasis added). Though there are other words for “rest” in Hebrew, Pharaoh uses a *hapax legomenon* with the “Shabbat” root. This suggests that Pharaoh realizes that his slaves were somehow acknowledging the seventh day.

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“laws, commandments, and statutes” undergird morality in the patriarchal period.<sup>47</sup> And this morality is identical to that of the Decalogue.

There is another witness during the pre-Mosaic patriarchal period. Job’s personal testimony of morality also involves Decalogue principles. His language is clear:

I have made a covenant with my eyes: how then could I look upon a virgin? What would be my portion from God above and my heritage from the almighty on high? . . . Does He not see my ways, and number all my steps? If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hurried to deceit—let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity! . . . If my heart has been enticed by a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbor’s door; . . . If I have made gold my trust, or called fine gold my confidence . . . and my heart has been secretly enticed . . . this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I should have been false to God above . . . If I have concealed my transgressions as others do, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom, because I stood in great fear of the multitude . . . If my land has cried out against me, and its furrows have wept together; if I have eaten its yield without payment, and caused the death of its owners . . .” (Job 31:1-34, quoted here selectively)

This passage yields a striking moral sensitivity. And if this is the oldest book in the Bible (which the details of the text itself seem to corroborate),<sup>48</sup> the principles by which Job’s conscience operates also reflect advanced knowledge of the much-later-presented Sinai decalogue. And Job is not even of the Covenant Line.

A close reading of the book of Genesis suggests that the precepts of the Decalogue were the standard of human morality long before Sinai. We have surveyed implicit acknowledgments of all ten. The dramatic, majestic, overwhelming presentation of the Ten Commandments to the

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<sup>47</sup> Higher criticism has been unable to appreciate these precise indicators in Genesis, thinking that the ancient peoples were incapable of such advanced thinking. Critics argue that these specific terms come from another source and claim to discern traces of a later redactor.

<sup>48</sup> Job’s morning and evening sacrificial worship plus the offering of sacrifice by the head of the family rather than by an official priesthood would be pre-Mosaic; use of “El Shaddai” as God’s name and the list of flocks Job owns are the same as given for the patriarchs. The Great Exodus, subsequently mentioned by the many different Bible writers, is never alluded to. Cf. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 456-462.



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Israelites at Mt Sinai, rather than being an initial presentation of them, instead underscores the flaming emphasis God attaches to the Moral Law, His eternal code of righteousness. Rather than granting Israel a new code of ethics, the Genesis narratives instead give evidence that the Decalogue morality predates Sinai. Thus, their expression on Sinai suggests that God purposed to make the occasion of speaking His law on Sinai a scene of awful grandeur because of the exalted character of the Law. No wonder the psalmist was moved to chant:

Forever, O LORD,  
Your word is settled in heaven. . . .  
Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,  
And Your Law is Truth . . .  
Oh, how I love Your Law. (Ps 119:89,142,97)

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## **The Message of the Trees in the Midst of the Garden**

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### **I. The Trees in the Garden**

“The Hebrew Bible is terse, it does not use three words where two or one or none will do,” says Pamela Tamarkin Reis.<sup>1</sup> This view surely applies to the passage concerning the trees in the Garden of Eden in the Book of Genesis.

Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:9)

If economy of words is a feature of the Hebrew Bible generally, it rises to dizzying levels in this passage. Gerhard von Rad, citing an unnamed source, refers to this portion of Scripture as “one of the greatest accomplishments of all times in the history of thought,” adding that “[w]onderful clarity and utter simplicity characterize the representation of the individual scenes.”<sup>2</sup> His admiration, it must be noted, is primarily of the disproportion between “the meagerness of [the author’s] resources” and the magnitude of the message that is communicated. Nahum Sarna, contrasting the Genesis narrative with other ancient attempts

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela Tamarkin Reis, “What Cain Said: A Note on Genesis 4.8,” *JSOT* 27 (2002): 110.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (trans. John H. Marks; OTL; London: SCM, 1963), 24.

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to write an account of human beginnings, likewise notes that “[t]he Hebrew account is matchless in its solemn and majestic simplicity.”<sup>3</sup>

To many a reader, however, this passage is more simple than clear. The economy of words is cause for despair, not praise. While the writer may not use “three words where two or one or none will do,”<sup>4</sup> the reader may be yearning precisely for the words the author omits.

Three items are specified in the passage that introduces the trees: God has created trees “pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9). It is evident that the two named trees are the author’s particular interest, although they share important characteristics with the unnamed trees. Given that the trees that God made to grow in general terms are said to be “pleasant to the sight and good for food,” we should expect this feature to apply to the named trees as well. This question need not be left on the level of assumption. In regard to the third item on the list, “the tree of knowledge of good and evil,” we are later informed that this tree “was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes” (Gen 3:6). As to beauty and apparent utility, the named trees are not inferior to the other trees in the garden.

The tree of life was “in the midst of the garden” (Gen 2:9). To be at the center in terms of location is also to be at the center in terms of importance. The location of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is not specified at the point where the tree is introduced to the reader, but the text implies that the two named trees are paired. Again, we are helped by information supplied at a later point. In the woman’s answer to the serpent she refers to it as the tree “in the middle of the garden” (Gen 3:2). To the extent that location signifies importance, the tree of knowledge is an item of high priority. The notion that it is “incidental that there are two trees,” as suggested by Walter Brueggemann, is not persuasive.<sup>5</sup> If, too, there is a movement in the text from the simple to the sublime, an order of priority from lesser to greater, and a trajectory from lower to higher, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil occupies a position of spectacular distinction. This tree seems “good for food, and . . . a delight to the eyes” (Gen 3:6), and it is located “in the middle of the garden” (Gen 3:2).

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<sup>3</sup> Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1966), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Reis, “What Cain Said,” 110.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 45.

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The exceptional character of this tree applies not only to its location but also to its role in the story. A “tree of life” is known in other ancient narratives of origins but not a tree of knowledge. Sarna claims that this tree “has no parallel outside of our biblical Garden of Eden story.”<sup>6</sup> Attention in the story is focused on this tree even more than on the tree of life, further highlighting its importance.<sup>7</sup> I am therefore tempted to add one word concerning this tree where the writer thought that none would do, “Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and [even] the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9). In order to forestall a ho-hum reading, it may be appropriate to end the sentence with an exclamation mark. In short, we do well to pay attention to this tree and the message it represents.

## **II. An Expression of Core Convictions**

Having ascertained that purpose and priority are in view, we are ready to hear the instruction that is given with respect to the tree of knowledge.

And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (Gen 2:16-17)

Where should we place the emphasis in this statement? Considering the statement as a whole, should the focus be on permission or on restriction? Considering the tree of knowledge, is the prohibition not to eat of the tree of knowledge meant as a restriction? What is the message of this unique tree?

A reading that puts the weight on quantitative parameters leaves the impression that the prohibition not to eat of the tree imposes a restriction. In a garden of 3000 trees, choosing this number for the purpose of illustration, one tree is now forbidden territory. The arithmetic is easy. 2999 trees is one less than 3000, and the difference, albeit a small one, signifies a restriction. In quantitative terms, a person is more restricted who has access to 2999 trees rather than to 3000.

James Barr registers a strident objection to the story not only because it is imposing a restriction but also because the alleged restriction lacks

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<sup>6</sup> Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 26.

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even the slimmest of hints at good sense.<sup>8</sup> His rhetoric is unsparing: Barr refers to “the sheer irrationality of the command,” aggravated by the fact that it threatens with death “the slightest deviation from the slightest divine command”; worse yet, the command is “devoid of perceptible ethical basis”; still worse, God “has made an ethically arbitrary prohibition, and backed it up with a threat to kill, which in the event, he does nothing to carry out.”<sup>9</sup> Adding up the dubious ingredients associated with the tree of knowledge, God is the one “who is placed in a rather ambiguous light.”<sup>10</sup> This assessment goes beyond a mere quantitative assessment, but one should be careful not to miss the uncharitable and sterile logic underlying it. Deprivation of freedom is the name of the game. The tree of knowledge represents a meaningless restriction to the point that, if it were not stated clearly enough already, God is the person who “comes out of this story with a slightly shaky moral record.”<sup>11</sup> The serpent that speaks later in the story (Gen 3:1-5), also operating within a quantitative framework, will not say it better or more forcefully.

If, however, our reading takes the qualitative route, the result will be quite different. What the quantitative measure construes as a restriction has exactly the opposite significance when we measure the tree of knowledge with a qualitative measuring stick. Now it is not the raw number of trees that matters but their meaning. In this scenario the quality of human existence is not to be measured according to material parameters but in spiritual and political terms. Where the quantitative assessment is forced to register a subtraction, placing the tree of knowledge in the column of loss, the qualitative approach sees in the tree an added quality, recording it in the column of gain.

R. W. L. Moberly says of the command as a whole that “God’s words had emphasized freedom—the man could eat of every tree with only one prohibited.”<sup>12</sup> This view is good as far as it goes, but it suffers under the implied quantitative constraint. In other words, freedom is the predominant emphasis, restriction the lesser one, but there is nevertheless a restriction. An unapologetic qualitative reading is altogether different, construing the apparent restriction not as a limitation of freedom but as its confirmation. First, as Sidney Greidanus suggests, “God is good in

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<sup>8</sup> James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right?” *JTS* 39 (1988): 6.

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giving this commandment, for they are free to eat from any tree in the Garden, including the tree of life, with one exception.”<sup>13</sup> Second, however, and contrary not only to the most intuitive interpretation but also to Barr’s critique, the prohibition is not really intended as a restriction. “This one prohibition is also good because God treats man as a free moral agent,” says Greidanus.<sup>14</sup> The added quality of the forbidden tree is the quality of choice.

In this scenario, consent and choice are set forth as core ingredients of God’s way. When the tree of knowledge is viewed qualitatively, the thought of seeing it removed is more disturbing than the thought of keeping it precisely with respect to the point that is unsettling within the quantitative framework. The latter sees less freedom, the former sees more. Indeed, the qualitative reading sees freedom itself. Remove the tree of knowledge, this logic suggests, and what is thereby removed is not the opportunity to eat but the reality of choice. We might wish to qualify this view by admitting that the author, through the symbolism of the tree, “teaches that the human person is free in all respects but one: determining what is right and wrong solely on the basis of human insight,”<sup>15</sup> but even this admission should not take away from the tree the connotation that choice itself is the primary function of the tree. Here we find the ‘voting booth’ of the Garden of Eden, the place where human beings are freely offered an opportunity to express approval or disapproval with respect to the terms of their existence.

At this point it is appropriate to recall that the text of Genesis, as noted, is a text of few words, placing more responsibility on the shoulders of the reader than the reader feels like carrying. More than one option is available to the interpreter, and many more than the ones that have been sampled so far. Nevertheless, computing evidence that lies on the surface of the text, we cannot treat the two named trees in the Garden of Eden dismissively. The trees share conspicuous characteristics. They are acts of God, located in the middle of the garden. What “the Lord God made to grow” is redolent with intent and importance. The sparse account tells us something about the Person who does these things. In theological and ideological terms, I suggest that the named trees should be

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<sup>13</sup> Sidney Greidanus, “Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall,” *BSac* 161 (2004): 266.

<sup>14</sup> Greidanus, “Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall”: 266.

<sup>15</sup> Paul F. Scotchmer, “Lessons from Paradise on Work, Marriage, and Freedom: A Study of Genesis 2:4-3:24,” *ERT* 28 (2004): 81-82.

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seen as core convictions of the Agent behind these actions. The acting subject in the account, rather than the narrator, is in the process of achieving not only “one of the greatest accomplishments of all times in the history of thought,” as in von Rad’s version,<sup>16</sup> but a costly and generous ideological commitment. This commitment, in turn, admitting that the Hebrew Bible has left out the explanatory notes that would simplify the task of interpretation, should broadly speaking be seen as the gift of freedom. Limiting the options even more so as to avoid a comprehensive discussion of the elusive notion of freedom, the part of ‘freedom’ that this essay finds enshrined in the tree of knowledge is the absence of coercion.

If this seems like a timid aspiration and a peripheral concern, what follows might prove otherwise. Brueggemann, who sees in the text concerning the tree of knowledge a triplet denoting *vocation*, *permission*, and *prohibition*, finds that little attention has been given to the mandate of vocation or the gift of permission.<sup>17</sup> In the eyes of many interpreters, says Brueggemann, God’s will for vocation and freedom has been lost to the effect that God “is chiefly remembered as the one who *prohibits*.”<sup>18</sup> This is not an exaggeration, nor is it worded strongly enough. God has been seen not only as a God who *prohibits* but also as a God who *coerces*, even though, as the present interpretation sees it, the ideology that is revealed in the Garden of Eden is precisely and emphatically an ideology that eschews coercion. The writer of Genesis leaves it to the interpreter to name the unnamed idea and to ponder its implication, and this is just what interpreters have done.

### III. Pursuing the Meaning of the Tree of Knowledge

The tree of life is virtually self-explanatory, but how has the tree of knowledge of good and evil been understood? How should it be understood, knowing the role this tree plays in the remainder of the narrative and the downward course emerging from its conspicuous location in the midst of the garden?

**1. The Politics of Paradise.** To early Christian interpreters of the Genesis story, the message of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is that human beings are meant to be free moral agents along the lines suggested above. God’s intention for humanity is life as revealed in the tree

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<sup>16</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46.

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46.

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of life, but life as such is not the whole story. Sarna seems to operate within the boundaries of the text when he assigns a subordinate role to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden story, but he exaggerates when he claims that the Bible relegates this tree to an insignificant role and that Scripture, in his words, “dissociates itself completely” from the implied pre-occupation with immortality.<sup>19</sup> One should nevertheless listen to the Jewish point of view that the concern of the story “is with the issues of living rather than with the question of death, with morality rather than mortality.”<sup>20</sup>

In the eyes of the earliest Christian interpreters, the ideology of the tree of knowledge is the ideology of freedom. Its political corollary entails repudiation of coercion. The tree of knowledge embodies the means by which God’s will is to come to expression in the lives of human beings; it is to happen freely, without compulsion or force. Elaine Pagels has written lucidly about the early Christian understanding of Genesis under the title of “The Politics of Paradise.”<sup>21</sup> Adopting the political angle, the tree of knowledge stands as a political and constitutional statement whose message is freedom.

If, as suggested above, we see the tree of knowledge as a ‘core conviction,’ it will be worthwhile to listen to what early Christian interpreters say about this conviction in the context of the Genesis creation account, using the Christian apologist Origen (185-254 AD) as an example. According to Origen, God “will subject all rational creatures to himself through *persuasion*, not through constraint, and thus bring their freedom to fulfillment in obedience to the divine will.”<sup>22</sup> An individual “should not be compelled by force against its free choice to any action except that to which the motions of its own mind lead it,” says Origen.<sup>23</sup> By these and other statements, Origen is remembered as a leading exponent of freedom, and freedom, as Origen sees it, is “the most general of all the

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<sup>19</sup> Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Elaine Pagels, “The Politics of Paradise; Augustine’s Exegesis of Genesis 1-3 versus that of John Chrysostom,” *HTR* 78 (1985): 67-99.

<sup>22</sup> John R. Sachs, “Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 628.

<sup>23</sup> *Origen on First Principles* (trans. G. W. Butterworth; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936), II.1.2.



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laws of the universe.”<sup>24</sup> The terms of human existence were originally constituted under the rubric of freedom. Until Origen’s time and for another half century or so, declining upon the ascent of the emperor Constantine, this view represents the thrust of the Christian interpretation of the Genesis narrative of the fall.

Further corroboration is in order for this view to be sustained, but on the whole I find it easy to agree with the tenor of the early Christian understanding. Absent the tree of knowledge, a thought experiment I have attempted many times in various contexts, I have not been the only one concluding that human existence would thereby be deprived of choice, consent, and even responsibility. Were the tree of knowledge to be removed, the terms of human existence would be diminished. However, human dignity, important though it is, must not be held as the breaking point. The trees that are specifically named in the Garden of Eden must primarily be seen as statements about God and as representations of God’s core convictions. In the form of the tree of knowledge, God makes willing, intelligent consent an essential ingredient in the divine-human relationship.

Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 334-ca. 394) was a great admirer of Origen, but he serves notice that already in his time, early in the Constantinian era, the tree of knowledge is acquiring a negative connotation. Gregory disputes the centrality of the tree in the Garden of Eden on purely geometric grounds. In his line of argument, the notion of two trees in the middle means that the story should not be taken literally and is the first step toward stripping the tree of ideological prestige. Quite simply, Gregory will argue, it is impossible to have *two* trees at the center.

But if another center is set alongside the center, the circle must necessarily be shifted along with its center, with the result that the former center is no longer the midst. Since, then, the Garden in that place is one, why does the text say that each of the trees is to be treated as something separate, and that both of them are at the center, when the account which tells us that the works of God are “very good” teaches that the killer-tree is no part of God’s planting?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> René Cadiou, *Introduction au système d’Origène* (Paris: Société d’édition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1932), quoted in Jean Danielou, *Origen* (trans. Walter Mitchell; London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 205-206.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom. in Cant., praef.* (GNO 6:10.17-11.5., quoted in Richard A. Norris, Jr., “Two Trees in the Midst of the Garden (Genesis 2:9b): Gregory of Nyssa

The ideological shift of emphasis is more subtle than this quotation suggests, but the rhetorical about-face is remarkable. Designating the tree of knowledge as “the killer-tree” stigmatizes it as a negative, with Gregory following through by stating that this tree actually “is no part of God’s planting.”<sup>26</sup> Richard Norris points out that Gregory has not given up on the idea of human choice in the sense that “the ‘killer-tree’ becomes a killer only if and when it is chosen by a human agent,”<sup>27</sup> but his rhetoric nevertheless has the impact of casting the tree in negative terms. Norris deems Gregory’s attempt to give a plausible account of the origin of evil a failure, finding it unintelligible. The project fails, he says, “because at every point its plausibility depends on the one thing Gregory cannot allow; namely, the existence *apart from human choice* of some factor or reality that by its intrinsic magnetism or attractiveness deceives the mind, overwhelms the will, and so orients human loving away from the authentic Good.”<sup>28</sup> This attitude on the part of Gregory means that he resists the dualist implication of the Genesis account, the notion of a real Enemy. By eschewing this option, Gregory deprives himself not only of other ways to account for the reality of evil, but he also cuts himself off from a view that might allow him to see the tree of knowledge in positive and even protective terms. In the present context it is sufficient to conclude that a trend is afoot in the Church to see the tree of knowledge in negative terms.

**2. Endorsing Coercion.** With Augustine (354-430 AD), there is considerable ambiguity with respect to his interpretation of paradise and his view of freedom,<sup>29</sup> but this ambiguity is in itself testimony of the shift that is occurring and of which he is a leading voice. Augustine will condone coercion against the Donatists and other dissenters,<sup>30</sup> but he cannot do so except by reconfiguring the theology found in the first chapters of

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and the Puzzle of Human Evil,” in *In Dominico Eloquio: Essays in Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, ed. Paul Blowers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 220.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Norris, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Puzzle of Human Evil,” 232.

<sup>28</sup> Norris, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Puzzle of Human Evil,” 239-240.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine’s preoccupation with Genesis is legendary and is not limited to his major works on the subject; cf. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (trans. John Hammond Taylor; New York: Newman, 1982; *On Genesis [De Genesi contra Manichaeos]* (trans. Edmund Hill; New York: New City, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> John R. Bowlin (“Augustine on Justifying Coercion,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 17 [1997], 49-70) confirms that Augustine became a believer in, and a promoter of, coercion, but he also downplays its significance as though it is no more than what people might condone or approve of under certain circumstances even today.

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Genesis. “What earlier apologists celebrate as God’s gift to humankind—free will, liberty, autonomy, self-government—Augustine characterizes in surprisingly negative terms,” Pagels observes.<sup>31</sup> Exegesis of the text in Genesis is yielding ground to contextual, political pressure. The church, long a threatened minority, is now ascendant; it is in the driver’s seat, so to speak. Augustine revises the map of interpretation to fit the new landscape. The views of earlier Christian interpreters are in decline, as is their emphasis on the ideology of freedom and their opposition to coercion. This trend, says Elizabeth Clark, “made effective in the West the flourishing of a Christian theology whose central concerns were human sinfulness, not human potentiality; divine determination, not human freedom and responsibility; God’s mystery, not God’s justice.”<sup>32</sup> Augustine’s theology triumphs, but its triumph requires “the capitulation of all who held to the classical proclamation concerning human freedom, once regarded as the heart of the Christian gospel.”<sup>33</sup> His view of the politics of paradise becomes the political manual not only for his own time but also for posterity. In the words of Peter Brown, Augustine is the man who writes “the only full justification, in the Early Church, of the right of the state to suppress non-Catholics.”<sup>34</sup>

Augustine is a complex figure. He deserves admiration for the raw if sometimes indulgent honesty of his introspection.<sup>35</sup> He deals with human weakness and failings with sensitivity and nuance that surpass his opponents. He perceives the oneness of humanity and has a Catholic vision of inclusion that is exceptional and praiseworthy. And yet one thing does not follow from his sometimes implied and sometimes explicit view of the human condition. If experience confirms that human beings seem powerless against sin, it does not follow that God will remedy the problem by means of coercion. Indeed, if individuals have convictions other than those considered orthodox by the Catholic Church, it does not follow that the Church is free to call on the arm of the state to coerce these individuals into line. The early Christian apologists looked to the Genesis story of the fall to prove the God-given rights of conscience against the intrusive will of the state. Augustine increasingly looks to the same story in order to promote subservience to authority and obedience to the

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<sup>31</sup> Pagels, “The Politics of Paradise”: 78.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), 250.

<sup>33</sup> Pagels, “Politics of Paradise”: 99.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 235.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* (trans. Henry Chadwick; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

Church. In his interpretation of Genesis, the ideology of freedom is in eclipse.<sup>36</sup>

**3. Sins of Omission.** Traveling downstream from Augustine, we find notions of freedom diluted and increasingly on the wane in Christian theology, set on its trajectory by the great Latin father. Theology is preoccupied by the tree of life, increasingly oblivious to the meaning of the tree of knowledge. Anselm of Canterbury, living six-hundred years after Augustine, is remembered as the theologian who wrote an influential treatise on the atonement.<sup>37</sup> It is less well known that Anselm in 1099 presented his treatise to pope Urban II, the man who four years earlier launched the most cruel and ill-conceived Christian enterprise of all time, the Crusades. Anselm says nothing about the Crusades. Even when he writes about free will, which he does,<sup>38</sup> or about the fall of Satan, which he also does,<sup>39</sup> Anselm seems blissfully detached from contemporary reality, and he fails to espouse a notion of freedom that has a bearing on the intensely cruel and immensely consequential atrocities of which the Church of his time is the instigator. The suggestion may seem anachronistic and unfair, but perhaps Anselm deserves to be remembered as much for what he did not do as for his accomplishments. This is to say, when a treatise on the tree of knowledge is needed—when opposition to the Crusades is needed, and when the Church needs to be reminded that the end does not justify the means—the best the leading theologian of this time can do is to produce a theoretical treatise on how the death of Jesus secures access to the tree of life. Indeed, when a treatise is needed to rein in the savagery of the Crusaders, taking the death of Christ to be the most compelling argument against such savagery, Anselm and his contemporaries are so blinded by their presuppositions that they cannot see it.

We revere the Reformation, but it, too, is almost exclusively preoccupied with the tree of life, metaphorically speaking. The early Luther

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<sup>36</sup> Rowan A. Greer, "Augustine's Transformation of the Free Will Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (1996): 471-486; Fred Berthold, Jr., "Free Will and Theodicy in Augustine: An Exposition and Critique," *Religious Studies* 17 (1982): 525-535.

<sup>37</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, in *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 261-356.

<sup>38</sup> Anselm, *On Free Will*, in *The Major Works*, 175-192.

<sup>39</sup> Anselm, *On the Fall of the Devil*, in *The Major Works*, 193-232.

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speaks forcefully and with exceptional eloquence about freedom,<sup>40</sup> but he ends up condoning coercion, and he urges his contemporaries to practice coercion of the most blood-curdling and cruel kind against the Jews.<sup>41</sup> Zwingli preaches free grace, but he votes with the city council of Zürich to drown the Anabaptist Felix Manz for committing the sin of believer's baptism.<sup>42</sup> Calvin teaches grace with conviction and clarity, but he casts his vote with the city council of Geneva in favor of burning the physician and lay theologian Michael Servetus at the stake for the crime of advocating an unorthodox Christology.<sup>43</sup>

#### IV. Reclaiming the Ideology of Freedom

**1. Roger Williams.** There are not a thousand points of light in this landscape, but there are occasional points of light, moments of exceptional perception, insight, and courage. Roger Williams, in a little known booklet entitled *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience*, published in 1644, asserts that “an [enforced] uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh.”<sup>44</sup> Mainstream renditions of church history will object that the doctrine of the Trinity was enshrined in the beliefs of

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” in *Luther's Works* 45; *The Christian and Society* (trans. J. J. Schindel; ed. Walther I. Brandt and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962), 80-128.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” in *Luther's Works* 47; *The Christian and Society* IV (trans. Martin H. Bertram, ed. Franklin Sherman; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 135-305.

<sup>42</sup> William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 43-48.

<sup>43</sup> John T. McNeill (*The History and Character of Calvinism* [London: Oxford UP, 1954], 174) claims that Servetus was drawn to Geneva by “a fatal fascination,” “like a moth to the candle flame,” so as to suggest that Servetus brought the calamity on himself. T. H. L. Parker (*John Calvin* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], 121) is even less sympathetic, accusing him of “twenty years of play-acting” and describing Servetus’ final and fatal visit to Geneva as “an incredibly foolish thing,” as if on the assumption that it was the victim’s responsibility to avoid being executed. The image of an inconsistent and opportunistic personality is belied by the fact that Servetus was willing to die for his convictions, maintaining sufficient composure in the face of the flames to hold his denial of the Trinity till the end. Servetus is said to have prayed, “Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have mercy on me,” not “Eternal Son of God.”

<sup>44</sup> Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* (London, 1644 [repr. London: J. Haddon, 1848], 2. I have modernized Williams’ archaic English. He uses the word ‘informed’ where today we would use ‘enforced.’

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the Christian Church in Nicea in 325, never to be seriously threatened after that. What Williams suggests is a different measuring stick for Christian doctrine, one by which doctrine cannot be severed from the means by which it is promoted and proclaimed. By Williams' qualitative criterion, the New Testament confession that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2) has no meaning when divorced from the qualities and values represented by Christ.

The Protestant reformers urge that the doctrine of justification by faith alone be the doctrine by which the church will stand or fall. It is a great doctrine, but I agree with Lord Acton that another doctrine equally deserves to be accorded this distinction. To Acton, legitimating coercion dooms the most auspicious theological project, making *it*—coercion—"the breaking point, the article of their system by which they stand or fall."<sup>45</sup>

Whether Roger Williams or Lord Acton, the one a Protestant, the other a dissenting Roman Catholic, each promotes standards other than the ones traditionally accepted by which to measure what is important in Christian theology. Each pays attention to the means used to promote the cause of faith, and each insists that the only means compatible with the Christian profession is the one that accepts the constraint of freedom. These rare voices have internalized that the tree of knowledge belongs in the midst of the garden along with the tree of life, and they give the ideology of the tree of knowledge the courageous and principled exposure often denied to it in the history of Christian theology.

**2. Ellen G. White.** When Ellen G. White (1827-1915), the leading voice in Seventh-day Adventism, comes on stage, her main work is more cognizant of the implications of the tree of knowledge than just about any Christian thinker of which I am aware. Her main contribution, the five volume *Conflict of the Ages* series, begins with the question, "Why Was Sin Permitted?"<sup>46</sup>

This, I submit, is a question that has the tree of knowledge as its frame of reference. Focus on the ideology of freedom is maintained with striking consistency throughout the five books. In the first volume of the

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<sup>45</sup> Lord (Sir John) Acton, Letter to Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887, in *Lord Acton: Essays on Freedom and Power* (ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb; Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1972), 333. John R. Bowlin (see n. 30, above), in his discussion of Augustine, leaves precisely the impression that one should not hold the Church to a different standard than the prevailing cultural norm. This is precisely the view that is so offensive to Lord Acton.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1958), 33.

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series, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, she strikes the chord of freedom, never to let up in the rest of the series. God “takes no pleasure in forced obedience, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service,” she contends.<sup>47</sup> In the third volume, *The Desire of Ages*, she writes that “The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government.”<sup>48</sup> In yet another chapter in the same book, at a critical intermission reflecting on the meaning of Jesus’ death, she goes where Augustine, Anselm, or even Luther do not venture to tread, claiming resolutely that “Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government.”<sup>49</sup> And in the final volume, *The Great Controversy*, she remembers what her theme is, repeating almost verbatim the statement quoted above from *Patriarchs and Prophets*. God “takes no pleasure in forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.”<sup>50</sup> On this point the writer does not mince words, and the ideological commitment is focused, pervasive and wholehearted. Ellen G. White’s attention to this theme has probably not been executed with the same degree of clarity and consistency since the days of Origen. What she brings to light in this manner is the neglected, underexposed, and enduring implication of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

To the contemporary concern that the problem in the consumer societies of the Western World is an excess of freedom and not its absence,<sup>51</sup> the answer should be that the hedonistic perversion of freedom must also be addressed. This concern, however, does not negate the need to pursue the primary meaning of the tree of knowledge or to acknowledge that institutional religion has been, and often still is, on the wrong side with respect to the issue of coercion.<sup>52</sup> Ideologically and historically,

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<sup>47</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 34.

<sup>48</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1940 [1898]), 22.

<sup>49</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 759.

<sup>50</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1939 [1888]), 493.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Concessions on the part of professing Christians to the legitimacy of coercion and torture in the current “war on terror” should be seen as a problem of Christian ideology rather than a question of American values. The shortcoming in Jane Mayer’s account (*The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals* [New York: Doubleday, 2008]) is not in the facts but in the notion that the ideals that are in jeopardy are primarily American rather than Christian. This short-

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freedom in the sense of the absence of coercion has been the hardest thing to accept and the most difficult value to implement. God has indeed been remembered chiefly “as the one who *prohibits*”<sup>53</sup> if not as the one who resorts to coercion.

**V. No Tree of Knowledge?**

The course mapped out for the text concerning the trees in the Garden of Eden in Genesis reaches its final destination in Revelation, in the chapter that makes the ending of the biblical narrative fold back on the beginning.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Rev 22:1, 2)

This text, of course, counts on the reader’s powers of recognition for its force to be felt in full. We have been here before, in our paradise lost. The river of life is in the middle, and there, still in the middle, is the tree of life. Where, now, however, is the tree of knowledge, conceding that there is no mention of the tree of knowledge in Revelation’s description of paradise regained?

Does the omission mean that the tree of knowledge is not there, dug up and discarded at some point during the interim between Genesis and Revelation? Does it mean that the tree of knowledge is there, but it is not mentioned? This might be what my doctoral supervisor at the University of St. Andrews would suggest, in line with his understanding of Old Testament allusions in Revelation. These allusions, says Richard Bauckham, “are meant to recall the Old Testament context.”<sup>54</sup> When these Old Testament fragments appear in Revelation, we are supposed to see and recall the whole, meaning, we might suppose, that when we read of the tree of life we are meant to see the tree of knowledge, too.

But if the tree of knowledge is not there, considering this option by itself, and if the tree signifies God’s core conviction, does it mean that

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coming is understandable, given that the ideals in question have been diluted in the name of Christian ideology.

<sup>53</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), xi.



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God has abandoned a core conviction? If the tree of knowledge is not there, and if the tree is a symbol of freedom, at least in the sense of absence of coercion, does it mean that freedom will not have the emphasis it once had? Does the apparent absence of the tree of knowledge, or its non-mention, mean that God is in retreat on the value of freedom?

In Revelation, apparently, there is only one tree, but its trunk is divided. “. . . on either side of the river is the tree of life,” says our text of the tree that is located in the middle. This detail is not found in Genesis.<sup>55</sup> Why thus a divided trunk, with its two legs apparently arching over the river of life, apparently to be joined at the top?

Richard B. Hays says of narratives that “if we ask why the events of a particular story are ordered as they are and not some other way, the answer can only be ‘because that is the way it happened’ or ‘because that is how the story is told.’”<sup>56</sup> The story draws us into its contemplative zone, in puzzled awareness of the many things left unsaid. From the story come our questions, not the other way around.

When it comes to the two trees in the Garden of Eden, the text itself, the varied history of the interpretation of this text, the endangered status of freedom, and the human inclination to act as though the end justifies the means, combine to urge readers of the Bible to take a fresh look at the meaning of the most challenging of the two trees. If, in *Paradise Regained*, it appears that the tree of knowledge has outplayed its peculiar role, that it is not there, or that it is somehow fused to its sister tree, forming an arch over the river of life, we should hesitate to conclude that God will ever be in retreat with respect to the ideology of freedom.

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<sup>55</sup> Part of the imagery in Revelation is from Ezekiel 47, giving a more complex picture than what an allusion to Genesis alone would entail; cf. Barbara Rossing, “River of Life in God’s New Jerusalem: An Ecological Vision for Earth’s Future,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 25 (1998): 487-499.

<sup>56</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (SBLDS 56; Chico: Scholars, 1983; 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 195.

## **“See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking”: Hearing God Preach and Obedience in the Letter to the Hebrews**

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At first sight, the notion of obedience does not seem to be prominent in the Letter to the Hebrews. The author uses the verb ὑπακούω (obey) only two times. In the first passage, he asserts that Jesus “became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey [τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν] him” (Heb 5:9). In the second, he refers to the fact that “Abraham obeyed [ὑπήκουσεν]” when God called him to set out to an unknown place (11:8). Likewise, the noun ὑπακοή (obedience) appears only once, referring to the fact that the Son “learned obedience through what he suffered” (5:8). The other two references to obedience are the use of the passive of πείθω in 13:17, referring to the need to obey church leaders, and εὐλαβέομαι in 11:7, referring to Noah’s obedience in building the ark.

This superficial first impression, however, is misleading. Hebrews is a moving exhortation built upon the conviction that “God has spoken to us in *His* Son” (1:2 NASB, the emphasis is original) and, therefore, “we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it” (2:1 NRSV, as hereafter unless otherwise noted). A study of this complex New Testament document shows that the author seeks through carefully crafted arguments, compelling logic, and moving examples to strengthen the sagging faith of these Christians who courageously suffered in the past public shaming, persecution, and financial loss but have now begun to drift away from Christ and are even in danger of blatant unbelief. William Lane’s description of this document is on the mark: “Hebrews is an expression of passionate and personal concern for

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the Christian addressed.”<sup>1</sup> That is why the argument of Hebrews reaches its climax with a strong exhortation to “hear” God’s voice: “See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!” (Heb 12:25). Thus, we can appropriately describe Hebrews as a “passionate and personal” exhortation to obey the “word of God.”

The purpose of this paper is to explore Hebrews’ theology of the word of God as the basis for understanding its passionate call to obedience. It is structured around three questions: (1) How has God spoken to us? (2) What has God said? (3) What are the implications of obedience and disobedience? I suggest that we take the climax of the argument, Heb 12:18-25, as the point of departure for understanding Hebrews’ theology of the word of God.<sup>2</sup>

#### How Has God Spoken to Us?

Hebrews 12:18-24 consists of a contrast between mounts Sinai and Zion which the author develops into an *a fortiori* argument (“from the lesser to the greater”).<sup>3</sup> The author compares here—once again—the experience of the ancient Israelites before Sinai at the inauguration of the first covenant to the experience of believers at Mount Zion on the occasion of the inauguration of the new covenant (cf. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:11; 9:15-23).

On the one hand stands Sinai.<sup>4</sup> The mountain is enshrouded in the numinous phenomena of the blazing fire, the darkness, the gloom, the tempest, and the sound of the trumpet: all of them powerful physical events that produced fear even in Moses, the mediator of the covenant.

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*. WBC, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin, 47a (Dallas: Word, 1991), c.

<sup>2</sup> Kiwoong Son has recently suggested that the symbolism of Sinai and Zion in this passage is the hermeneutical key to the argument of the Letter, *Zion Symbolism in Hebrews: Hebrews 12:18-24 as a Hermeneutical Key to the Epistle*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*. NTL, ed. C. Clifton Black and John T. Carroll (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 326. Contra, Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 669.

<sup>4</sup> The mountain itself is not referred by name. The description assumes that the readers are familiar with Deut 4:11-12. Hebrews 12:21 quotes Deut 9:19, which refers to Moses’ fear of approaching God after the golden calf incident.

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This formidable scene climaxes in a “voice” that “made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them” (vs. 19).<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand stands Zion, where a “festal gathering” contrasts with the dreadful scene of Mount Sinai. No phenomena or barriers prevent access to God; instead, believers blend with angels in the celebration that takes place. The description culminates with the “sprinkled blood” of Jesus that “*speaks* a better word than the blood of Abel” (vs. 24, emphasis mine).

The main point of the contrast is that at the climax of each event, both Israel and the believers have “heard” a voice. This is the pivot on which the hortatory argument of the passage turns. On this basis the author warns the readers:

See that you do not refuse *the one who is speaking*; for if they did not escape [ἔξέφυγον] when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! (Heb 12:25, emphasis mine.)

Note that this warning repeats, in essence, the first warning of the Letter:

Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape [ἐκφευξόμεθα] if we neglect so great a salvation? (2:1-3a)<sup>6</sup>

The question is, now, how have the readers heard the voice of God speaking to them from heaven? Also, in what sense is this experience greater than the one Israel experienced at the foot of Sinai when they heard the voice of God speak—literally—the ten commandments? This leads us to the author’s theology of the nature of Scripture.

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<sup>5</sup> Ironically, “The physical phenomena, which might seem to manifest divine power, do more to conceal God than to reveal him.” Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 549.

<sup>6</sup> For the relationship of this passage to Heb 1-2 see Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l’Épître aux Hébreux* 2e ed. (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1976), 233-4.

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**Hebrews' Use of the Old Testament Creates a World  
in which Believers Stand in the Presence of God**

No other document of the NT quotes the OT as often as does Hebrews.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the amount of quotations, however, there is something unique to Hebrews' use of Scripture: the oral nature of the word of God and its immediacy.<sup>8</sup>

Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum has noted—and I will follow her argument here—that almost all the quotations from the OT “are quotations of *direct speech*” (emphasis hers).<sup>9</sup> The significant thing is that whether they quote the oracles of the prophets or the meditations of the psalmist,

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<sup>7</sup> See George H. Guthrie, “Old Testament in Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 841-2. Hebrews scholars do not agree on the number of quotations of, and allusions to, the OT in Hebrews largely because they use different criteria to identify them. For an overview of the different lists and criteria, see S. Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: van Soest, 1961), 16.

<sup>8</sup> Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum, *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context*, SBLDS, ed. Pheme Perkins, 156 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 89-133. Richard B. Hays argues convincingly that there was an hermeneutical tradition in early Christianity that understood the Psalms as *having been spoken by Jesus* and that this phenomenon is the matrix from which early Christology rose. Richard B. Hays, “Christ Prays the Psalms: Israel’s Psalter as Matrix of Early Christology,” in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 101-18. The difference with Hebrews is that Hebrews emphasizes this aspect in the introduction to its quotations of the OT, while the placing of the Psalms in the mouth of Jesus elsewhere in the NT is implicit.

<sup>9</sup> Eisenbaum, 92. She identifies the following quotations as being of “direct speech” (the numbers in parenthesis refer to OT passages quoted from the LXX): Heb 1:5a (Ps 2:7); 1:5b (2 Sam 7:14); 1:6b (Deut 32:43); 1:7 (Ps 103:4); 1:8-9 (Ps 44:7-8); 1:10-12 (Ps 101:26-28); 1:13 (Ps 109:1); 2:12 (Ps 21:23); 2:13a (Isa 8:17=2 Sam 22:3); 2:13b (Isa 8:18); 3:7-11 (and several times in the section; Ps 94:7-8); 5:5 (Ps 2:7); 5:6 (Ps 109:4); 6:14 (Gen 22:17); 7:21 (Ps 109:4); 8:5 (Exod 25:40); 8:8-12 (Jer 38:31-34); 9:20 (Exod 24:8); 10:5-7 (Ps 39:7-9); 10:16-17 (Jer 38:31-34); 10:30a (Deut 32:35); 10:30b (Deut 32:36); 10:37a (Isa 26:20-21); 10:37b (Hab 2:3-4); 11:18 (Gen 21:12); 12:5-6 (Prov 3:11-12); 12:21 (Deut 9:19); 12:26 (Hag 2:6); 12:29 (Deut 4:24); 13:5 (Deut 31:8); 13:6 (Ps 117:6).

There are two exceptions: Heb 4:4 (Gen 2:2) and 11:5 (Gen 5:24). There are, as well, two that are of an intermediate nature (neither direct nor indirect speech). These are introduced by the verb *μαρτυρέω*: 2:6-8a (Ps 8:5-7); 7:17 (Ps 109:4). Both of them imply the written nature of the word of God. See Eisenbaum, 98-100.

For the several functions of quotations of direct speech and a brief history of its research, see George W. Savran, *Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature, ed. Herbert Marks and Robert Polzin (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), 7-12.

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the author of Hebrews understands and presents them as instances of divine utterance. In some cases, Hebrews quotes God's *ipssissima verba* from the LXX; for example, "I will surely bless you and multiply you" in Heb 6:14 (quoting Gen 22:17). In other cases, when Hebrews quotes a person inspired by God, such as a prophet or a psalmist, it makes no mention of the human agent.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes the quotation itself makes clear that God is speaking: for example, "The days are surely coming, *says the Lord*, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel . . ." (Heb 8:8, quoting LXX Jer 38:31, emphasis mine). Other times, the use of the first person in the quotation itself identifies God as the speaker; for example, "*I* will be his Father, and he will be my Son" (Heb 1:5, quoting LXX 2 Sam 7:14, emphasis mine). Finally, in the vast majority of cases, Hebrews introduces the quotation with a verb of saying in which God is the subject.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, implicitly or explicitly, the author of Hebrews describes God as speaking directly to the audience of the letter in the words of the Scriptures. Note that the "word of God" is spoken, not written.<sup>12</sup> It is a striking fact that the author of Hebrews does not use the common formula "as it is written." Many other ancient authors—including Qumran and the Mishnah—use verbs of saying to introduce Old Testament quotations; however, "no other author uses them to the complete exclusion of

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<sup>10</sup> There are three exceptions: David is mentioned Heb 4:7 and Moses in 9:19-20 and 12:21. In both cases, however, the mention of the human agent is necessary for the argument of the letter. There are two quotations of an intermediary nature, 2:6-8a (Ps 8:5-7) and 7:17 (Ps 109:4).

<sup>11</sup> There are cases in which Jesus (2:12; 10:5) or the Holy Spirit (3:7) is identified as the speaker. Verbs of saying are common in introductory formulas for the quotation of Scripture in Qumran, the NT, and the Mishnah. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament," in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, SBL SBS, no. 5 (Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1974), 7-17; Bruce M. Metzger, "The Formulas Introducing Quotations of Scripture in the NT and the Mishnah," *JBL* 70 (1951): 297-307. Note, however, that only in a few cases is God the subject of the verb in Qumran and the NT. See Fitzmyer, "The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations," 10-12. In the Mishnah, the great majority of cases use the Niphal form of the verb—implying its written nature. In the minority of cases where the active form is used, the Scriptures or God are the implied subject; Metzger, "Formulas," 298-9.

<sup>12</sup> This does not negate the author of Hebrews' recognition that God has spoken through human agents. Hebrews 1:1 makes clear that he understands this; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 24. However, he has chosen to present Scripture as spoken immediately by God in the presence of or to the audience; see Eisenbaum, 97; Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Scriptural World of Hebrews," *Int* 57 (2003): 239-40.

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writing verbs or references to scripture *qua* scripture, i.e., as written text.”<sup>13</sup>

This leads us to the second peculiar characteristic of Hebrews’ use of Scripture: its immediacy. Note that a quotation of direct speech—as the vast majority of Hebrews’ quotations are—is in fact a subcategory of the more general term “quotation,” and it has unique characteristics.<sup>14</sup> A quotation evokes the past and therefore is bound to the original context and meaning.<sup>15</sup> As George W. Savran affirms: “Repetition [i.e., quotation] . . . de-emphasizes the present moment by *supplying the perspective of an earlier time*” (emphasis mine).<sup>16</sup> A quotation of direct speech has a different force, however. It “*speaks directly to and within the new context*, with as much immediate impact as it had in its original context” (emphasis mine).<sup>17</sup> In other words, a quotation refers the hearer to a time and context different than his, but the quotation of direct speech *re-uses* the past to speak to the hearer in the present. Thus, the “quotations in

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<sup>13</sup> Eisenbaum, 97. “The author never uses the word ‘written’ in any form in connection with biblical material” (Eisenbaum, 97). Hebrews 2:6 and 7:17, however, seem to imply or at least to point towards the written nature of the word of God. Kenneth Schenck suggests that the author considered the scriptures as “instantiations” of the word of God, “God Has Spoken: Hebrews’ Theology of the Scriptures,” Paper presented at the the St Andrews Conference on the Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology (St Mary’s College, St Andrews, Scotland, July 18-22, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Savran, 7.

<sup>15</sup> A quotation is a speech-act and, as such, not only informs or describes something, but is itself an act. Speech acts comprise (1) locution (what is actually said), (2) illocution (what is done or accomplished in an utterance), and (3) perlocution (the effect on the hearer). [See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962). Also, the development and refinement of his ideas in John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969).] We are interested here with the illocutionary force of quotations, that is, with what they accomplish or do.

A quotation may “accomplish” or “do” several things. For example, a quotation may lend an “air of objectivity” to the argument of the author who quotes the words of another as independent witness of his point of view. If that independent witness is a recognized authority, it gives the “illusion of external evidence.” A quotation may demonstrate the fulfillment of a past idea in the present. Also, the repetition of something said in the past suggests a comparison between the past and the present. See Eisenbaum, 110. On the illocutionary force of Hebrews’ description of God’s speech, see also Dunnill, 245-8. Cf. Harold W. Attridge, “God in Hebrews: Urging Children to Heavenly Glory,” in *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology*, ed. A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 203-8.

<sup>16</sup> Savran, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Eisenbaum, 109. Also Schenck.

Hebrews are reused prophetic oracles” which retain their original oracular force.<sup>18</sup>

The effect of the use of direct speech in Hebrews is, then, that Hebrews’ quotations are not used to refer to or evoke something God said in the past but “re-present” God’s words to the audience in the present.<sup>19</sup> They speak “directly to and within the new context” of the audience. In this sense, they are a new speech-act of God.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, Hebrews not only uses verbs of saying to introduce its quotations from Scripture but also, in most of the cases, the verb form introducing the quotation is present indicative or a present participle.<sup>21</sup>

This immediacy of the word of God in Hebrews is very important for its hortatory argument. By means of the quotation of the word of God as direct speech, Hebrews has made a “theological redescription of time and space.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, it has constructed through Scripture a world where the readers—or, hearers—stand in the presence of God and hear him speak.

Now, what is God saying?

### What Has God Said?

Hebrews 12:22 describes God speaking at Mount Zion.<sup>23</sup> This is the only place where Mount Zion is explicitly referred to in Hebrews; nonetheless, Mount Zion is the scriptural background to the events referred to through scriptural quotations in the Epistle.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Eisenbaum, 111. Her discussion of the function of prophetic biblical oracles in Hebrews in contrast to their function in Matthew and John, for example, is illuminating.

<sup>19</sup> They refer to or evoke the past only *indirectly* because the readers know that the author is using the words of Scripture. See Luke Timothy Johnson, “Scriptural World,” 240-41.

<sup>20</sup> Savran, 14.

<sup>21</sup> I am referring here to the large majority of verses in which God is implicitly or explicitly understood as the subject.

<sup>22</sup> John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*, SNTSMS, ed. Margaret E. Thrall, 75 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 134. Also Luke Timothy Johnson, “Scriptural World,” 239-47.

<sup>23</sup> The priority in the structure of the sentence and the contrast to Mount Sinai in vss. 18-21 suggest that Mount Zion is the chief definition of the place in this passage.

<sup>24</sup> For an introduction to Zion traditions in the Hebrew Bible, see Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*, New Voices in Biblical Studies, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985). For the study of Zion traditions in Hebrews, see Kiwoong Son.



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First, Mount Zion is the place where Jesus, the Son of God, has been enthroned. Three of the Psalms Hebrews uses to describe the enthronement of the Son in Chap. 1 have Mount Zion as their context. Hebrews 1:5 (also 5:5) quotes Psalm 2:7, which refers to an event happening at Mount Zion: “‘I have set my king *on Zion*, my holy hill.’ I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’” (Psalm 2:6-7, emphasis mine). Likewise, Ps 110:1, quoted in Heb 1:3, 13 (*passim*), refers to an event in Zion: “The LORD says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’ The LORD sends out *from Zion* your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes” (Ps 110:1-2, emphasis mine). Finally, the acclamation of Jesus’ eternal rule in Heb 1:10-12 uses the words of Ps 102:21-25 that have, again, Zion as their context (cf. vss. 13, 16, 21).

Second, Mount Zion is the place where the Son was appointed “priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:6). The introduction of Jesus’ appointment as priest (5:6) with a reference to his adoption as Son of God (5:5) links the appointment of Jesus as high priest with his enthronement as king. Likewise, the scriptural context to Ps 110:4—the scriptural basis for Jesus’ appointment as high priest—is, again, Mount Zion (cf. Ps 110:2).

Finally, the argument of Hebrews implies that Zion is also the place where the covenant is inaugurated. Hebrews 7:12 argues that a change in the priesthood implies a change in the law (cf. 7:11-19).<sup>25</sup> From this, the author develops the notion that a new covenant has been inaugurated with the appointment of Jesus as high priest (chaps. 8-10). This is confirmed in Heb 12:24, where at the center of the “festal gathering” at

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<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 7:11-19 makes clear that a change in the law refers here to a change in the law of priesthood. Similarly, Hebrews 10:8,9,18 declares that animal sacrifices have been abolished and Heb 8:1-6; 9:8-10 refers to the supersession of the earthly sanctuary. Hebrews 10:1 refers to these three things as shadows “of the good things to come” (7:23-28; 8:5; 9:12-14). They are ritual aspects of the law that prefigured the realities of the new covenant (see note 9:9; also Col. 2:17). The author argues that these “shadows” were abolished once the “real thing” came (7:11-19; 9:8; 10:9,18). On the other hand, the author contends that the law itself—that is, what was not a shadow—was confirmed by being written on the *hearts* of believers (8:7-12; 10:16-17). The author of Hebrews also explains that the problem of the first covenant resided not in the covenant itself, but in the unfaithfulness of the people (8:7-8). For a study of the failure of the first covenant and its relation to the new covenant, see Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?: What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath*, (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2007).

Mount Zion stand “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and . . . the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

These three events—Jesus’ enthronement, his appointment as high priest, and the inauguration of the new covenant—constitute the backbone of the structure of Hebrews’ expository sections, and all of them are performed through God’s speech—or what contemporary philosophers would call God’s “illocution.”<sup>26</sup> God enthrones Jesus above the angels (Heb 1-2) with the words of a catena of Psalms (Heb 1:5-14)—especially Pss 2:7 and 110:1. God appoints Jesus as high priest (Heb 5-7) with the oath of Ps 110:4. God creates a new covenant (Heb 8-10) with the words of Jer 31:31-34. Therefore, by referring to and using Scripture as God’s *own speech* in his exposition, the author of Hebrews has constructed a world in which the audience stands at Mount Zion where they hear God speak and, hence, witness the enthronement of the Son, his appointment as high priest, and the inauguration of the new covenant.<sup>27</sup>

#### **What are the Implications of Obedience and Disobedience?**

This leads us to an important realization. To reject the voice of God in Hebrews means to refuse Jesus as the ruler seated at the right hand of God, to disavow him as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, and to repudiate the provisions of the new covenant. On the other hand, to “hear” or “obey” the word of God means to acknowledge Jesus as our leader and follow him into the rest of God (Heb 4), to confess Jesus as our high priest and draw near with confidence because of his intercession into the presence of God (Heb 4:14-16; 10:19-23), and to own the provisions of the new covenant by embracing the “once for all” sacrifice of Christ and its benefits, renouncing the multiple sacrifices of the old covenant.

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<sup>26</sup> Hebrews’ exposition follows a logical order that develops step by step from Jesus’ enthronement (Heb 1-4), through his appointment as high priest (Heb 5-7), to the inauguration of the new covenant (Heb 8-10). For a description of this linear development of the exposition of Hebrews, see Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 116-27. For a fuller analysis of God’s speech and a description of its role in the argument of Hebrews, see Attridge, “God in Hebrews,” 203-8.

<sup>27</sup> As Harold W. Attridge notes, “Hebrews . . . operates with the conceit that readers and hearers of Scripture can listen to God speaking to the Son and ultimately to all God’s children. In this conceit, the character of God and of his scriptural speech provides the raw material for both reflection and parenthesis. . . . In the development of this conceit resides the most creative theological work of this complex text.” Attridge, “God in Hebrews,” 203-4.

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Thus, the stakes for obedience in Hebrews are very high. On the one hand, the rewards are exceedingly generous. God offers faithful believers even better promises than those offered under the first covenant (Heb 8:6).<sup>28</sup> The author claims that “it is impossible that God would prove false” to his promises so that “we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us” (6:18). For those who take refuge in him, “he always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). On the other hand, the penalties are very harsh.<sup>29</sup> The author warns the readers about the dire consequences of disobedience. It is impossible to restore to repentance those who spurn the son of God (10:26) and hold him up to contempt (8:4-6). They will suffer the “wrath of God” (10:26-31).

Disobedience implies the rejection of the rule of Jesus as king, his intercession as high priest, and the provisions of the new covenant. In other words, it means the rejection of grace.

The promises and warnings of Hebrews are especially relevant for us in the 21st century. We might think that those who heard Jesus speak and saw him perform miracles have a greater responsibility than we who have met him only through the words of Scripture. Hebrews argues the opposite, however. The readers did not hear God speak at Mount Sinai or Jesus while on earth (2:1-4); yet, they have greater responsibility because they hear God’s voice speaking to them through Scripture. This is, in my

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<sup>28</sup> The old covenant promised the faithful “rest” from their pilgrimage in the land of Canaan (Heb 3:7-19); God, however, offers new covenant believers the opportunity to enter God’s “own” rest, the very rest he experienced on the first Sabbath after creation (Heb 4:1-11). The old covenant offered a gentle high priest able to have compassion for weak human beings who are tempted (5:1-4); the new covenant, however, provides an eternal high priest who “has been tested as we are, yet without sin” (4:15) and is “able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). The old covenant provided ritual means to cleanse the flesh from defilement (9:10,13), but the new covenant provided a “once for all” sacrifice that cleanses the conscience from sin (9:9,14,26). The heroes of faith looked forward to a homeland, a city promised by God; new covenant believers, however, have arrived at the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-24). In other words, the old covenant promises were as inferior to the new covenant realities as the “shadow” is inferior to the “true form” of reality (10:1).

<sup>29</sup> Old covenant people were forbidden to enter Canaan; new covenant people, the presence of God (Heb 4). Those unwilling to enter the rest faced the “sword of the Amalekites and Canaanites” (Num 14:43-45); new covenant people will face the “word of God” that is “sharper than any two-edged sword” and able to discern “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). In short, the consequences are harsher under the new covenant, just as spiritual penalties are harsher than material ones.

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view, the most striking teaching of Hebrews regarding obedience. Hebrews places the authority of Scripture over the authority of sense experience. What you “hear” through Scripture is more authoritative than what you see, touch, hear, or taste through the senses.

Luke Timothy Johnson is correct in his conclusion:

Scripture . . . is not simply a collection of ancient texts that can throw light on the present through analogy; it is the voice of the living God who speaks through the text directly and urgently to people in the present. The word of God is therefore living and active (4:12).<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, Hebrews’ warning continues to be relevant for us who hear today God speak in Scriptures: “if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!” (12:25).

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<sup>30</sup> “Scriptural World,” 240-41.

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## **Emphasizing the Wholeness of Man**

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General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

The nature of man has always been an important theological concern. Several concepts have prevailed from the beginning of Christianity to the present day. The most prominent of these are the trichotomy view of human nature, the dichotomy view, and the wholistic<sup>1</sup> view.

Those who hold the trichotomy view believe that man consists of three substances, or three component parts: body, soul, and spirit.<sup>2</sup> Soul and spirit are as distinct from each other as the soul and body. Some theologians regard this view as untenable because it seems to oppose the account of the creation of man in Gen 2:7, which clearly states that the living soul is the combination of the body and the breath of life. Trichotomy is also a misunderstanding of 1 Thess 5:23.

The dichotomy view holds that man has a two-fold nature: material and immaterial. Man therefore consists of body and spirit or soul.<sup>3</sup> Since this view claims that its basis is found in the record of creation, it is more reasonable than trichotomy. However, as one author has pointed out, “The weakness in this view is that it savors of Greek dualism, which is not the teaching of the Bible.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the wholistic view is the concept of man’s nature that sees him as an irreducible whole, emphasizing the unity and interrelationship

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<sup>1</sup> The use of this word rather than “holistic” emphasizes the wholeness rather than the holiness of man’s nature and will be the preferred nomenclature in this article.

<sup>2</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Rochester: Revell, 1907), 434.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

<sup>4</sup> Gottfried Oosterwal, *In the Image of God*, Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, April-June 1975 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1975), 77.

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that exist between the function of the body and mind.<sup>5</sup> The supporters of the wholistic concept believe that the Bible does not teach that man has two, three, or more substances and is an indivisible whole although there are various aspects of his being.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the belief that the wholistic view is more scriptural than either trichotomy or dichotomy, it is the purpose of this paper to reexamine the concept of the wholistic nature of man according to the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White (whose writings have been accepted as inspired counsel for the Seventh-day Adventist Church). An investigation of scientific evidence concerning the wholistic nature of man will be included in this examination, since this writer believes that God, the Author of the Bible, is also the Author of true science.

**The Wholeness of Man**

“Whole” is defined as “the entire thing without loss of parts, elements or members.” On the basis of this definition, the wholeness of man can be considered as the existence of the entire person, without the loss of any parts. Is the expression “the wholeness of man” found in the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White? An investigation of the biblical meanings of “soul,” “spirit,” “body,” and “heart” will provide the answer.

**The Expressions of “Soul” and “Spirit”**

*Man, a living soul.* The word “soul” is translated from *nephesh*, a Hebrew word that occurs 755 times in the Old Testament. The New Testament uses the Greek word *psyche* to express the same meaning. One hundred fifty-two times man is described as living soul.<sup>7</sup> Gen 17:14; Lev 7:27; Num 19:18, and 1 Sam 22:22 are just a few examples.

In the New Testament, there are fourteen occurrences in which the word *psyche* means a human being in exactly the same sense as the Hebrew *nephesh*. Several of these occurrences can be found in Acts 2:41, 43; 3:23; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:14; Rom 2:9; 13:1; and 1 Cor 15:45. In these

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<sup>5</sup> A. Leroy Moore, “A Study of Ellen G. White’s Concept of the Nature of Man as It Relates to the Objective of Bible Teaching.” (M.A. thesis, Walla Walla College, 1966), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Oosterwal, *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (Taunton: E. Goodman & Son, Phoenix, n.d.), 3. The author, who was under-librarian of the Cambridge University Library, has counted the words *nephesh*, *psyche*, *ruach*, and *pneuma* in the Bible in his defense against immortality of the soul. Since the book is well recommended by Dr. Norman Anderson, the author of *Issues of Life and Death* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), several quotations in the paper are taken from this book.

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verses, *psyche* is translated “man” or “soul,” which has the same meaning as *nephesh* in Gen 2:7, the “living soul.” This means man is a whole, a person who has body, mind, and soul, and supports the belief that *nephesh* or *psyche* refers to the entire individual.<sup>8</sup>

*Man, a person.* The basic idea of *nephesh* or *psyche* as an individual or person provides the idiomatic use of *neuhesh* and *psyche* for personal pronouns.<sup>9</sup> Expressions such as “my soul” for “I” or “me” and “thy soul” for “you,” respectively, are commonly used in the Bible. *Nephesh* is used in this sense about eighty-one times in the Old Testament, while this use of *psyche* appears twenty-four times in the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> One example of this use of *nephesh* can be found in Gen 27:19: “ ‘Sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul [you] may bless me’ ” (KJV). The word *psyche* is used in Matt 11:29: “ ‘and ye shall find rest unto your souls [yourselves]’ ” (KJV).

*Man’s life.* There are about 150 occurrences of the word *nephesh* in the Old Testament in which it means “life.” About forty-six times in the New Testament the word *psyche* expresses the same meaning.<sup>11</sup> Examples include Exod 21:30: “ ‘He shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him’ ” (KJV), which means the ransom of his soul or himself as a whole. In John 10:11, to lay down one’s life is the same as to give oneself. Used in this way, *nephesh* and *psyche*, “soul,” can be understood as a person with the whole of life in him.

Man as a living soul, man as a person, and man’s life—all expressed by the words *nephesh* and *psyche*, mean the whole person. Moreover, the use of the word “spirit” or *pneuma* in the New Testament also carries the idea of the whole person. Two clear examples are found in 1 Cor 16:18 and 2 Cor 2:13.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly to the use of the word “soul” in the Bible, Ellen G. White uses the word to mean “person” or “individual.” It is typically used to describe the whole man as a complete living, thinking, and physical being.

The best example in White’s writings of “soul” referring to a person is in her description of the creation of man:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>9</sup> F. D. Nichol, ed., *Questions on Doctrine* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1957), 512.

<sup>10</sup> Atkinson, *ibid.*, 4, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 9, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Eduard Schweizer, “*pneuma*, pneumatikos,” *TDOT*, Gerhard Mittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6: 4.35.

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The human form was perfect in all its arrangements, but it was without life. Then a personal, self-existing God breathed into that form the breath of life, and man became a living, intelligent being. All parts of the human organism were set in action. The heart, the arteries, the veins, . . . the faculties of the mind, all began their work, and . . . Man became a living soul.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, it is clear that the “living soul” is the totality of the individual, including physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. The use of “soul” as person is also found in other statements. When she says, “in all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save,”<sup>14</sup> “souls” clearly means “persons.” When she says, “God claims every soul as His property,”<sup>15</sup> she means God claims every person or individual.

**The Expressions “Body” and “Flesh”**

Besides “soul” and “spirit,” the third aspect in the creation of man is “dust from the ground,” commonly understood as “body” or “flesh.” In the Old Testament “flesh” and “body” are designated by the same word, *basar*. Early Hebrew apparently had no term to designate the body as a whole, at least in today’s sense of the word. Those who used this language chose to refer to various parts and organs individually.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, “a Semite has the same regard for the body as for the flesh since both signify the whole man.<sup>17</sup> The word *basar* occurs 127 times in the Old Testament, indicating the “flesh” of both animals and man.<sup>18</sup> Some examples of this use can be found in Gen 40:19; Exod 4:7; Lev 12:3; 13:2; and Deut 28:53,55. Phrases translated “living being” include Gen 6:17,19; 7:21; and Lev 17:14; while “mankind” is used in Isa 40:5; Gen 6:12,13 and Num 16:22, clearly describing the whole person. In the New Testament, on the other hand, there is a distinction drawn between the words “flesh” (*sari*) and “body” (*soma*).

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<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1905), 415.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1898), 353.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1986) 56.

<sup>16</sup> Xavier Leon, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (New York: Decler, 1967), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), s. v. “Body.”



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*Body.* In neither the Old nor the New Testament, is the body identified with corruption.<sup>19</sup> Paul stresses the dignity of the “body,” indicating that the “body” is to be respected by man as an expression of the person. When Paul exhorts the Romans to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom 12:1, KJV), it is clear that *soma* does not mean “body form,” nor just “body,” but refers to the whole person.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we need not say only that man does not have a *soma*—he is a *soma*.<sup>21</sup>

*Flesh.* Man as flesh, on the other hand, means man as a whole, with his weakness and limitations. However, “flesh,” as such, is not evil, nor is it the source of evil.<sup>22</sup> Bultmann says that man is good when his will is good, and man is evil when his will is evil. Sin is not existing in the “flesh,” which is “idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Gal 5:20, 21, NIV). As the result of sin, man may have a sinful body (Rom 6:19), or sinful “flesh” (Rom 8:3), because sin is capable of dominating the “body” (Rom 6:19). Thus the “body” is reduced to a lowly state (Phil 3:21), full of unholy cravings (Rom 6:12).

Although man is sinful, the Bible does not separate “flesh” and “spirit” as distinct entities. Paul writes of the “mind of the flesh” (Rom 8:6, AMP), and men who “walk in the desires of the flesh” (Eph 2:3, KJV). This does not mean there is an element in man that is intrinsically bad. The Christian is to crucify the flesh because the work of the flesh fights against the spirit, “for the flesh lusts against the spirit” (Gal 5:17, NKJV). However, the conflict is not between two halves of a person, but between two tendencies of the whole person. The whole person is always engaged in the act.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, “flesh” and “body,” as well as “soul” and “spirit,” express the wholeness of man.

#### **The Expressions of “Heart”**

Although the word “heart” is not found in the account of creation of man, as are “spirit,” “soul,” and “body,” the use of “heart” in the Bible is

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<sup>19</sup> Leon, *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1951) 1:192.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>22</sup> Veselin Kesich, “The Biblical Understanding of Man,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 20 (Fall & Summer 1975): 15

<sup>23</sup> Edward Heppenstall, “The Nature of Man,” 4, Document File DF 2066, Ellen G. White Research Center (EGWRC).

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similar to use of “soul” and “spirit.” The Hebrew words for “heart” are *lev*, *levav*, and *libbah*, while Greek uses *kardia*. The word “heart” generally denotes the seat of various attitudes, emotions, or intelligence and can mean the totality of feeling, thought, and human desire traced back to their deepest sources in the inner life.<sup>24</sup>

The “heart” as the seat of emotions is clearly described in Scripture. The “heart” can be glad (Prov 27:11, KJV), sad (Neh 2:2, NIV), or troubled (2 Kings 6:11, KJV). It is referred to as the seat of wisdom (Exod 31:6, NKJV). The “heart” can plan wicked deeds, since it is considered the seat of volition and moral life. Jesus says, “ ‘Out of the heart come evil thoughts’ ” (Matt 15:19, NIV).

The “heart” is man’s self, and in most cases where this word is used, it performs the service of a personal pronoun!<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the Bible speaks of sin and love for God in relation to the “heart.” This usage represents the whole man.<sup>26</sup> When the “heart” loves, the whole man loves; when the heart rejoices, the whole man rejoices. And when the “heart” is sinful, the whole man is sinful. When God sanctifies man’s “heart,” He sanctifies the whole man.

Nancy Collins and her colleagues at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) conducted a prospective study of 129 ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged pregnant women to see if social support would improve physical and mental outcomes in pregnancy. They found that women who received more prenatal social support and those who were more satisfied with that support experienced fewer difficulties in labor, delivered babies of higher birth weight, and gave birth to healthier babies, as indicated by their Apgar rating. Also, those who received more social support during pregnancy reported less depression after childbirth.<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Sheldon Cohen and his colleagues at Carnegie-Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh conducted a study to assess whether social ties (having social support and willingness to provide service to one another) helps to protect the human body against infectious disease. Two hundred seventy-six healthy volunteers ranging in age from 18 to 55 were given nasal drops containing *rhinovirus* (the virus that causes the

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<sup>24</sup> Atkinson, *ibid.*, 27

<sup>25</sup> Bultmann, *ibid.*, 221.

<sup>26</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 202.

<sup>27</sup> N. L. Collins, C. Dunkel-Schetter, M. Lobel, et al. “Social Support in Pregnancy: Psychosocial Correlates of Birth Outcomes and Postpartum Depression.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65 (1993): 1243-58.

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common cold). Thereafter, participation in 12 types of social relationships were assessed: relationship with (1) spouse, (2) parents, (3) parents-in-law, (4) children, (5) close family members, (6) close neighbors, (7) friends, (8) fellow workers, (9) schoolmates, (10) fellow volunteers in charity or community work, (11) members of groups without religious affiliations [social, recreational, or professional], as well as (12) members of religious groups.

The research revealed that those who reported only one to three types of relationships had more than four times the risk of developing a cold than those reporting six or more various types of relationships. These differences were not fully explained by antibody titers (levels), smoking, exercise, amount of sleep, alcohol, vitamin C, or other variable factors. In addition, the researchers discovered that the diversity of relationships was more important than the total number of people to whom they spoke. In short, those involved in mutually supportive relationship with a diversity of people, regardless of their background, increase their resistance to infection from the rhinovirus.<sup>28</sup>

According to Ellen G. White, “When Jesus speaks of the new heart, He means the mind, the life, the whole being.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, in her mind, “heart” means the mind, the life, and the whole being. It refers to the wholeness of man. Therefore, there are usages of the word “heart” in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White with the same meaning as “soul,” and “body.” That is, man should be considered as a whole.

#### **The Indivisible Man**

The usage of the biblical words “soul,” “spirit,” “body,” and “heart” express the wholeness of man. Each word indicates man as a whole, a complete man, a person who has a physical, mental, and spiritual being. Further, man, considered a total person, is indivisible, although he comprises several aspects.

*Body and Life Principle.* In the formation of man, the Bible says, “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground” (Gen 2:7, KJV). The “dust of the ground” is the original substance of the human body, which in turn is the medium used to communicate to others.<sup>30</sup> Without

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<sup>28</sup> S. Cohen, W. J. Doyle, D. P. Skoner, et al. “Social Ties and Susceptibility to the Common Cold,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 277 (1997): 1940-44.

<sup>29</sup> White, comment on Ezekiel 36:25, 26, in F. D. Nichols, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1953-1957), 4:1164.

<sup>30</sup> Kesich, *ibid.*, 15.

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the human body, there is no existence for man. Body is one of the basic aspects of the human being.

In the formation of man, God also breathed “the breath of life” into man’s nostrils and man became a living soul. The breath of life in the creation of man is represented by Hebrew *n’shamah*, which is the life principle issuing from the Lord). There are some passages in which *n’shamah* is synonymous with *ruach*.<sup>31</sup> These include 1 Kgs 17:17; Isa 42:5; and Job 32:8; 33:4, which show that the absence of *n’shamah* means death.

There are forty-nine passages in the Old Testament and nine instances in the New Testament in which *ruach* and *pneuma* mean “life principle.”<sup>32</sup> Several illustrative examples are Lam 4:20; Num 16:22; Matt 27:50; and Luke 8:55. These verses show that the “spirit” as life principle is one of the aspects of man and cannot be separated from man himself. If this aspect is missing, man is no longer man.

*Man’s Mind and Emotion.* There are several other meanings of the words “soul” and “spirit,” and some of them express man’s mind and emotion. There are about a hundred twenty-six passages in the Old Testament in which *nephesh* is specifically connected with the emotions of desire, while there are twelve occurrences of the New Testament *psyche* that express the same meaning.<sup>33</sup>

The *nephesh* is spoken of as the seat of feelings in general; e.g., the soul’s reaction to hunger and thirst (Ps 42:1,2). There are also examples of the *nephesh* as the seat of sorrow (Ps 13:2), the seat of desire (Deut 21:14), the seat of anger (Judg 18:25), and the seat of joy (Ezek 25:6). New Testament examples can be found in Matt 22:37 and Mark 12:33.

In some instances, Ellen G. White refers to “soul” as the mind, also. One of these examples is found in her counsels to parents to “educate and train their children as to bring out the energies of the soul by exercise.”<sup>34</sup> She identifies these energies as perception, judgment, memory, and the reasoning power, all of which she calls the faculties of the mind.

Some of the usages of “spirit” in the Old and New Testaments indicate the same meaning. There are many passages in the Old Testament in which the word *ruach* means a man’s inner disposition; that is, the seat

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<sup>31</sup> C. F. Kell and F. Delitzch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Pentateuch*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 1:76.

<sup>32</sup> Atkinson, 18, 26, 41.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 13

<sup>34</sup> Ellen G. White, “The Duties of Parents in Educating Their Children,” *Good Health* 15 (July 1880): 206.

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of his thoughts and emotions. This is similar to the sense of *nephesh* when it refers to the inner man, as well as to the whole man as person or living being. There are twenty-seven cases where the “spirit” (*ruach*) is the seat of grief, generally referred to in Hebrew as “bitterness of spirit” (Gen 26:35, NASB).<sup>35</sup>

There are some instances in which we find *ruach* governing the will, such as “every one whom his spirit [*ruach*] made willing” (Exod 35:21, KJV). Other passages show *ruach* as the seat of jealousy (Num 5:14,30), the seat of courage (Josh 5:1; 1 Kgs 10:5), the seat of anger (Judg 8:3, Prov 14:29), the seat of perverseness, evil, or rebellion (Isa 19:14; Hos 4:12), and the seat of contrition, humility (Isa 57:15; 66:2). There also fifteen references to *ruach* in a more general sense.<sup>36</sup> In Prov 29:11 and Ezek 11:5, KJV, *ruach* is translated as “mind,” while Ezek 20:32 and Hab 1:11 reveal the hand of God on the character and personality of man.

Concerning the nature of man, Ellen G. White uses the word “spirit” in two ways: (1) man’s disposition or temperament, and (2) man’s thought and feeling. When she says, “We must have perfect control over our own spirit,”<sup>37</sup> it clearly means that we must have perfect control over our own temperament. In another place she says, “Our spirit and deportment must correspond with the copy that our Saviour has given us.”<sup>38</sup> In this statement, as in several others, White uses “spirit” and “temperament” interchangeably when referring to a specific aspect of human personality.

White also seems to identify “spirit” with character.<sup>39</sup> This character is the product of mind activity.<sup>40</sup> By implication, we conclude that the “spirit” is synonymous with thought.

On another occasion, she refers to human moral character as “the thought and feelings combined.”<sup>41</sup> The combination of thought and feelings comprise the moral character and thus the “spirit” of man. In this

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<sup>35</sup> Atkinson, *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 22

<sup>37</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1945), 1:308.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:36.

<sup>39</sup> Ellen G. White, Comment on 1 Cor 15:42-45, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1093.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:606.

<sup>41</sup> Ellen G. White, “Praise Due to the Creator,” *Review and Herald* 62 (April 21, 1885): 241.

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sense “spirit” is a person, referring to the unity of thought and feelings that are the product or content of the properly functioning mind.

Some usages of *nephesh*, *psyche*, *ruach*, *pneuma*, or “soul” and “spirit” in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White reveal the function, personality, or characteristic of man in which feeling, thinking, reasoning, and will are included. Since feeling, thinking, and will are various functions of man, they are parts of the whole, not separate substances. So, when one wills, he wills with his whole being; when he feels, he feels with his whole being. It is impossible to separate man from his mind or his emotions. Therefore the uses of *nephesh*, *psyche*, *ruach*, and *pneuma* in this category may be understood to indicate that man is indivisible, while mind and emotion are complementary aspects of man.

**The Problems of Translation**

How could Christians have been wrong about this for so many centuries? Part of the answer involves translation. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, probably dating from around 250 bce. This text translated Hebrew anthropological terminology into Greek, and it then contained the terms that, in the minds of Christians influenced by Greek philosophy, referred to constituent parts of humans.

Christians since then have obligingly read them and translated them in this way. The clearest instance of this is the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which was translated as *psyche* in the Septuagint and later translated into English as “soul.” To illustrate, here are a few lines as they were translated in the King James Version:

- Psalm 16:10: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.”
- Psalm 25:20: “O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed.”
- Psalm 26:9: “Gather not my soul with sinners.”
- Psalm 49:14-15: “Like sheep they [who trust in their wealth] are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them. . . . But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me.

It is widely agreed now that the Hebrew word translated “soul” (*nephesh*) in all these cases did not mean what later Christians have meant by “soul.” In most of these cases, it is simply a way of referring to the whole living person. Here is how more recent versions translate some of these same passages:

- “You do not give me up to Sheol” (Ps 16:10, NRSV).
- “Guard my life and rescue me” (Ps 25:20, NIV).

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●“Man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7, NASB, NIV, NKJV) or “a living person” (NLT).

**From Creation to Restoration**

It has been shown that man is indivisible, although consisting of various aspects. Did the indivisible man exist at the time of creation, or does this concept apply to post-lapsarian man and man at the time of restoration?

*At Creation.* After the creation of man, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen 1:31, NKJV). One of the reasons man’s condition was good was that he was created in the image of God (Gen 1:26,27).

Ellen G. White explains that in his original creation, with his nature resembling God’s in “outward resemblance,” man was “of lofty stature and perfect symmetry,”<sup>42</sup> with the “size and strength of all his organs being fully and harmoniously developed.”<sup>43</sup> Adam was tall and symmetrical, and though twice the height of modern man, he was well proportioned. Eve was a little smaller than Adam, coming just above his shoulder in height. She was also “noble—perfect in symmetry, and very beautiful.”<sup>44</sup>

Adam and Eve did not wear ordinary clothing, but wore garments of glory and light, as the angels do.<sup>45</sup> The diet given to man in the garden was fruits, grains, and nuts (Gen 1:29). The natural environment in which Adam and Eve lived was good for their health, as well as conducive to their joy and happiness.<sup>46</sup> They were perfect physically.

Moreover, the perfection of their mental and spiritual condition can be seen in the following statements. “Every faculty of mind and soul reflected the Creator’s glory. Endowed with high mental and spiritual gifts, Adam and Eve were made . . . that they might . . . comprehend moral responsibilities and obligations.”<sup>47</sup> One of the very greatest mental and

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<sup>42</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1913), 45.

<sup>43</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1938), 147.

<sup>44</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1945), 3:33.

<sup>45</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 261.

<sup>47</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1952), 20.

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spiritual blessings was the ability to communicate with God freely and openly.<sup>48</sup>

Holy angels gave Adam and Eve counsel and instruction,<sup>49</sup> and the Father “personally directed their education.”<sup>50</sup> Their mental and spiritual powers developed, and they realized the highest pleasures of their holy existence.<sup>51</sup> They foresaw no problem in keeping God’s law, since “it was their highest pleasure to do [God’s] will.”<sup>52</sup> The law was written in their hearts.<sup>53</sup> All of these facts tell us they were perfect mentally and spiritually. There was a unity of man’s perfection before the fall—all aspects were perfect.

*After the Fall.* Man, as a whole being, was affected by the calamities of sin. “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; . . . for your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity” (Isa 59:2,3, NKJV). Sin produces “evil thoughts” (Matt 15:19, NKJV) and an “evil heart” (Heb 3:12, KJV). Man’s physical, mental, and spiritual powers are affected by sin.

The terrible effects of sin on all the faculties of man in the time of Christ are clearly stated by White:

Satanic agencies took possession of men. The bodies of human beings, made for the dwelling place of God, became the habitation of demons. The senses, the nerves, the organs of men were worked by supernatural agencies in the indulgence of the vilest lust. The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men. Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which men were possessed.<sup>54</sup>

This statement reveals White’s understanding of how sin has affected all areas of the human body. All of man was touched by distortion, including his appearance. As the result of this, men have to experience

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<sup>48</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1947), 51.

<sup>49</sup> White, *Education*, *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>52</sup> White, *The Story of Redemption*, *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> Ellen G. White, Comment on Gen 3:15, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, *ibid.*, 1:1084.

<sup>54</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 142.



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“sickness, suffering, debility, and premature death.”<sup>55</sup> The human being’s “vital forces have been greatly weakened by the indulgence of appetite.”<sup>56</sup>

Actually “the brain nerves which communicate with the entire system are the only medium through which Heaven can communicate to man.”<sup>57</sup> But as the result of sin, “the senses, the nerves, the organs”<sup>58</sup> are being attacked by Satan through the indulgence of lust. Satan tries to break the only medium of communication between God and man, which could not have been prior to the Fall. As the result of the working of Satan in man’s mind, the ability of human beings to distinguish between right and wrong is affected. They do not realize that they are being led by Satan.<sup>59</sup>

Men’s faculties are perverted. And one of the worst characteristics of man’s sinful mind is selfishness. Because men’s desires have become perverted, their motives in life are focused upon self-gratification instead of upon glorifying God. The mind is weakened, the spiritual being has lost harmony with God and is inclined toward evil. It is clear that the Bible and the writings of White show that all aspects of man are affected by sin.

*In Restoration.* Although man fell in sin, God planned to restore him to his original state. The idea of the restoration of man into his original image is clearly found in the writings of Ellen G. White and the Bible. On this point, White believes that Christ is the only way to restoration. “All that was lost by the first Adam will be restored by the second.”<sup>60</sup> All of man’s being was affected by sin. Thus, the restoration of man will include the whole being also.

Concerning the objective of redemption and education, White says:

To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of re-

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<sup>55</sup> Ellen G. White, *Fundamental of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1952), 23.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 3:347.

<sup>58</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> White, *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>60</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *ibid.*, 67.

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demption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.<sup>61</sup>

That God is concerned about the restoration of man as a whole, including physical, mental, and spiritual powers, can be clearly seen as we examine the way God guides His people and gives His commandments. Some commandments that were given to improve spiritual life are related to the physical aspect of man as well. For example, when God instructed Abraham to circumcise all the members of his household (Gen 17:10-12,14), it represented a spiritual relationship with God. Medical science seems to indicate, however, that it is also a matter of health. According to Stanley Robbins, in his textbook on general pathology, "The ritual of circumcision as practiced by the Hebrews during the first two weeks of life has for all purposes virtually eliminated carcinoma of the penis."<sup>62</sup> Thus, when God gave His commandments, it was for the spiritual and physical benefit of man.

Furthermore, beside many commandments with a spiritual emphasis, God, through Moses, gave many commandments with a physical emphasis. Some examples are the health laws found in Lev 11 and Deut 14. These laws prohibited the use of some animals, such as camels, hares, swine, dogs, cats, weasels, mice, and lizards, for food. Medical science has proved that abstaining from eating these animals will limit incidence of plague, rat-bite fever, leptospirosis, ascariasis, anthrax, tularemia, and the probability of infestation by parasites (*trichinella spiralis*, *taenia solium*, or *echinococcus granulosus*) or protozoan toxoplasma.<sup>63</sup>

The interrelation between obedience to the law of God and physical health can be found repeatedly in the books of Moses. In Exod 15:26 God says, through Moses, " 'If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee' " (KJV).

God promised His people physical blessings, with the condition that they would be obedient to the law of God. But if they disobeyed the commandments, " 'The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation' "

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<sup>61</sup> White, *Education*, *ibid.*, 15, 16.

<sup>62</sup> Rarvey Rosenstock, "On the Genesis of Public Health: One Facet of Pentateuchal Materia Medica," *Arizona Medicine* 25 (May 1968): 494.

<sup>63</sup> Donald G. Dawe, "Moses the Father of Preventive Medicine," *Minnesota Medicine* 47 (February 1964): 171.

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(Deut 28:20, KJV), “ ‘The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation’ ” (vs. 22, KJV), “The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart’ ” (vss. 27, 28, KJV).

These verses clearly show that disobedience to God’s commandments is a spiritual act that affects the physical and mental aspects of man. In the eyes of Moses, man is indivisible. Any disobedience to spiritual law affects the physical area of man. There is no separation between the various aspects of man.

Moreover, in the New Testament, Jesus showed His concern for the ministry of the wholeness of man: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Matt 4:23, NIV). Three aspects of man constituted the center of His ministry. “Healing represents His ministry to man’s physical needs; teaching, His ministry to the mind; and preaching, His ministry to spiritual needs.”<sup>64</sup>

The interrelationship between the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of man may also be found in the writings of Paul: “The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23, KJV). Here Paul uses periphrasis for the whole man. He saw the necessity of preparing our physical, mental, and spiritual powers for the coming of Jesus Christ. Man is indivisible. In White’s words “Bible sanctification has to do with the whole man.”<sup>65</sup>

This section brings us to the conclusion that man was indivisible at the time of his creation and after the fall and will be in the time of restoration. There is no point when the body is separated from the mind, or the mind from the body. The perfection of man at the time of creation involved man’s physical, mental, and spiritual areas. The iniquities of sin affect man’s physical, mental, and spiritual powers, and the restoration of man includes the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. Since man is indivisible, the sanctification of man involves the whole person.

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<sup>64</sup> Leo R. Van Dolson and J. Robert Spangler, *Healthy, Happy, Holy* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1975), 38.

<sup>65</sup> White, *Counsels on Health* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1923), 66.

### The Integrated Man

The words “soul,” “spirit,” “body,” and “heart” in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White refer to man as a whole. The same words express the fact that man is indivisible, although he consists of several aspects. God has not separated the aspects of man since the fall and will not do so in the time of restoration.

Furthermore, a study of the account of the creation of man in Gen 2:7 reveals that man is not only to be considered as whole and indivisible, but also that each aspect of man is interdependent with the other. “The dust of the earth” depends upon the “breath of life” in order to become human. And the “breath of life” is dependent on the “dust of the earth,” because without the combination of both, the “breath of life” is not a man.

The interdependence between body and spirit (or soul) is found in the Bible. Can this also be found in the writings of White?

Since the uses of “soul,” “spirit,” and “heart” are usually synonymous with “mind” in the writings of White, we will observe what she says about the relationship between mind and body. Ellen G. White says “the relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate,”<sup>66</sup> and to neglect the body is to neglect the mind.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, “All . . . should study the influence of the mind upon the body, and of the body upon the mind, and the laws by which they are governed.”<sup>68</sup>

*Mind Depends Upon Body.* Ellen G. White believed that certain physical faculties are the basis of mental action,<sup>69</sup> and these faculties form the brain, which is to be the mind organ<sup>70</sup> and moral organ.<sup>71</sup> She also says, “The brain nerves . . . are the only medium through which Heaven can communicate to man, and affect his inmost life.”<sup>72</sup> Therefore, the physical senses are the “avenues of the soul.”<sup>73</sup>

The mental and moral powers are dependent upon the activity of the body for their very existence.<sup>74</sup> The cessation of life in the human body means the ceasing of consciousness, of mental and moral powers.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>67</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 241.

<sup>68</sup> White, *Counsels on Health*, *ibid.*, 128

<sup>69</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>71</sup> White, *Counsels on Health*, *ibid.*, 586

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 616.

<sup>73</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 3:324.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 3:506.

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*Body Depends Upon Mind.* As the mind is dependent upon the body, White at the same time believes that the body is also dependent upon the mind. According to her, “The brain is the organ and instrument of the mind and controls the whole body. In order for the other parts of the system to be healthy, the brain must be healthy.”<sup>75</sup> Because the brain is the organ of the mind, it is clearly understood that the mind controls the whole body. Therefore, it functions as the source of action.

The work of the brain is summarized: “By the brain nerves, mental impressions are conveyed to all the nerves of the body as by telegraph wires; and they control the vital action of every part of the system.”<sup>76</sup> Any unnatural condition of the brain or mind means the lack of harmonious action in the human organism, and this may bring disease and even death.<sup>77</sup> The body is vitally dependent upon the mind as well as the mind being dependent upon the body.\

*Body Affects Mind.* White describes the close relationship between the body and mind by saying, “when one is affected, the other sympathizes.”<sup>78</sup> For example, when she describes the electric currents in the nervous system, she says that “Whatever disturbs the . . . nervous system lessens the strength of the vital powers, and the result is a deadening of the sensibilities of the mind.”<sup>79</sup>

*Effect of Sickness Upon the Mind.* To describe the effect of sickness upon the mind, medical science refers to “somatopsychic” disease, which is a combination of the two words, *soma* and *psyche*, emphasizing the influence of body on mind. White believes that a sick body affects the proper functioning of the mind. A poor condition of the body, as a result of disease or feebleness, affects the mind so that it cannot think clearly and has difficulty differentiating between right and wrong.<sup>80</sup> Because of physical debility, the mind is often unable to function at its highest level of ability.<sup>81</sup> Physicians often see examples of psychosomatic symptoms among people who suffer with ulcerative colitis.<sup>82</sup> “The *psyche* of the

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<sup>75</sup> White, *Counsels on Health*, *ibid.*, 586.

<sup>76</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 3:69.

<sup>77</sup> White, *Counsel on Health*, *ibid.*, 587; *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 241.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 2:347.

<sup>80</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1900), 346.

<sup>81</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1913), 98-100.

<sup>82</sup> Sara M. Jordan, *Health and Happiness* (New York: Devin Adair, 1962), 403.

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sick person is disturbed to the extent that he appears dependent, apprehensive and depressed.”<sup>83</sup> It is interesting to note that the mental abnormalities disappear when the colon is healed or when the disease is surgically removed. “The individual regains his optimism, his dependence upon his own ability and resourcefulness.”<sup>84</sup>

White clearly states that “the infirmities of the body affect the mind.”<sup>85</sup> That is, every wrong habit that affects the physical health is understood to reach the mind.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, she believes the health of the body and the health of the mind are inseparable.

*Effect of Physical Habits Upon the Mind.* That White believes physical habits affect the mind can be seen in the following statement: “whatever promotes physical health, promotes the development of a strong mind and a well-balanced character,”<sup>87</sup> adding that “We generally find, even among Seventh-day Adventists, that inclination, habit, delicate, unhealthful preparations in cooking and unhealthful habits of dress are weakening physical, mental, and moral efficiency, and making it impossible to overcome temptation.”<sup>88</sup>

It is not surprising that she stresses that “the treatment of the body has everything to do with the vigor and purity of mind and heart,”<sup>89</sup> and “right physical habits promote mental superiority.”<sup>90</sup> On this point, she believes that those who obey the laws of health will have clearness of thought and strength of mind. In counsel to her own son, Edson White, she refers to overwork as one of the bad habits that affect the person mentally and spiritually:

Cut down your work to that which you understand best. You have carried so many responsibilities that you are nearly bankrupt in mental and physical strength. Do not try to rush things as you have been doing. You cannot afford to sacrifice your needed rest and sleep in order to drive forward your work. You are wearing out altogether too fast. With overtaxed

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 1:304.

<sup>86</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 309.

<sup>87</sup> White, *Education*, *ibid.*, 195.

<sup>88</sup> Ellen G. White, MS 1, 1875, EGWRC.

<sup>89</sup> White, Comment on 1 Thess 5:23, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, *ibid.*, 7:909.

<sup>90</sup> White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, *ibid.*, 29.

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nerves, aching head, and sleepless nights, you have been losing ground physically, mentally and spiritually.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, idleness weakens brain power.<sup>92</sup> In establishing the health of body and mind, she gives a great deal of counsel on natural remedies, such as proper diet, water, exercise, temperance, and rest.<sup>93</sup>

Also discussed is the relationship of exercise and proper diet to the condition of the mind. The brain nerves should be nourished by good quality and quantity of blood in order to perform their vital function.<sup>94</sup> The quantity and quality of blood depends upon exercise, the respiratory and digestive processes, and the quality of air and food taken into the body.<sup>95</sup> Exercise and proper diet are important for better vital action of the mind.

Her conviction is in harmony with recent scientific discoveries. In the *Annals of Internal Medicine 2006*, the result of a prospective study was published regarding how physical fitness can fight off dementia. One thousand seven hundred forty people over 65 who didn't have mental impairment, scored highly on tests of mental functioning, enrolled in the study. They were to report on the number of days a week they took part in at least 15 minutes of exercise—walking, hiking, bicycling, aerobics, weight training, or equivalents. Subjects were examined every two years to see if they had developed any evidence of dementia. After adjusting for the age and gender of the participants, the study reported a 38-percent reduction in risk of dementia for those who exercise three or more times weekly, compared to those who exercise fewer than three times weekly.<sup>96</sup> Exercise has been proven beneficial for numerous conditions associated with aging—diabetes, cancer, heart attack, stroke, osteoporosis, and overweight and so forth. This study that reveals exercise is also helpful for preventing dementia clearly shows that White and medical science agree that physical habits affect the mind.

*Effect of Diet Upon the Mind.* Referring to the indulgence of Israel in the wilderness, the Bible says, “He gave them their request, but sent

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<sup>91</sup> Ellen G. White, MS 124, 1902, EGWRC.

<sup>92</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 4:96.

<sup>93</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>94</sup> White, *Fundamental of Christian Education*, *ibid.*, 226, 227.

<sup>95</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 238.

<sup>96</sup> E. B. Larson, L. Wang, J. D. Bowen, et al. “Exercise Is Associated with Reduced Risk for Incident Dementia among Persons 65 Years of Age and Older,” *Annals of Internal Medicine 2006*;144:73-81.

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leanness into their soul” (Ps 106:15, NKJV). This verse shows that diet affects man’s mind. White repeatedly emphasizes the relationship between digestive organs, diet, and mental action. “The brain will be affected by the disturbance in the stomach.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore “The relation of diet to intellectual development should be given far more attention”<sup>98</sup> because “mental confusion and dullness are often the result of errors in diet.”<sup>99</sup>

She states that “wrong habits of eating and drinking lead to errors in thought and action.”<sup>100</sup> “Overeating, even of the simplest food, benumbs the sensitive nerves of the brain, and weakens its vitality. Overeating has a worse effect upon the system than overworking.”<sup>101</sup>

Besides statements regarding the quantity of food eaten, the quality of the food and drink ingested are also discussed. These factors have a profound influence upon the quality of mental processes, since erroneous eating and drinking bring negative results in thinking and acting.<sup>102</sup>

For better physical and mental health, abstinence from stimulating food and drink is advocated: “We bear positive testimony against tobacco, spirituous liquors, snuff, tea, coffee, flesh meats, butter, spices, rich cakes, mince pies, a large amount of salt, and all exciting substances used as articles of food.”<sup>103</sup> Fruits, grains, vegetables, and nuts, the original food of man as described in Gen 1:29, 3:18, are the best food for body and mind:

Fruits, grains, and vegetables, prepared in a simple way, free from spice and grease of all kinds, make, with milk or cream, the most healthful diet. They impart nourishment to the body and give a power of endurance and vigor of intellect that are not produced by a stimulating diet.<sup>104</sup>

In harmony with White’s writings, medical science has discovered a relationship between a high fat diet and cerebro-vascular disease. A diet with high quantities of cholesterol may cause the narrowing of the brain’s blood vessels known as cerebro-vascular disease. Because of the

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<sup>97</sup> White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, *ibid.*, 335.

<sup>98</sup> White, *Education*, *ibid.*, 204.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, *ibid.*, 62

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>102</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 9:159-160.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:21.

<sup>104</sup> White, *Counsels on Health*, *ibid.*, 115.



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lack of oxygen, some neurons die, and the intellect and reasoning powers fade as a result.

Because fat is necessary in the diet to provide essential fatty acids, facilitate the absorption of fat soluble vitamins, and provide satiety value and palatability to meals, going on a severely restricted fat diet is not the way to go. In February 2006, the result was published of a \$415-million study funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Involving 48,835 people, it reveals that low-fat diets do not give protection against heart attacks, strokes, or breast or colon cancer. This major study contradicts what had once been promoted as one of the cornerstones of a healthful lifestyle. With the present state of knowledge, the Surgeon General's Report, the National Academy of Sciences Food and Nutrition Board, the American Heart Association, the National Cancer Institute, the Inter-Society Commission for the Heart Disease Resources, the American Medical Association, the National Cholesterol Education Program, the American Health Foundation and the General Conference of Nutrition Council recommend a healthful fat intake of 20 to 30 percent of total calories. It is important to practice the principles of temperance in the diet to have a positive impact on the mind.

*Mind Affects Body.* Paul counseled the Romans: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom 12:1,2, NKJV) These verses indicate that the "renewing of the mind" leads the body to being acceptable unto God. In other words, the condition of the mind affects the body.

White emphasizes the influence of the mind on the body, as well as the body on the mind.<sup>105</sup> The condition of the mind has much to do with the healthy function of the entire physical system.

*The Mind a Factor in Sickness.* Scripture reads, "A crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Prov 17:22, NIV). The mind can be a significant factor in contributing to sickness or disease. In harmony with the Bible, White holds that:

Sickness of the mind prevails everywhere. Nine tenths of the diseases from which men suffer have their foundation here. Perhaps some living home trouble is, like a canker, eating to the very soul and weakening the life forces. Remorse for sin

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<sup>105</sup> White, *Education*, *ibid.*, 197.

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sometimes undermines the constitution and unbalances the mind.<sup>106</sup>

Speaking about the origin of sickness, she points out that:

Disease is sometimes produced, and is often greatly aggravated, by the imagination. Many are lifelong invalids who might be well if they only thought so. Many imagine that every slight exposure will cause illness, and the evil effect is produced because it is expected. Many die from disease, the cause of which is wholly imaginary.<sup>107</sup>

Several conditions of the mind that can be causes of sickness are listed. They include grief, anxiety, discontent, guilt, remorse, and distrust.<sup>108</sup>

Medical science has developed the term “psychosomatic” to express mind-body disease and physical sickness that is the result of an emotional reaction. The field of medicine has discovered that emotional stress may affect the release of certain hormones and stimulate the nervous system in such a way as to put stress on various parts of the body. For example, stress hormones may cause blood vessels to constrict, leading to hypertension and diminished peripheral vascular flow, resulting in cold hands and feet; stress may induce shallow and rapid breathing with bronchial dilation, which causes hyperventilation and tetany; stress results in diversion of the blood supply away from the digestive system, possibly affecting digestive processes; stress induces a state of increased coagulability (clotting) of the blood, which though protective in some circumstances, could have deleterious effects in others; chronic stressful conditions may increase perspiration, leading to unpleasant dampness; stress causes an increase in blood glucose (to serve as a rapid source of energy), which in the diabetically predisposed person may lead to the hastening of the onset or exacerbation of diabetes mellitus, and so forth.

A stressed person may visit the doctor for numerous physical complaints and may suffer from emotional disorders such as anxiety, depression, phobias, cognitive disorders, memory problems, sleep disorders and even psychosis. “Somewhere between 75 and 90 percent of all doctor visits stem from stress.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 5:444.

<sup>107</sup> White, *Counsels on Health*, *ibid.*, 344

<sup>108</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 241.

<sup>109</sup> J. Mark, “A Time Out,” *U.S. News & World Report* (11 Dec.1995): 85-97.

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Repeatedly, medical science supports Ellen G. White's contention that the condition of the mind can be a significant factor in human sickness.

*Mind Factor in Physical Health.* The Bible shows that physical health can result from a good condition of the mind. This concept is found in Prov 14:30 "A sound heart is the life of the flesh" (KJV). Another translation reads: "A tranquil heart is life to the body" (NASB).

In harmony with the Bible, White believes physical health can be gained by changing the state of mind.<sup>110</sup> It is not surprising that she says, "Great wisdom is needed by the physicians . . . in order to cure the body through the mind."<sup>111</sup> The state of the mind is able to build up physical resistance and facilitate recovery from disease.

Several conditions of the mind are important for gaining physical health, including the power of will, courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, a sense of forgiveness, peace of mind, cheerfulness, and joyfulness.<sup>112</sup>

*The Power of the Will.* Special emphasis is placed on the power of will as an important factor in resisting disease.<sup>113</sup> She says that exercise of the power of the will "would control the imagination, and be a potent means of resisting and overcoming disease of both mind and body."<sup>114</sup>

*Cheerfulness.* Prov 17:22 says, "A merry heart does good, like a medicine" (NKJV). This shows the importance of cheerfulness for physical health. Writing about cheerfulness, White says that it will give vigor to the mind and health and vital energy to the body.<sup>115</sup> The importance of gratitude and praise are mentioned. "Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise."<sup>116</sup>

In the maintenance of health and the cure of disease, cheerfulness is seen by medical science as an important factor. Norman Cousins, the author of a book entitled *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient*, explained the use of "humor intervention" during his recovery from a serious and painful collagen disease in 1964. He discovered that ten minutes of genuine laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give him at least two hours of pain-free sleep. When the pain-killing effect of the

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<sup>110</sup> White, *Counsels on Health*, *ibid.*, 249.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>112</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 241, 257; *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 2:327.

<sup>113</sup> White, *Counsels on Health*, *ibid.*, 94.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 502.

<sup>116</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 251.

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laughter wore off, he would switch on the motion picture projector and watch the *Candid Camera* television program, and this would lead to another pain-free sleep interval. By end of the eighth day, his sedimentation rate, a blood test that shows the severity of the inflammation, lowered from 112mm/hour to 15mm/hour. He was able to move his thumbs without pain, the gravel-like lumps on his neck and back began to shrink, and he recovered sufficiently to return to his full time job at the *Saturday Review*.<sup>117</sup>

Studies show that each time a person is happy and has laughed genuinely, the sympathetic nervous system is stimulated, which in turn produces catecholamines. These catecholamines then stimulate the anterior lobe of the pituitary gland to produce endorphins, which are the body's natural opiates that soothe and relax the mind. Endorphins can relieve pain more effectively than morphine. It also elevates the mood and increases the activity of immune cells, such as the Natural Killer cells that destroy tumors and viruses, along with Gamma-interferon (a disease-fighting protein), T cells (important for our immune system), and B cells (which make disease-fighting antibodies). Laughter exercises the lungs and stimulates the circulatory system. It increases the oxygen intake into the lungs and then is distributed by the blood to the cells. Laughter speeds the heart rate, breathing, and circulation, and subsequently the pulse rate and blood pressure will decrease, and the skeletal muscles may then relax.

The twentieth-century lifestyle studies by Drs. Belloc and Breslow from the Department of Public Health, Berkeley, California, reinforce the concept that longevity has a close connection with the happy disposition of people. This study involved 6,928 adult residents of Alameda County, California, and the results showed that those who were generally unhappy had a death rate 57-percent higher than those who were generally very happy.<sup>118</sup>

Again, we see medical science support White and the Bible, saying that cheerfulness will give vigor to the mind and health and vital energy to the body—and is a good medicine.

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<sup>117</sup> Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient* (New York: Norton, 1979).

<sup>118</sup> L. F. Berkman, S. L. Syme. "Social Networks, Host Resistance, and Mortality: A Nine-year Follow Up Study of Alameda County Residents," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 109.2 (1979): 186-204.

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*Freedom from Guilt.* There are many benefits of freedom from guilt. Peace and love diffuse through the whole being as a vitalizing power. Freedom from guilt also touches the brain, heart, and nerves with healing, serenity, and composure as well as bringing joy in the Holy Spirit.<sup>119</sup>

The source of a more beneficial condition of the mind can be found in the love of Christ.<sup>120</sup> “It implants in the soul, joy that nothing earthly can destroy, . . . health-giving, life-giving joy.”<sup>121</sup>

Because of the closeness of the body/mind relationship, there is a need for keeping both body and mind in the best possible condition.<sup>122</sup> Medical science, in fact, suggests the treatment of mind and body at the same time, in the case of psychosomatic and somatopsychic patients, so the recovery will affect the whole person.<sup>123</sup>

#### **Approaching Spiritual Needs Through the Physical**

In view of the fact that man is an integrated being in which each aspect of his being depends on and affects the others, fulfillment of man’s physical needs can be an adjunct for meeting his spiritual needs. This has been God’s method in guiding man. In 1 Kgs 19:1-18, the Bible records the story of Elijah, who ran away from God because of his depression and discouragement. In order to restore his faith, hope, and courage, God fulfilled his physical needs first by giving him enough rest, food, and water (vss. 5-8). After his physical health was restored, the Lord revealed Himself and gave some instructions to him (vs. 9-18).

The Gospels show that Jesus was concerned with man’s physical needs; He spent more time performing miracles of healing than teaching and preaching. In her comments regarding the purpose of these divine healings, White says:

Jesus healed the people of their diseases when they had faith in His power; He helped them in the things which they could see, thus inspiring them with confidence in Him concerning things which they could not see—leading them to believe in His power to forgive sins.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ellen G. White to S, February 24, 1887, and letter 38, 1905, EGWRC.

<sup>120</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 115.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> White, *Counsels on Health*, *ibid.*, 543.

<sup>123</sup> Bernard Jensen, *The Science and Practice of Iridology*. (Provo: Biworld, 1952), 186.

<sup>124</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1893), 50.

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This statement is based on the words of Jesus when He healed the man sick with palsy: “ ‘That you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, . . . rise, take up your bed, and go to your house’ ” (Matt 9:6, NKJV). White states, “The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’ ”<sup>125</sup>

The fulfillment of man’s physical needs as an adjunct for the fulfillment of his spiritual needs was the practice of the apostolic church. When Jesus instructed His disciples to go out, He asked them to heal the sick and preach the gospel (Matt 10:1,7,8). The same practice was followed by Paul and also by Luke, “the beloved physician.” White describes this as follows:

Paul heard of [Luke’s] skill as a physician, and sought him out as one to whom the Lord had entrusted a special work. He secured his co-operation, and for some time Luke accompanied him in his travels from place to place. After a time, Paul left Luke at Philippi, in Macedonia. Here he continued to labor for several years, both as a physician and as a teacher of the gospel. In his work as a physician he ministered to the sick, and then prayed for the healing power of God to rest upon the afflicted ones. Thus the way was opened for the gospel message. Luke’s success as a physician gained for him many opportunities for preaching Christ among the heathen.<sup>126</sup>

It is God’s plan that we shall work as the disciples worked. This includes the ministry to man’s physical need as an adjunct to winning the whole person. “The more closely the New Testament plan is followed in missionary labor, the more successful will be the efforts put forth.”<sup>127</sup>

It would appear that scientific discoveries that speak of the wholeness of man, in the sense that each aspect of man is interdependent, corroborate the teachings of the Bible and Ellen G. White. The mind depends upon the body, and the body depends upon the mind; the mind affects the body, and the body affects the mind. For this reason, the care and treatment of man should work toward healing the whole person. Moreover, the fulfillment of man’s physical needs can be an adjunct to fulfilling his spiritual needs.

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<sup>125</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing*, *ibid.*, 143

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 140, 141.

<sup>127</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, *ibid.*, 3:210.

### Summary

The Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, supported by medical science, reveal that man is a wholistic being—indivisible and integrated.

The wholeness of man is expressed in the Bible by the word “soul” (*nephesh* in the Old Testament and *psyche* in the New Testament), and the same word is used in the writings of Ellen G. White. These words point to man as a whole, man as a person, and to man’s life itself. The word *pneuma* in the New Testament can denote man as a whole, and the use of “heart” and “body” in the Old and New Testaments usually expresses the whole man. The wholeness of man expressed by these words includes the completeness of man as a person who has body, mind, and soul, or physical, mental, and spiritual aspects.

Although man consists of several aspects, he is indivisible. The indivisibility of man can be seen in the fact that the absence of one aspect, for example, *ruach*, or life principle, means death. At the same time, the words “soul” and “spirit” in the Bible and the writings of White usually mean man’s mind, or the seat of emotions, including feeling, thinking, and reasoning. These aspects cannot be separated from man himself because they are part of the whole. If he feels, he feels with his whole being. The use of “soul” and “spirit” in this sense shows that man is a unit. He is an indivisible being.

The indivisible man is clearly found in the Bible and the writings of White. Both teach the condition of man before the fall, after the fall, and in restoration. Man as a whole was perfect before the fall. All aspects of man, physical, mental, and spiritual, were totally affected by sin, and the restoration of man is going to take place in the whole man also, without any separation.

The Bible and the writings of White, with corroboration from medical science, also reveal that body and mind are interdependent. Just as “dust from the ground” and the “life principle” are interdependent for man’s existence, body and mind are interdependent in every human being. Moreover, mind and body interact with each other. Our mind will not work properly if we are sick. Improving our diet and physical habits will enable us to think more clearly. On the other hand, emotional stress, worry, or anxiety can produce physical sickness, while proper conditioning of the mind brings better physical health.

Because the Bible and the writings of White teach the wholeness of man, the indivisible man, and the interdependent aspects of man, we need to regard man as a whole in our ministry. Educational institutions should be concerned with man’s physical and spiritual development; and

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health institutions should serve man's mental and spiritual needs, as well as his physical needs.

Furthermore, every effort in introducing the gospel to human beings should be centered on the whole man as a physical, mental, and spiritual being. Every program of evangelism should attract man as a whole. The content of evangelistic programs should fulfill the needs of man's physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. Therefore, health programs should be a part of evangelistic efforts. Health programs can even be the opening wedge for gospel evangelism. Health evangelism is a vital program for introducing the gospel to the whole man because man is a wholistic being.

If all church members, workers, and institutions can work together to reach the integrated, indivisible man, we can find unity in the church through an emphasis on the wholeness of man. Since all aspects of the nature of man are united, the church must be united in reaching all aspects of man because we have the same goal, salvation of the whole man as a physical, mental, and spiritual being.

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## **Theology and Disestablishment in Colonial America: Insights from a Quaker, a Puritan, and a Baptist**

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### **Introduction: From The Puritan To The Constitutional Founding**

The Puritans' holy experiment in New England, begun in the early 17th century, was very different from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century reality of America. Puritan leaders had envisioned a glorious "city on a hill" where church and state cooperated to ensure a Christian commonwealth. But a century later, this dream had turned into the messy reality of a religiously diverse community. Not only was there no federal religious establishment, but most colonies also rejected religious establishments. Connecticut and Massachusetts hung on to the vestiges of their establishments for two or three decades, until 1818 and 1833 respectively. But these states' capitulation was just a matter of time. By then, disestablishment and the principle of religious voluntarism had become as much the American Way as religious establishment had been the Puritan and New England Way.

This change was not a top-down affair foisted by a small group of deist elites on an unsuspecting and more conventionally religious populace. As law professor Carl Esbeck recently noted, "the American disestablishment occurred over a fifty-to-sixty year period, from 1774 to the early 1830s" and was "entirely a state-law affair," completely independent of the Revolution or the adoption of the Bill of Rights.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>1</sup> Carl H. Esbeck, "Dissent and Disestablishment: The Church-State Settlement in the Early American Republic," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 4 (2004): 1590.

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credit for disestablishment cannot be placed on a small, elite group of enlightenment thinkers gathered in Philadelphia to draft a new national constitution. Rather, it was a populist movement throughout the states where religious, rather than enlightenment influences, were predominant. As Esbeck puts it, “at the state level, where the work of disestablishment did take place, the vast number of those pushing for it were not doing so out of rationalism or secularism. Rather, they were religious people who sought disestablishment for (as they saw it) biblical reasons.”<sup>2</sup>

Much of the scholarship surrounding the founding period and disestablishment has focused on secular Enlightenment and Republican influences.<sup>3</sup> Many of the national founders were Enlightenment thinkers who leaned toward or accepted deistic beliefs. Because of this, those analyzing the impulses to disestablishment have often given religion a secondary, supporting role. A ritual nod is usually given to Roger Williams and a handful of Baptists and Quakers. But even those authors who acknowledge a role for religion in the journey to disestablishment tend place the heavy ideological lifting on the shoulders of secular thought.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Esbeck, 1590.

<sup>3</sup> Two of the most influential, now classic, works on the revolutionary period acknowledge some religious influence, but focus almost entirely on secular Republican and Enlightenment ideals arising out of certain strands of British politics. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967) xi-xii; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Vintage, 1993), 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> William Lee Miller traces three roots of religious liberty—the Enlightenment, Republicanism, and dissenting religion—and uses the figures of Jefferson and Madison, contemporaries of the constitutional founding, to illustrate the Enlightenment and Republican streams. But he reaches back nearly 150 years to pluck his religious voice, that of Roger Williams, who serves, by Miller’s own admission, more as a symbol for dissenting ideas, rather than as a historical figure with direct influence on the constitutional founding. William Lee Miller, *The First Liberty: Religion and the American Republic*, (New York: Paragon House, 1988), 153-155. Other recent works acknowledge the influence of religion on disestablishment, but generally describe it in terms of either religious minorities’ self-protective responses to majoritarian religion or of the general pragmatic response of society to a growing religious pluralism. Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003). John Witte, Jr., *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment: Essential Rights and Liberties*, (Boulder: Westview, 2000). In both these works, the emphasis on the role of religion is that of pragmatic response to American pluralism, rather than the principled outgrowth of religious ideology. The two main religious impulses are seen as either a pragmatic desire by religious minorities to avoid persecution or a practical recognition by mainstream religious groups that to live in peace in a diverse and pluralistic religious community required some kind of widespread tolerance and eventually disestablishment. Religious

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But once one turns, in an attempt to account for widespread state disestablishment, from the elites to the grass-roots, religious thought becomes much more important.<sup>5</sup> And thus the conundrum emerges. How did it happen that the Puritan Way in the northeast, and the Anglican establishments in the South, were ideologically routed by persecuted bands of Baptists, a small group of Quakers in the middle colonies, and a dead religious radical from Rhode Island?

Perhaps this is overstating the case for effect, but not by much. It is as though the Puritan and Anglican establishments were a powerful steam locomotive that disappeared into a tunnel in the late 1600s. The engine was distantly trailed by a car of dissent, containing agitators like Williams and Hutchinson, a trailing caboose, at times abandoned on isolated side-tracks. But lo, when the train emerges into the uplands of the mid-1700s, the “radicals” have assumed command of the steam engine, and the “theocrats” are nearly out of steam, soon to be shunted off to the scrap-yard.

How did this change happen? One standard explanation is that the religious revival and agitation caused by the Great Awakenings greatly increased the power and influence of the dissenting sects.<sup>6</sup> Understandably, those in the minority favored disestablishment, as they were oppressed by it, and thus religious revivals would tend to help weaken religious establishment. And the growth of religious diversity would weaken the ability of any one group to impose its form of religion or worship.<sup>7</sup>

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belief or theology is usually seen as an afterthought to justify an otherwise socially, culturally, or politically necessary, or at least desirable, state. Probably the best work to acknowledge the ideological contributions of religion is Chris Beneke's recent book, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006). Beneke notes, as do I in this article, the central role that the “right of private judgment” played in turning the culture of eighteenth-century America into one open to pluralism and disestablishment. He even identifies this principle with Protestants, but suggests that they adopted the principle from enlightenment thinkers. This article argues that the “right of private judgment” has distinctly religious roots and that this can be discerned from the writings of the three authors examined in this paper.

<sup>5</sup> As Nathan Hatch put it, “the rise of evangelical Christianity in the early republic is, in some measure, a story of the success of the common people in shaping the culture after their own priorities rather than the priorities outlined by gentlemen such as the framers of the constitution.” Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, (New Haven: Yale UP 1989), 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*, 59-61.

<sup>7</sup> *Idem*, 64-65.

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This explanation, however, tends to degrade the religious impulse to a mere doctrine of self-preservation or convenience. It is viewed as the inevitable pragmatic response made by any minority, religious or otherwise, facing persecution.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the attention returns, for the philosophical or theoretical heavy lifting needed for a long-term disestablishment, to the developing philosophical or political streams that the religious ideas find themselves caught up with. But this cannot be the whole story. Many of the Colonial disestablishments occurred prior to the First Great Awakening, or in the religiously quiet era of the Revolution prior to the Second Awakening.

Indeed, it is clear that in a number of instances a theologically-based legal commitment to toleration and disestablishment preceded and appears to have caused the pluralistic social and religious conditions that are often cited as the pragmatic reasons for disestablishment. The most obvious examples of this are Rhode Island and Pennsylvania, where the founders—Roger Williams and William Penn respectively—created legal frameworks for their colonies based explicitly on their theological commitments to freedom of conscience and religious tolerance.<sup>9</sup> New Jersey and Delaware were also shaped by William Penn and other Quakers, and are places where the principle of tolerance preceded the growth of pluralism.

New York is also a candidate for this category. While historically possessing an established church—first Dutch Reformed, then Anglican—New York, when it was the New Netherlands, had experienced a robust religious tolerance under Dutch rule. This had led to a religious and ethnic diversity that prevented the Anglican establishment from taking meaningful hold.<sup>10</sup> Further, many of the groups who agitated for disestablishment, such as the Baptists, did not change their position on this

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Bailyn, in his classic treatise on the American Revolution, described the opposition to establishments as generally “unsystematic, incomplete, pragmatic,” and “little grounded in doctrine.” *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967), 248-250. Gordon Wood portrays religious groups as basically a force in opposition to disestablishment: *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 330-331. For a more recent forceful exposition that disestablishment and the separation of church and state were initially a purely secular, republican affair, see Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 144 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas J. Curry, *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Richard W. Pointer, *Protestant Pluralism and the New York Experience*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1988), 1-3.

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question long after they had achieved comfortable majority status. Thus, the position appears to have had some principled basis beyond mere self-preservation or a pragmatic response to pluralism.

This paper attempts to understand more fully the religious impulses towards disestablishment in pre-revolutionary America. It does so by analyzing three major statements on religious liberty, made by three prominent religious leaders, from three points in the religious and social triangle of the day: a Quaker—William Penn; a Baptist—Isaac Backus; and a Puritan—Elisha Williams. This paper will compare and contrast their arguments for religious liberty and disestablishment, especially their theological and biblical arguments. It will attempt to discover any shared religious, theological visions of religious freedom that cut across these rather broad Protestant sectarian boundaries.

If it is possible to discern some underlying theological or biblical themes that are common to all three views, this would provide some meaningful evidence that the religious dissent of the day had principled, doctrinal content to go along with its pragmatic concerns. The greater the coincidence of shared theology, the stronger support it provides for the argument that the religious response included principled, doctrinally-driven components, rather than being merely pragmatic arguments in superficial religious dress. Proving such a point would require looking at many more than three individuals. But a broader survey would lose the ability to grapple in-depth with the details of the theological arguments being made. It is the goal of this paper to compare and contrast meaningfully the theology of the three authors, to gauge the kind and depth of theological ideas involved. It would be a future project to survey the extent and pervasiveness of these theological views in colonial America and their direct impact, if any, on legal ideas.

The three figures chosen were well-respected and well-known leaders within their confessional affiliations. Because of this, it can be assumed with some safety that they write from within the tradition of scriptural understanding of their faith communities. Between the three, one will expect differences, of course: both in outlook, arguments, and ending points. But as this article will show, underneath the differences of class, education, and religious outlook, a consistently similar argument emerged. It is one based on principled theological views of the personal nature of human spiritual epistemology, the resulting absence of final earthly spiritual authority, and the consequent prohibition of the use of force in the jurisdiction of religion. These ideas worked in harmony to support the proposal of disestablishment. It is also argued that this group

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of ideas is associated with the reformation doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers” and the corollary idea of the “right of private judgment in matters of biblical interpretation.”

This article looks at each of the historic figures, Penn, Williams, and Backus. It examines briefly the person and place of the writer and the immediate setting of the statement under review. It then gives an overview of each statement, with a focus on the theological arguments raised. Finally, the theological themes common to the three subjects will be compared and contrasted.

**I. William Penn—The Privileged Dissenter**

For many years in Philadelphia, it was unlawful to erect a building any higher than the statue of William Penn that stood atop town hall. This was an ironic role for a figure of a man who in life, as a practicing Quaker, believed that no human being deserved the deference or homage of as much as a removed hat. But Penn was no ordinary Quaker. He was born in 1644 into a family of relative wealth, privilege, and power.<sup>11</sup>

Americans know Penn as the founder of Pennsylvania. But most probably do not know that the colony was not named for William, but for his father, a well-connected Admiral in the British navy. His well-to-do background allowed him a privileged education. He attended Christ Church College, Oxford, in 1660, where he had contact with John Locke, who at the time was a tutor at Christ Church, and Dr. John Owen, a well-known dissenting Puritan theologian.

Penn then went on a gentleman’s finishing trip to Europe. While in France, Penn’s serious religious nature again revealed itself by his decision to attend the Protestant Academy of Saumur. There, he studied under Moise Amyraut, a leading Calvinist theologian who played a key role in promoting religious toleration in France. After Penn returned to England, his father desired him to assist with the family business in Ireland. In preparation for that role, Penn studied law in London for a year, which put the finishing polish on his dissenting advocacy skills.

He went to Ireland to manage his father’s estates, and there he came into contact with the Quakers. Impressed with their piety and apparently primitive Christianity, he soon joined the sect. Penn quickly assumed the

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<sup>11</sup> The details found in this summary of Penn’s early life were taken from Mary K. Geiter, *Profiles in Power: William Penn*, (Singapore: Pearson Education Asia, 2000), 13-21; Mary Maples Dunn, *William Penn: Politics and Conscience*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967), 3-6; Andrew R. Murphy, Ed., *The Political Writings of William Penn*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002).

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role of advocate and champion for the oppressed Quakers. Due to his background and education, he had connections at the royal palace, at the courts, and in the boards of commerce. He used these connections to elevate the plight of the disenfranchised, often persecuted Quakers to new heights of visibility.

In choosing to become a Quaker, Penn appeared to give up a life of privilege and power—Quakers were ineligible to hold government office. The irony is, of course, that had he not become a Quaker, Penn would as likely be as unfamiliar to most of us today as is the naval career of his father.

**A. Context of *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience*.** At times, Penn's advocacy work became alarmingly hands on, at least in his father's opinion. Penn spent time in prison for personally violating restrictions on dissent. It was during one of these times in prison in 1670 that Penn wrote *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience*. The immediate target of this document was the newly passed Conventicle Act, which forbade non-conforming sects from gathering for worship. But Penn used the opportunity to unleash the full range of his historical, theological, and legal training on the question of liberty of conscience and the roles of church and state.

The document was written in an English prison, by an Englishman, to an English King and English public. But it is also an American historical document, for it details the religious/political thought of a man who, in shaping three American colonies and their governments,<sup>12</sup> arguably "left a greater mark on British North America than any other single individual in the colonial era."<sup>13</sup>

**B. Overview of *The Great Case*.**<sup>14</sup> In pressing a case, the legally trained Penn tended to leave no argument unused. He marshals a wide range of arguments, many of which appear to overlap. Penn aids the reader by putting forward the arguments under very specific headings: the nature and rights of God; the nature of Christianity; the teachings of the Bible; arguments from nature and reason; the nature of good government; and the witness of history. For our purposes, however, his theological arguments are of greatest interest.

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<sup>12</sup> Along with Pennsylvania, Penn worked with the Quakers who founded New Jersey, and Delaware continued under his oversight even after it split from Pennsylvania. Esbeck, 1461, 1468-69.

<sup>13</sup> Geiter, back cover.

<sup>14</sup> The text of the "Great Case" used here is taken from Murphy, ed., 79-119.

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1. *Nature and Rights of God.* Penn's first argument is a clever reversal of the usual modern claim for human rights. Rather than starting with his, or the Quaker's, inalienable right to worship, he starts with God's right to man's worship. Rather than defending his turf, he chooses to defend God's turf. This, at least as a rhetorical matter, raises considerably the ante for his opponents. As Penn puts the argument in his title heading, "That Imposition, Restraint, and Persecution for Conscience-Sake, highly Invade the Divine Prerogative, and Divest the Almighty of a Right, due to none beside Himself."<sup>15</sup>

2. *Biblical Teachings.* Penn then moves on to explicit biblical teaching on the question of force in religion. He lists twelve different texts, or groups of texts, as opposing force in religion. The groups can be divided into three main categories: texts detailing limits on human knowledge, texts detailing limits on human spiritual authority, and texts describing appropriate Christian conduct or praxis in relation to power.<sup>16</sup>

Penn begins with rather an obscure verse, Job 32:8, which says "The Inspiration of the Almighty gives Understanding." This is the second time that Penn cites this text in his book, and it gives support to a very basic argument regarding human understanding and epistemology that he relies on throughout his work. In Penn's words, "If no Man can believe before he understands, and no Man can understand before he is inspir'd of God," then it is unreasonable and inhuman to punish someone for not believing something.<sup>17</sup>

He then cites several other verses that emphasize the limits of human knowledge and the need to rely on God for true spiritual knowledge. "Woe unto them that take Counsel, but not of me" (Isa 30:1). "Let the Wheat and the Tares grow together, until the end of the world," because, the implication is, the Christian cannot always tell one from the other (Matt 13:27). It is the "Spirit of Truth" that shall "lead you into all Truth" (John 16:8,13).

This argument regarding the limits of human knowledge, and how humans gain spiritual knowledge, is then followed by a logical corollary: If humans cannot know spiritual truth, except from God through the Holy Spirit, then no human is in a position, or has the authority, to ultimately judge others in spiritual matters. Thus, Jesus said that "the Princes of the Gentiles, exercise Dominion over them . . . but it shall not be so among

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<sup>15</sup> Idem, 84.

<sup>16</sup> Idem, 90-91.

<sup>17</sup> Idem, 90.



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you.” In Matt 20:25 Jesus indicated there were different realms, Caesar’s and God’s, and that God’s did not involve force (Luke 20:25; 9:54-56).

The last group of texts represents the conclusion on how Christians should act, with meekness and use of persuasion, given the first two premises. The three group of texts work very like a syllogism. If only one with full spiritual knowledge has authority to judge, and humans lack full spiritual knowledge for others, then they cannot judge and coerce in spiritual matters. Or to put it positively, each individual must seek spiritual knowledge directly from God. And no individual has ultimate spiritual authority over another. Thus, the Christian practice should be one of persuasion, not of force.

3. *Nature and Reason.* Penn’s next category is explicitly based on philosophical reasoning, rather than on theology or the Bible. In this section he draws a distinction between arguments from nature and arguments from reason. The former consist of arguments from universal human experiences, and the latter consists of truths from the world of logic.

He also argues from the field of the nature, execution, and end of good government. Penn proposes that the nature of good government is justice, and that religious force violates the principles of equality, fairness, and proportionality inherent in a just state. He then turns to the heart of his legal argument concerning laws and government, that the great rights to liberty and property set down in English law, extending back to the Magna Charta, cannot be undone by more recent laws, which merely build on these foundational laws.

**C. Conclusion Regarding Penn.** Three main points can be made about Penn’s use of theological arguments. The first is that his theological argument for religious liberty appealed first to God’s rights, rather than human rights. The second is that his theological arguments were not limited to biblical arguments, but he drew broadly from the world of natural theology and philosophy. The final point is that his use of theology and scripture emphasized the limits on human spiritual knowledge and religious authority as a basis for not using civil force in religious matters.

The second and third points are particularly significant for how they parallel the other two authors we will examine, and these points will be discussed in the conclusion to the paper. But the first point is somewhat unique to Penn and deserves comment here.

Penn’s formulation turns the contemporary vision of religious freedom and civil liberties on its head. Rather than starting with man and moving outward, Penn starts with God and moves downward. It is not

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human rights he is expounding, but God's right to human worship and devotion. The corollary of God's right to human worship is Penn's duty to worship God, with which the state is interfering.

The constitutional founders were aware of this manner of formulating the issue. Madison, in his famed *Memorial and Remonstrance*, gave as his first reason for religious liberty the fact that worship was "a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society," and as such, it must be respected by Civil Society.<sup>18</sup>

**II. Elisha Williams—The Orthodox Lawyer**

The "River Gods" was the name given to a series of imposing aristocratic leaders in the towns along the Connecticut River in western Massachusetts during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Elisha Williams, born in about 1694, was a prominent member of one of the gentry families so designated. He was part of a long line of eminent ministers, military men, and magistrates in the region, and was a cousin of the Puritan divine Jonathan Edwards. His eventual role as dissenter from the decrees of the established order, then, was less a parish squabble, and more akin to the drama of a Wagnerian opera—a battle among the gods of New England, with serious, statewide political careers and influences at stake.

Unlike his brothers and cousins, Elisha<sup>20</sup> did not follow the traditional Williams path to the Presbyterian pulpit. While he studied theology as a youth, he took up teaching and avoided taking on a pulpit. At one point, he studied law in preparation for a legal career, but ended up using his legal training as a state assemblyman and a judge, rather than a practicing lawyer. When he was 25 or 26, Elisha underwent a fuller conversion experience and decided to enter the ministry after all.

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<sup>18</sup> James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, 1785.

<sup>19</sup> The factual background for this summary of Elisha Williams' life was taken from Kevin Michael Sweeney, "River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637-1790" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, New Haven, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Due to the number of other prominent Williamses in his family, the other well known religious liberty advocate Roger Williams, and the fact that Penn's first name was William, I will refer to Elisha Williams as "Elisha" throughout this discussion.

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He pastored for three or four years before accepting the rectorship of Yale college. The previous head of Yale had tried to take the college down an Anglican, Arminian-friendly road, and the trustees were anxious to re-establish a reformed orthodoxy. Elisha more than met these expectations. In an opening sermon he re-affirmed Calvin's fundamentals of utter depravity, election, predestination, and irresistible grace. But he did so in a way that showed he was open to further developments on how these doctrines functioned in light of contemporary thinkers like Locke.

**A. Setting of *A Seasonable Plea*.** It was Elisha's openness to the advancing nature of truth that placed him at the center of the controversy of the First Great Awakening between the religious enthusiasm of the "new lights" and the traditional "old light" establishment. By the time the Awakening was under way in 1740, Elisha had resigned his Yale post to recover his health and to pursue a career in Connecticut politics. Shortly thereafter, despite losing a race for governorship, Elisha was made a judge on the Superior Court, as well as Speaker of the Assembly.

At about that time, the Connecticut Assembly passed a bill that placed stiff restrictions on itinerant preachers and made it difficult for settled preachers to speak outside their own districts. While Elisha was opposed to some of the excesses of the Awakening, he supported what he thought was "agreeable to true Principles of Calvinism." He was not opposed to appropriate enthusiasm in religion, and was counted among the "new lights."

Elisha spoke against the new law, in the assembly and in public. His stand came at a cost. Elisha was aware of the risks, but stated his intent to "act his own Principles, let Man make what Use of it they please, and he would serve Mankind as well as he could, so far as they would let him."<sup>21</sup> In 1743, the assembly removed him from his judgeship, and shortly afterwards, he also lost his appointment as justice of the peace. While his political fortunes later rebounded, such a result was by no means certain.

It was in 1744 that Elisha wrote his *Seasonable Plea for The Liberty of Conscience*, an exposition of the principles of religious liberty in the context of the anti-itinerancy law.

**B. Overview of *A Seasonable Plea*.** In a short introduction, Elisha introduces his recurring theme and central point: That as the "Sacred Scriptures are the *alone Rule of Faith and Practice* to a Christian . . . that

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<sup>21</sup> Idem, 316.

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every Christian has a *Right of judging for himself* what he is to believe and practice.”<sup>22</sup> And that it is thus “perfectly inconsistent with any Power in the civil Magistrate to make any penal Laws in Matters of Religion.”<sup>23</sup> Protestants, he notes, are agreed in the profession of this principle, but too many have departed from it in practice. He then launches into a philosophical and religious discourse to demonstrate the truth of the above propositions.

*1. Origin and Ends of Civil Government.* Where Penn began with spiritual and divine, the nature and rights of God’s kingdom, Elisha begins with the temporal and earthly, the rights and limits of civil kingdoms. He begins with an overview of the origins and ends of civil government. His argument is based, by his own references, on the work of John Locke. He starts with the equality men have in the state of nature, at least by the time they attain the age of reason. Reason is the basis of understanding, free choice, and action, and is thus, in Elisha’s view, the basis of natural freedom. It is this very reason that tells us that all are born with equal rights to liberty and property.

But these rights to liberty and property cannot be well preserved in the state of nature. Governments are instituted to preserve and protect these rights. The state draws its power from the people, and its legitimate end is the preservation of persons, liberties, and estates. Given these ends of government, Elisha moves on to discuss what liberty or power persons give up to the civil government to allow it to accomplish its ends.<sup>24</sup> The two primary objects people give up are the *power* to preserve his person and property, and the *freedom* from societal laws that protect the persons and properties of others.

*2. Rights Retained by the Individual.* Elisha now he comes to his main concern, which is the liberties and rights that people *retain* upon entering civil society. He begins with the general rule that no more natural liberty or power is given up than is necessary for the preservation of persons and property.<sup>25</sup> Thus, persons retain all their natural liberties that have no relation to the ends of society. They can read Locke, or Milton, or the Bible, and the state has no business interfering.

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<sup>22</sup> Elisha Williams, *A Seasonable Plea for the Liberty of Conscience and the Right of Private Judgment in Matters of Religion*, (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1744), 1 (emphasis in original), viewed in *Early American Imprints*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, no. 5520.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>24</sup> *Idem*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Idem*, 6.

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Second, he states that persons retain the right of judging in matters of religion. This is a right based on the nature of humanity, which is that of a rational, reasonable being, capable of knowledge of his Maker, and accountable to that Maker for his actions. As faith and religious practice depend on individual judgment and choice, that faith cannot, logically, depend on the will of another human.<sup>26</sup>

The reasonable nature of humanity is such a key point for Elisha's argument for liberty that it is worth quoting at length from him on it:

*This Right of judging every one for himself in Matters of Religion results from the Nature of Man, and is so inseparably connected therewith, that a Man can no more part with it than he can with his Power of Thinking . . . —A man may alienate some Branches of his Property and give up his Rights in them to others; but he cannot transfer the Rights of Conscience, unless he could destroy his rational and moral Powers, or substitute some other to be judged for him at the Tribunal of God.*<sup>27</sup>

Thus, Elisha takes an opposite, though complementary approach to Penn. Rather than focusing on God's power and privileges and following up with human duties, Elisha rests his argument on the essence of the nature of man, as God created him. But like Penn, while this argument is theological in nature, drawing on the nature of man and his relation to God, Elisha does not base it explicitly on biblical authority. Rather, it is an argument from reason, an argument of natural theology. Elisha acknowledges this difference by explicitly next turning to the Bible as an additional, second argument to support his thesis that religious matters are issues of private concern.

3. *The Bible and the Right of Private Judgment.* To "further clear this Point," the sole propriety of private religious judgment and to show the extent of it, Elisha next appeals to the "Truth, That the *Sacred Scriptures* are the alone Rule of Faith and Practice to every individual Christian."<sup>28</sup> Here, Elisha begins an extended Bible study that supports from the Bible the points made in his previous arguments from reason and nature. He begins to trace arguments strikingly similar to those of William Penn about spiritual epistemology, authority, and the limits of human spiritual power and oversight.

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<sup>26</sup> Idem, 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, 8 (emphasis in original).

<sup>28</sup> Idem.

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But where Penn started, as a Quaker would, with texts regarding Christians being taught directly of God, and receiving truth from the Spirit, Elisha starts with texts asserting the basic Protestant doctrine of biblical supremacy in religious matters. He quotes 2 Tim 3:15-16, that scripture is “given by inspiration from God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness,” and John 20:31, that “these things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ . . . and that believing ye might have Life through his name.”

Having asserted biblical supremacy, he then moves to the right of every person to “read, inquire and impartially judge” the meaning of scripture for himself.<sup>29</sup> No person or group, whether pope, priest, bishop, pastor, counsel or civil body can be the final authority on biblical matters for the individual. If any earthly authority was the final arbiter of biblical matters, that authority would replace the scriptures as the final authority.<sup>30</sup>

This means that believers have the duty to check pastors and teachers by the Word. He cites Acts 17:11, where Paul commends the Bereans for checking his own teachings against the Hebrew scriptures, and quotes 1 Cor 10:15, where Paul says, “I speak as to wise Men, judge ye what I say.”<sup>31</sup> This is the very nature of the biblical rule of faith and practice, as acceptance of human authority would become a rule of human faith and practice. The Bible is the tool by which Christ rules the church, and any other rule is to deny Christ the right to be “King in his own Kingdom.”<sup>32</sup>

Here Elisha has begun to echo some of Penn’s initial arguments about the “rights of God,” and it brings him to a similar concluding point regarding civil power: it has no jurisdiction in religious matters—both because of the affirmative lack *and* because of the existing jurisdiction claimed by God and Christ.<sup>33</sup> As an Englishman is subject to the laws of England, and not of France or Spain, so the Christian is subject to the laws of God and Christ in religious matters, and not to human laws. “No man can serve two masters.”<sup>34</sup>

*4. Limits of Earthly Civil Power.* Elisha then sets out the “corollaries” of the principles he has deduced from reason and Scripture. The first

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<sup>29</sup> Idem, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Idem.

<sup>34</sup> Idem, 13.

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is that the civil authority has no power to “make or ordain Articles of Faith, Creeds, Forms of Worship or Church Government.”<sup>35</sup> These matters have no relationship to the legitimate ends of civil society, and invade the rights of Christ.<sup>36</sup> And if the state has no business running the church itself, it certainly has no right to “establish any Religion,” e.g., religious beliefs, or rules, or kinds of worship, on penalty of civil law.

To accept that human authorities might so legislate is to confer on them the attribute of infallibility. Rather than a single pope, those that accept civil rule of religious standards have created literally hundreds of popes, for each state and each government is now a final religious authority within their jurisdiction.<sup>37</sup> But if they err, then what they enforce is no longer the Bible, but human authority.<sup>38</sup> This plainly violates the biblical rule of faith and practice.

In setting out this argument, Elisha expresses a rather sophisticated view of Bible reading and interpretation that we usually associate with modern thought. Elisha notes that as the Bible is not written as a coherent, self-executing legal code, for the legislature to “enforce” the Bible, it will first have to interpret the Bible.<sup>39</sup> Thus, what the legislature will implement will not be the Bible itself, but the legislature’s view or understanding of what the Bible teaches.<sup>40</sup>

This difference between “the Bible” and “the Bible as understood,” was an important basis of Elisha’s view of liberty. Thus, his commitment to religious liberty rests in part, as Penn’s did, on human epistemological limitations in spiritual matters.

5. *Meaning of “Establishment of Religion.”* In his discussion of civil rule, Elisha provides insights into what “religious establishment” meant in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today, some insist it referred only to the creation of a national or state church. But Elisha uses the term more broadly than this. An establishment of religion for him would be the state attempting to enforce any standard, practice, or rule based on the Scriptures, rather than on the legitimate ends of government.<sup>41</sup>

But at the same time, he was far from being a 20<sup>th</sup> century constitutionalist. He allowed that, while the state could not legislate on issues of

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<sup>35</sup> Idem, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Idem, 17-18.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Idem, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Idem, 21.

<sup>40</sup> Idem.

<sup>41</sup> Idem, 19-20.

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religion, it could recommend or encourage—“Approbation” or “Recommendation” were the terms Elisha used—certain religious beliefs and practices.<sup>42</sup> He also saw no conflict between his argument against establishment and the civil enforcement of agreements between pastors and their religious societies for financial support.<sup>43</sup>

This amounted to the enforcement of a tax against members of a church to support a pastor, whether or not an individual member voted for or agreed with the theology of that pastor. While this differed from a general assessment in support of religion, it contained enough of an entanglement of church and state to fail modern constitutional muster.

As a closing matter, Elisha appeals, as Penn did, to the rights of Englishmen, both under the Magna Charta and the Act of Toleration.<sup>44</sup> The Connecticut charter, Elisha reminds his readers, was subject to the Act of Toleration, and the anti-itinerancy law could thus jeopardize their colonial status. But this, he noted was a relatively small matter, given the fact that the right of private judgment and religious liberty was not conferred by the Magna Charta or Act of Toleration, but was from God. And all those that infringed it would find, in the judgment, that “Christ will be King in his own Kingdom.”<sup>45</sup>

### **III. Isaac Backus—Self-Made Dissenter**

Unlike either Penn or Williams, Backus did not have the benefit of college training. Rather, he was a self-taught, yet highly effective, advocate for religious liberty.<sup>46</sup> He was born into a well-to-do Connecticut family in 1724, with a father who served in the state Assembly. But when Isaac was sixteen his father died. His mother now had to raise eleven children on her own. Isaac was needed all the more in the fields of the family farm, and college was out of the question.

Although the family had been dutiful members of the standing order, Backus’ religious commitment had been, by his later accounting, shallow and careless. But the time of crisis in the Backus family coincided with

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<sup>42</sup> *Idem*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> *Idem*, 54.

<sup>44</sup> *Idem*, 58, 64-65.

<sup>45</sup> *Idem*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Details of the life of Isaac Backus found in this section were taken from the introduction of William G. McLoughlin, ed., *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968) [“McLoughlin I,”] and from William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967) [“McLoughlin II”].



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the outbreak of the Great Awakening and the preaching of George Whitefield in 1740. Isaac's grieving mother was re-awakened with a new and deeper conversion experience, and shortly thereafter, so was Isaac.

Soon Backus was involved in his first experiences of religious controversy. He and his fellow "new light" enthusiasts began to object to the half-way covenant arrangement, whereby those with no profession of conversion were made church members, in the Congregational Church. Defeated in their attempts to reform it, Backus and other "new lights" withdrew to begin their own congregation on "purer" principles, allowing in as members only those who described a conversion experience.

But Backus and his friends found that by separating, they had now entered uncharted and perilous legal waters. The New England establishment had, grudgingly, granted a certain level of toleration to recognized religious groups, such as Anglicans, Quakers, and Baptists. But these exceptions were carefully defined and carved out. They did not apply to those merely seeking a "purer form" of the established church. Backus and his friends had effectively declared revolution against the existing order, and many of them were fined and imprisoned.

Thus began Backus' first of many experiences in opposing the state enforcement of political orthodoxy. It was a journey that would take him from the established church, to the separatists, and eventually into the Baptist church. It was during his time as a Baptist minister that he wrote and spoke most widely and publicly on issues of religious freedom. This autodidact eventually wrote the definitive history of Baptists in New England and served as a delegate to the Massachusetts convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

**A. Setting of *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty*.** By the late 1760s, the scattered Baptist churches had organized into an association to bring pressure to bear to make more effective the laws granting tax exemptions to their denomination. The association appointed Backus as "Agent for the Baptists in New England," and tasked him with seeking remedies for tax grievances, either in the courts or the legislature. Backus had some success in this role. At one point in 1771 he appealed to the King of England and had the satisfaction of seeing him veto a law of the Massachusetts general assembly.

Yet, the tax exemption system was still cumbersome. It was a system of mere toleration and led to prejudice against the Baptists, who were considered by many to be tax evaders. The application of the exemptions was in the hands of local towns and parishes, which at times misused and misapplied them. In 1773, the association considered whether it should

adopt a church-wide policy of civil disobedience and refuse to seek the exemption or pay the taxes. In the end, they authorized each church to decide whether to take this drastic step. At the same time, they voted to widely publish and distribute copies of Isaac Backus' *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty*, an attack on the "tyranny" of the tax-exemption system.

**B. Overview of *An Appeal to the Public*.** Penn and Williams started at opposite ends of the natural theology spectrum. Penn began with the nature and rights of God and the heavenly government, Williams with the nature and obligations of man and civil government. But Backus starts at a third point off of that continuum, that of biblical revelation and its teaching regarding the fallen nature of man and the proper roles of civil and ecclesiastical rulers.<sup>47</sup> But these are arguably three points of a connected triangle and, in the end, the arguments share more ground than they exclude.

Backus explicitly rejects the Lockean state of nature reasoning, relied on explicitly by Williams, and also implicitly used by Penn. He asserts that because of man's fall, and his subsequent sinful nature, that he naturally possesses no real freedom or liberty, but is in bondage. Man does not give up rights and freedom by entering society. Rather, man must "submit to some government in order to enjoy any liberty and security at all."<sup>48</sup>

In the Bible, Backus argues, God has appointed two kinds of governments, civil and ecclesiastical, to create order and opportunity for liberty. But these two kinds of governments are very different, and his argument for religious freedom is largely based on those differences.

*1. Differences between Civil and Church Governments.* Backus begins by noting the differences in the Bible between civil and ecclesiastical governments and the history of these governments. What is interesting about this section is that despite rejecting Locke's ideas about the state of nature at the opening of his essay, his argument here seems to borrow from Lockean ideas about states deriving their authority from the people. While the notion or propriety of social contract between ruler and ruled is not denied by the Bible, it is hard to argue that it is affirmatively set out there. So despite his stated attempts to construct a biblical theology of church and state, Backus detours, and not for the last time, into arguments of natural theology that parallel those of Penn and Williams.

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<sup>47</sup> McLoughlin I, 310-311.

<sup>48</sup> *Idem*, 312.

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2. *Blending of the Civil and Spiritual.* Backus then goes over the history of force entering the church, first under Constantine, and then in the medieval church through the time of the Reformation. He then turns to more current examples of church/state combinations. He details how church and state have been inappropriately combined in Massachusetts and how this institution differs, both in nature and effects, from that set out in the Bible.

He argues that taxation in support of ministers violates the teaching of Scripture, which is that “they which preach the Gospel shall live of the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:13-14).<sup>49</sup> He cites two well known New England divines to the effect that the tax support of the ministers makes them the “king’s ministers” who minister in the “king’s name.”<sup>50</sup> This is a *prima facie* violation, in Backus’ view, of Christ’s command that his kingdom “is not of this world.”

His latter argument here is an application of belief that church and state have separate, “dual jurisdictions.” The rationale behind the “dual jurisdiction” doctrine, he writes, rests largely on two separate points—the *nature* and the *effect* of proper government institutions.<sup>51</sup> The nature of church government in Massachusetts was to make pastors ministers of the king, but in reality, they should be ministers of God. The effect of this state government was that it made the majority the test of orthodoxy. This power had been used in the state to imprison, whip, and banish men only for denying infant baptism.

In his dual jurisdictions view and his belief in the inability of the legislature or the majority to arrive at reliable spiritual truth, Backus is making an epistemological argument similar to that of Penn and Williams. Later on he writes explicitly about the “right of private religious judgment.” But this right flows by necessity from his rejection of the legislature’s ability to determine spiritual truth.

3. *Spiritual Standards of Epistemology, Authority, and Use of Force.* While he gets there less directly than Penn and Williams, Backus ends up at basically the same place in regards to spiritual epistemology, religious authority, and use of force. But first, he disclaims, in another rejection of Locke, that the Baptists were making arguments from natural rights. Backus insists that his claims rest on the “Charter privilege,” the legal rights of Englishmen to be free of religious discrimination. Even this

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<sup>49</sup> *Idem*, 318.

<sup>50</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Idem*, 320-321.

close to the revolution, the Baptists had not yet fully decided which camp, loyalist or revolutionary, would best defend their interests.

The language of rights was being used at the time to propose revolution against England. Yet at this point the Baptist's best defense against religious laws was often their charter privileges under British law. This was shown by Backus' earlier invalidation of a state law by an appeal to the king. So at this point, Backus was hedging his bets, practically if not ideologically. He rested on practical legal protections rather than more grandiose, but less enforceable philosophical ones that might actually undercut the existing legal protections.

In conclusion, Backus makes explicit what has lain beneath the surface of his arguments. And these are the essential points of both Penn and Williams. Backus, echoing Williams, states that the disability of civil government in spiritual matters rests on the truth that "each one has an equal right to judge for himself, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10).<sup>52</sup> Every man has not only the right, but the responsibility, to "judge for himself" and to act "according to the *persuasion of his own mind*."<sup>53</sup>

He argues that to place an earthly power between God and man is to usurp the role and place of God. It makes men judges of spiritual matters, a role they have no right to play.<sup>54</sup> He notes that the exemption system itself is based on a notion of inequality. Why do the Baptists need to seek exemptions from the established church, and not vice versa? Backus would not appear to accept Williams' notion that the state can "encourage" or "promote" a particular religious view.

And he returns to his theme of "no jurisdiction" of civil authority in religious matters: that no force can be used in those matters. So, while arriving there by a somewhat different route, Backus ultimately rests on the three points common to Penn and Williams: the sacred syllogism of personal spiritual knowledge, no earthly spiritual authority, and the non-jurisdiction of civil power in spiritual matters.

#### **IV. Conclusion: A Quaker, a Puritan, and a Baptist Meet**

It is doubtful whether any of the three men discussed in this essay ever met in person. Penn died before Backus was born and was geographically distant from a youthful Williams. There is a chance that

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<sup>52</sup> *Idem*, 332.

<sup>53</sup> *Idem*, 335.

<sup>54</sup> *Idem*, 333.

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Backus and Williams could have met; but social, class, and religious differences probably conspired to prevent it. While they were on similar sides of some of the Great Awakening debates, they were participants in very different venues and social levels.

All three were separated by tremendous philosophical and religious differences. Williams embraced Locke, Backus rejected Locke, and Penn wrote prior to him, although he drew on similar sorts of reasoning. Backus accepted Scripture only as guide, Williams accepted scripture and reason, and Penn would have placed “enlightened, inner, spiritual reason” even ahead of Scripture. Yet, all these differences did not prevent them from coming to remarkably similar conclusions regarding religious liberty, using remarkably similar theological arguments.

It is where their minds meet that is most interesting and important for our purpose of finding a common theological impulse to separation. Apart from the individual contributions made by each and discussed above, two themes common to all deserve particular attention. The first is the use of both revealed and natural theology, or metaphysical philosophy. The second is the syllogism of spiritual epistemology, religious authority, and the “no jurisdiction of force” conclusion.

**A. Natural Theology and Limiting Government.** Penn and Williams made explicit distinctions, both in the form and substance of their arguments, between arguments based on reason about God and ultimate realities and arguments based on biblical authority. Backus appeared to reject the use of philosophy in his arguments, but as noted in the discussion of his arguments, in a number of places he relied on it in practice.

This distinction between natural theology and revealed theology, rather obscured presently, helps answer one of today’s constitutional conundrums: if the Constitution forbids the implementation of religious ideas by the state, and if the idea of religious liberty rests on a religious or theological base, then how can the Constitution protect religious liberty without running afoul of its own restrictions?

Penn and Williams would respond by saying, as did Thomas Jefferson in his Declaration of Independence, that there are certain universal truths about God and his requirements on humanity, relating to basic justice and fairness, which are capable of being understood by all persons everywhere. These truths or ideas may also be contained in Scripture, but they are not unique to Scripture and as such are a legitimate basis of public acts and policy.

If Backus had been completely consistent with his stated policy of only using arguments based entirely in Scripture, he would have run into

this logical conundrum: how could he criticize the establishment for legislating based on religious beliefs, when his argument that they should not was also a purely religious belief? But both Williams and Penn did themselves, or rather their posterity, a service by grounding their arguments, at least in part, in a philosophy that was not exclusively or entirely reliant on scripture.<sup>55</sup>

**B. The “Sacred Syllogism” and the Priesthood of Believers.** The most frequent and recurring basis of the trios’ call for religious liberty and disestablishment was the syllogism of the limits of human spiritual epistemology, the lack of human spiritual authority, and the resulting “no jurisdiction of force” in spiritual matters. In summarizing Backus’ and the Baptists’ commitment to the separation of Church and State, historian William McLoughlin attaches a helpful doctrinal label that captures this recurring constellation of ideas. He writes that the separatist impulse, apart from its very real pragmatic motives, “sprang from the resurgence of the pietistic doctrines of the *priesthood of all believers* and of the gathered, voluntaristic church.”<sup>56</sup> McLoughlin believes that this impulse was somehow unique to the anti-elite, anti-hierarchical Baptist polity. But these same ideas also emerge in the arguments of Williams and Penn.

It would be another project to show the roots of these shared ideas in the priesthood of believers doctrine, coming primarily from Luther, and being most fully embraced by Anabaptists, and then English Baptists.

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<sup>55</sup> Today, we have largely lost the language of natural theology. It is assumed that any “God” talk is religious and inappropriate for use in public policy or discourse. But by this standard, the Declaration of Independence itself, with its references to the “Creator,” is a religious document and violates the Constitution. Indeed, the First Amendment, with its elevation of the realm of the religious to special status, based on the philosophy of the Declaration, would also infringe this purported principle.

Perhaps we need to re-discover the view of the founders that religion, as Madison put it, is “the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it.”<sup>55</sup> Religion in this sense is not merely any reference or acknowledgement that a God or a sacred realm, beyond the legitimate reach of government, exists. Indeed, the founders viewed as crucial to our theory of civil liberties these metaphysical facts and the limits on the state that flow from them.

Perhaps the Pledge of Allegiance case is easier than we think. To admit that we are one nation “under God” tells no citizen how they must behave religiously. But it does tell the state that there is another jurisdiction, another realm of human belief and conduct, over which it does not have authority. In this sense, the pledge may be more for school teachers and public officials than it is for the students. As Penn, Williams, and Backus would all agree, the state needs constant reminding of its limits.

<sup>56</sup> McLoughlin II, 232 (emphasis added).

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But we do know that Penn, Williams, and Backus were Protestants of one stripe or another, and all three had a certain common, core heritage. Part of the essence of that heritage included the priesthood of believers and all that that implied about direct access to God and spiritual truth, no earthly spiritual intermediates or authorities, and the right of private spiritual judgment. As historical theologian Alister McGrath recently put it, in his view the single most influential—and dangerous—idea to come out of the Protestant Reformation was the belief that the Bible, in its main themes, could and should be understood and interpreted by all believers. As he puts it:

The idea that lay at the heart of the sixteenth-century Reformation, which brought Anglicanism and the other Protestant churches into being, was that the Bible is capable of being understood by all Christian believers—and that they all have the right to interpret it and to insist upon their perspectives being taken seriously.<sup>57</sup>

McGrath also identifies this idea as an expression or outgrowth of Luther's "doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers." This doctrine gave "every Christian the right to interpret the Bible and to raise concerns about any aspect of the church's teaching or practice that appear to be inconsistent with the Bible."<sup>58</sup> McGrath sees this related group of ideas surrounding the priesthood of believers— notions of the perspicuity of the central teachings of Scripture, the supreme authority of Scripture, and the right to personal interpretation of Scripture—as being the defining thread that runs through the story of Protestantism's engagement and encounter with western culture and society.

McGrath does not deal with the legal question of disestablishment or the religious arguments underlying it. But the ubiquity of this doctrine in the writings of these three, disparate religious personalities does tend to support McGrath's argument that the right to scriptural interpretation did have a wide and varied impact on western society. It also supports the argument of this paper that the religious impulse to disestablishment had an integrated doctrinal core. It was a core that both motivated the religious community and also inspired other, more publicly accessible and

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<sup>57</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History From the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 52-53, 199-200.

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civily legitimate arguments from natural theology and philosophy for disestablishment.

Page Smith, the American historian, once said that “the Protestant Reformation produced a new kind of consciousness and a new kind of man. . . . Luther and Calvin, by postulating a single ‘individual’ soul responsible for itself, plucked a new human type out of [the] traditional ‘order’ and put him down naked, a re-formed individual in a re-formed world. The doctrine of a “priesthood of believers,” with each person responsible directly to God for his or her own spiritual state . . . brought remarkable new opportunities . . . and indeed, entire new communities.”<sup>59</sup>

What we have found here supports that claim. In looking for the ideological roots of separation, it would be short-sighted to rely entirely on Republican and Enlightenment thought and to overlook the theological contribution of the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of believers. Seventh-day Adventists have a particular interest in this doctrinal foundation, as it also provides the basis for the Adventist view of the sanctuary doctrine. It was the re-discovery of Christ’s high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, and our direct access to Him as believers, that brought to view the priesthood of believers here on earth.

From this view, the sanctuary doctrine, rather than being a purely unique Adventist insight, is actually, at least at its roots, shared commonly throughout Protestant Christianity. Perhaps Adventists would be in a position to better share their unique insights on the sanctuary doctrine with others if we were more conscious of the pervasive influence and significant impact that the roots of this doctrine have had among our Protestant friends and their forebears. For it is only a persistent and broadly-rooted doctrine that could unify the church/state thought—and cause a meeting of the minds—of a Quaker, a Puritan, and a Baptist.

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<sup>59</sup> Page Smith, ed., *Religious Origins of the American Revolution*, (Missoula: Scholars, 1976), 2-3.



## **Divine Accommodation and Cultural Conditioning of the Inspired Writings**

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### **Introduction**

Prophetic inspiration is a mysterious and complex subject that has generated many discussions in Seventh-day Adventist circles over the years. Those discussions are largely due to the divine nature of inspiration and the human inability to fully grasp the supernatural inspiration process. William G. Johnsson suggests that “defining inspiration is like catching a rainbow. When we have put forth our best efforts, there will remain an elusive factor, an element of mystery.”<sup>1</sup> But this should not prevent us from recognizing that God’s Word provides helpful knowledge of His mysterious communication process. While humbly admitting the limitations of our own reasoning, we should thoroughly study what the inspired writings actually say about themselves.

In previous studies I have dealt with the historical development<sup>2</sup> and the nature<sup>3</sup> of inspiration from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective. This article provides some insight on the concept of divine accommodation and the cultural conditioning of the inspired writings with special emphasis on the interaction of those concepts. A better understanding of these

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<sup>1</sup>William G. Johnsson, “How Does God Speak?” *Ministry*, Oct. 1981: 4.

<sup>2</sup>See Alberto R. Timm, “History of Inspiration in the Adventist Church (1844-1915),” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/1 (Spring 1994): 180-95; idem, “A History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on Biblical and Prophetic Inspiration (1844-2000),” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10/1-2 (1999): 486-542; idem, “Adventist Views on Inspiration,” 3-part series in *Perspective Digest* 13/3 (2008): 24-39; 13/4 (2008): 29-49; 14/1 (2009): 44-56.

<sup>3</sup>See Alberto R. Timm, “Understanding Inspiration: The Symphonic and Wholistic Nature of Scripture,” *Ministry*, Aug. 1999: 12-15.

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controversial subjects can help us avoid the extremes of *decontextualization*, which takes the inspired writings out of the cultural context in which they came into existence, and *acculturalization*, which empties those writings from their divine nature that transcends culture.

**Divine Accommodation**

The mainstream Jewish-Christian tradition holds that “in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb 1:1, NIV). As God’s spokesmen, the prophets delivered His message to the people either orally or in a written form or even in a dramatized way. But the passing away of the Bible prophets in ancient times, and of Ellen G. White more recently, has limited the prophetic legacy quite exclusively to its written form. In order to understand how the divine message became incarnated in the inspired writings, one has to consider the work of the Holy Spirit in speaking through genuine prophets and addressing issues of that time.

**Speaking Through Available Resources.** Foundational in God’s relationship with humankind have been both the prophets, as communication agents, and the languages used, as communication devices. The prophets were called and enabled by God to speak to the people in their own language. But the divine empowerment did not make void the individuality of each prophet. In 1867 Calvin E. Stowe explained,

The Bible is not given to us in any celestial or superhuman language. If it had been it would have been of no use to us, for every book intended for men must be given to them in the language of men. But every human language is of necessity, and from the very nature of the case, an imperfect language. No human language has exactly one word and only one for each distinct idea. In every known language the same word is used to indicate different things, and different words are used to indicate the same thing. In every human language each word has more than one meaning, and each thing has generally more than one name. . . .

The Bible is not a specimen of God’s skill as a writer, showing us God’s mode of thought, giving us God’s logic, and God’s rhetoric, and God’s style of historical narration. . . . It is always to be remembered that the writers of the Bible were ‘God’s penmen, and not God’s pens.’

It is not the words of the Bible that were inspired, it is not the thoughts of the Bible that were inspired; it is the men who wrote the Bible that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words, not on the man’s thoughts, but on the man him-

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self; so that he, by his own spontaneity, under the impulse of the Holy Ghost, conceives certain thoughts and gives utterance to them in certain words, both the words and the thoughts receiving the peculiar impress of the mind which conceived and uttered them, and being in fact just as really his own, as they could have been if there had been no inspiration at all in the case. . . . Inspiration generally is a purifying, and an elevation, and an intensification of the human intellect subjectively, rather than an objective suggestion and communication; though suggestion and communication are not excluded.

The Divine mind is, as it were, so diffused through the human, and the human mind is so interpenetrated with the Divine, that for the time being the utterances of the man are the word of God.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth noting that in 1886, Ellen G. White reproduced much of this statement when she penned,

The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. . . .

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penman, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

It is not the words of the Bible that were inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself; who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>C[alvin] E. Stowe, *Origin and History of the Books of the Bible, both the Canonical and the Apocryphal* (Hartford: Hartford, 1867), 19. This quotation was reprinted in idem, "Inspiration of the Bible," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 4, 1889: 354-355.

<sup>5</sup>Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1858), 1:20-21.

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While Ellen White's statement is much indebted to Stowe's, she differs significantly from him in a few points.<sup>6</sup> For instance, while Stowe stated that neither the "words" nor the "thoughts" of the Bible were inspired, White speaks only about the "words" as not being inspired. She also left out Stowe's idea that inspiration is primarily "an intensification of the human intellect subjectively, rather than an objective suggestion and communication." Yet, even so, we are still left with some puzzling questions: If only the prophets themselves were inspired, and not their words, what has remained since those prophets passed away? Should we assume that we are left today with only a *non-inspired* Bible written anciently by *inspired* writers? And more: If this were the case, how could we harmonize such a view with Paul's statement that "all scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16, RSV)? How could we explain Ellen White's own declarations that "the scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work themselves,"<sup>7</sup> and that she herself was "just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision"?<sup>8</sup>

Analyzing Ellen G. White's writings on prophetic inspiration,<sup>9</sup> one can easily see that she expected something more from the Scriptures and from her own writings than just the notion of a non-inspired text that only contains an inspired message.<sup>10</sup> Such a notion can be held only by those who accept the correlated theory that the Bible *contains* the Word of God without *being* the Word of God. Nonetheless, the statement that "it is not the words of the Bible that were inspired" can be better harmonized with her overall understanding of inspiration by assuming that she

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<sup>6</sup>William S. Peterson says, in his article "Ellen White's Literary Indebtedness" (*Spectrum* 3 [Autumn 1971]: 79-81), that Ellen White just appropriated Stowe's "ideas, not historical information." David Neff states, in his paper "Ellen White's Theological and Literary Indebtedness to Calvin Stowe," rev. 1979 (Ellen G. White Estate, DF 389-C), that "William S. Peterson's allegation that in MS 24, 1886 Mrs. White was appropriating another man's ideas has proven untenable."

<sup>7</sup>[Ellen] G. White, *Testimony for the Church*, no. 26 (Oakland: Pacific Press, 1876), 5. Cf. *idem*, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views* (Rochester: James White, 1854), 8.

<sup>8</sup>Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts [vol. 2]: My Christian Experience, Views and Labors* (Battle Creek: James White, 1860), 293.

<sup>9</sup>Some of Ellen G. White's most important statements on prophetic inspiration are found in her books *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1911), v-xii, and *Selected Messages*, 1:15-39.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Juan Carlos Viera, *The Voice of the Spirit: How God Has Led His People through the Gift of Prophecy* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1998), 81-82.

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meant simply that God did not choose the actual wording of the Bible. This view seems to be endorsed by the following statements from her:

I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision. It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord brings them before me at the time that he is pleased to have me relate or write them.<sup>11</sup>

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.<sup>12</sup>

From these statements, we might conclude, in general terms, that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the prophets themselves selected the wording of the inspired writings. There were instances, however, in which the actual wording was provided to them. For this reason I suggested in my article “Understanding Inspiration” (1999) that we have to recognize the “symphonic” (or, perhaps, “polyphonic”) nature of inspiration, instead of just holding to a specific “monophonic” theory of inspiration.<sup>13</sup> But even in those cases in which God provided the wording to His prophets, He did it within their respective linguistic frameworks, without voiding their personal individualities. In other words, although the communication skills of the prophets usually improved over the years, the divine messages were still expressed within the limitations of the human languages used, like a precious “treasure in jars of clay” (2 Cor 4:7, NIV). So, each prophet transmitted the divine message “in a different way, yet without contradiction.”<sup>14</sup>

**Addressing Contemporary Issues.** The divine accommodation included not only the use of human language, with all its limitations, but also a strong thematic contextualization into the culture of the community of people to be reached by the divine message. This form of contextualization finds its climactic expression in and is modeled by the incarnation of the Son of God, who became the Son of man to save sinners

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<sup>11</sup>E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:293; reprinted in idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:36-37.

<sup>12</sup>Ellen G. White, “Questions and Answers,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1867: 260; reprinted in idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:37.

<sup>13</sup>See Timm, “Understanding Inspiration,” *Ministry*, Aug. 1999: 12-15.

<sup>14</sup>E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:22.

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from the bondage of Satan (John 1:14; Phil 2:5-11). Ellen White explains,

In Christ's parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly; God was made manifest in the likeness of men. So it was in Christ's teaching: the unknown was illustrated by the known; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar.<sup>15</sup>

This pattern of incarnation extended far beyond the reality of Christ becoming human flesh. It also shaped Christ's teachings and even the prophetic revelation in general. According to Ellen White,

The Great Teacher brought His hearers in contact with nature, that they might listen to the voice which speaks in all created things; and as their hearts became tender and their minds receptive, He helped them to interpret the spiritual teaching of the scenes upon which their eyes rested. The parables, by means of which He loved to teach lessons of truth, show how open His spirit was to the influences of nature and how He delighted to gather the spiritual teaching from the surroundings of daily life.

The birds of the air, the lilies of the field, the sower and the seed, the shepherd and the sheep—with these Christ illustrated immortal truth. He drew illustrations also from the events of life, facts of experience familiar to the hearers—the leaven, the hid treasure, the pearl, the fishing net, the lost coin, the prodigal son, the houses on the rock and the sand. In His lessons there was something to interest every mind, to appeal to every heart. Thus the daily task, instead of being a mere round of toil, bereft of higher thoughts, was brightened and uplifted by constant reminders of the spiritual and the unseen.<sup>16</sup>

But the whole process of divine accommodation cannot be restricted to the use of the human language and the illustrations taken from the

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<sup>15</sup>Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1941), 17.

<sup>16</sup>Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1952), 102.

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natural world and the daily life. Much of the prophetic writings addressed contemporary issues like the problems of idolatry, immorality, and other pagan customs. So, instead of arising within a cultural vacuum, the divine messages spoke directly to the contemporary culture. Yet, one of the most important (and most controversial) questions is the following: To what extent are the divine messages conditioned by the cultural milieu in which the prophets wrote them?

**Cultural Conditioning**

There are at least two distinct perspectives from which one can define the cultural conditioning of the inspired writings.<sup>17</sup> One is the *horizontal* perspective, which ends up reading the inspired writings as a mere product of the religious community in which they came into existence. Overlooking to a large extent the divine authorship of the inspired writings, those who accept this view usually study the inspired writings by means of the historical-critical method. Another perspective is the *vertical* one, which recognizes the presence of cultural elements within the inspired writings, without denying the writings' general status as the Word of God. This approach can only survive with the use of the historical-grammatical method. These two perspectives deserve further consideration.

**Horizontal Perspective.** Attempts to define the cultural conditioning of the inspired writings from a horizontal perspective tend to place them on a humanistic/cultural basis. Raymond F. Cottrell reflects this view in his articles "Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World" and "Extent of the Genesis Flood," published in the year 2000.<sup>18</sup> Cottrell, a former associate editor of the *Review and Herald* and the founding editor of *Adventist Today*, tried to solve some of the basic tensions between faith and reason, and between the Bible and natural sciences and secular history, by suggesting a clear distinction between the "inspired message" of the Bible and the "uninspired form in which it comes to us." Yet Cottrell viewed "the inspired message

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<sup>17</sup>Additional insights on this topic can be found in Appendix F—"Time-conditioned or Time-related" of Herbert E. Douglass' *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1998), 550-52.

<sup>18</sup>The discussion on Raymond F. Cottrell's theory is taken from Alberto R. Timm, "A History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on Biblical and Prophetic Inspiration (1844-2000)," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10/1-2 (1999): 539-40. Since the 1999 issue of this journal was published in late 2000, I have updated the content of my article to include information from that year.

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on record in the Bible” as “culturally conditioned” and “historically conditioned.” For him, “historical conditioning permeates the entire Bible. It is not incidental, nor is it exceptional or unusual; it is the invariable rule.”<sup>19</sup>

Under the assumption that “in matters of science, the Bible writers were on a level with their contemporaries,” Cottrell could suggest that on these matters our understanding should be informed by the more reliable data provided by modern science. His attempt to harmonize the Bible account of Creation with modern science led him to the conclusion that “at an unspecified time in the remote past, the Creator transmuted a finite portion of his infinite power into the primordial substance of the universe – perhaps in an event such as the Big Bang.”<sup>20</sup> The notion that “the words and forms of expression in the Bible were historically conditioned to their time and perspective” led the same author, elsewhere, to the conclusion that the Genesis Flood did not extend beyond the known “lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea.” He further stated that “only by reading our modern worldview of ‘all the earth’ [Gen 7:3] back into the Hebrew text can the idea of a world-wide flood be established.”<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly, such views empty Scripture of much of its supernatural content.

Another example of a horizontal perspective of cultural conditioning is proposed by Alden Thompson, professor of Religion at Walla Walla College. More moderate than Cottrell, Thompson still makes the inspired writings dependent too much on the religious experience of both the prophets themselves and the community in which they lived. In his 5-part series “From Sinai to Golgotha,” published in December 1981 in the *Adventist Review*,<sup>22</sup> Thompson argues that “the growth from Sinai to Golgotha, from command to invitation, from fear to love, is a Biblical pattern” that “is also reflected in the experience and theology of Ellen White.”<sup>23</sup> He argues that it took the Israelites “1,400 years to make the

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<sup>19</sup>Raymond F. Cottrell, “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World,” in James L. Hayward, ed., *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives* (Roseville: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 195-221.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 199, 219.

<sup>21</sup>Raymond F. Cottrell, “Extent of the Genesis Flood,” in Hayward, ed., *Creation Reconsidered*, 275.

<sup>22</sup>Alden Thompson, “From Sinai to Golgotha,” 5-part series in *Adventist Review*, Dec. 3, 1981: 4-6; Dec. 10, 1981: 8-10; Dec. 17, 1981: 7-10; Dec. 24, 1981: 7-9; Dec. 31, 1981: 12-13.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, Dec. 10, 1981: 10.



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journey from one mountain [Sinai] to the other [Golgotha],” and Ellen White “almost 60 years” until the 1888 Minneapolis Conference, where “the bright rays of light from Calvary finally dispelled the last shadows of Sinai.”<sup>24</sup> So, in Thompson’s opinion, “on the one hand stands the ‘encouraging’ God of *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages* [both published after 1888]; on the other, the ‘discouraging’ God of the *Testimonies* [several of which were published prior to 1888].”<sup>25</sup> This notion of a “maturing” prophet was further developed by Thompson in his book *Escape from the Flames: How Ellen White Grew from Fear to Joy—and Helped Me Do It Too* (2005).<sup>26</sup>

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a significant development indeed in the formation and consolidation of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal system. While the post-1844 period was marked by the definition and integration of Adventist distinctive doctrines (sanctuary, three angels’ messages, seventh-day Sabbath, conditional immortality of the soul, gift of prophecy, etc.), the post-1888 period was characterized by the rediscovery and integration of some major Evangelical doctrines (justification by faith and the Trinity, including Christ’s self-existence and coeternity with the Father, and the personality of the Holy Spirit). There is no doubt that over the years Ellen White helped the Church to grow in its understanding of biblical truth. But Thompson overstates the fact that to a certain extent she was a child of her own time. By qualifying as “mature” her post-1888 more expanded and elaborated theological expositions of truth, he tends to downgrade the value of her pre-1888 materials as less developed treatments of the same subjects, suggesting that they are inaccurate and unreliable. While she was one of the main spokespersons for the post-1888 Christ-centered emphasis, this does not mean that she shared the same legalistic views of her fellow believers of the pre-1888 period. Noteworthy, in Ellen White’s “Morning Talks” at the 1883 General Conference Session we find some of her more insightful treatments on justification by faith.<sup>27</sup> Even in her earlier writings we

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., Dec. 31, 1981: 13.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., Dec. 17, 1981: 7.

<sup>26</sup>Alden Thompson, *Escape from the Flames: How Ellen White Grew from Fear to Joy—and Helped Me Do It Too* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup>See Ellen G. White, “Morning Talks to the Ministers Assembled at the General Conference, Battle Creek, Mich., November, 1883,” in idem, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1893), 411-71. See also idem, “Unity in Christ,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (hereafter *RH*), Mar. 4, 1884: 145-46; idem, “Humility and Faithfulness in Laborers,” *RH*, Apr. 8, 1884: 225-26; idem, “The Christian Refuge,” *RH*,

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find insightful glimpses into the subject.<sup>28</sup> Already in her very first vision, on the Midnight Cry (December 1844), she saw that the Advent people were safe in their traveling to the New Jerusalem only if “they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the City.” She saw also that the saints cried out at Christ’s return, “who shall be able to stand?” to which He replied, “my grace is sufficient for you.”<sup>29</sup>

The views of Cottrell and Thompson demonstrate how the horizontal perspective of cultural conditioning binds much of the inspired writings to the cultural milieu in which they came into existence. By accepting the primacy of ancient surrounding cultures over divine revelation, Cottrell sees the Bible as an expression of those cultures, with very few ideas transcending them. By contrast, Thompson views large segments of Ellen White’s writings as primarily a reflection of her own experience within the believing community to which they originally spoke. At any rate, both approaches undermine many of the universal principles that placed those writings in direct opposition to contemporary cultures. So, the prophets are recognized as children of their own time, speaking to the needs of contemporary people, but with very little to say outside their own cultural milieu. Taking Thompson’s “from-Sinai-to-Golgotha” theory seriously, we would be tempted to select the latest writings of each prophet in order to form a special canon of more “mature” writings, in contrast to the remaining “immature” (or at least “less mature”) earlier writings. Would one suppose that Paul reaches the culmination of his theology with 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, which are practical books, rather than in his earlier writings, such as Romans and Galatians? Should

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Apr. 15, 1884: 241-42; idem, “Effectual Prayer,” *RH*, Apr. 22, 1884: 257-58; idem, “Are We in the Faith?” *RH*, Apr. 29, 1884: 273-74; idem, “Christ’s Followers the Light of the World,” *RH*, May 13, 1884: 305-6; idem, “Consecration and Courage in Laborers,” *RH*, May 20, 1884: 321-22; idem, “God’s Willingness to Save,” *RH*, May 27, 1884: 337-38; idem, “Love among Brethren,” *RH*, June 3, 1884: 353-54; idem, “The Transforming Grace of God,” *RH*, June 10, 1884: 369-70; idem, “Christian Deportment and Influence,” *RH*, June 17, 1884: 385-86; idem, “Consecration and Diligence in Christian Workers,” *RH*, June 24, 1884: 401-2; idem, “Our Mighty Helper,” *RH*, July 1, 1884: 417-18; idem, “Thoroughness in the Christian Minister,” *RH*, July 8, 1884: 433-34; idem, “Duties and Privileges of the Christian Laborer,” *RH*, July 22, 1884: 465-66.

<sup>28</sup>See Chapter “Principles as Set Forth by Ellen White in Her Early Ministry,” in Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1980), 145-55.

<sup>29</sup>Ellen G. Harmon, “Letter from Sister Harmon,” *Day-Star*, Jan. 24, 1846: 31; re-published in idem, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views* (Saratoga Springs: James White, 1851), 10-12.

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we regard Ellen White's book *The Great Controversy*, published in its revised version in 1911, as more "mature" and reliable than her *The Desire of Ages*, printed 13 years earlier (in 1898)? Would not this mature-immature approach be another kind of "canon within the canon," similar to the one Martin Luther based on the Christological principle?<sup>30</sup> And more: Would this not place the reader as the judge of Scripture? Could one argue that there is a chronological-theological development in the Old Testament, from the "primitive" Pentateuch to the "mature" post-exilic books (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi)?

Several questions are raised also by the notion that the "maturing" process took "1,400 years" for the prophetic writings of the Old Testament and "almost 60 years" for Ellen White's writings. How long does it actually take for a prophet and his writings to mature? If historical maturity was only reached at Golgotha, should we consider all pre-Golgotha prophetic writings as immature? If Ellen White's writings reached maturity only after 40 years of her prophetic ministry, what can we say about those canonical prophets with a much shorter ministry? Whatever direction one chooses to go in answering these questions, it seems to me that there is only one acceptable solution for such tensions: Early prophetic writings might be less developed than later writings, but they are equally trustworthy and reliable because their trustworthiness and reliability rest not on the prophets themselves but rather on God, who revealed Himself through the prophets.

**Vertical Perspective.** The *vertical* perspective of cultural conditioning recognizes that the inspired writings were given through imperfect human language, addressing contemporary local issues, and being limited by local circumstances and personal characteristics (cf. John 16:12). While the *horizontal* perspective regards the inspired writings largely as confined to the religious (and sometimes even secular) culture in which they came into existence, the *vertical* perspective recognizes those writings as the divine judges of contemporary cultures and even of all other cultures. It is only this approach that allows the inspired writings to hold their status as the Word of God for humankind. But in order to understand their nature properly, one needs to distinguish universal principles from temporal applications of such principles.

One of the most difficult tasks in interpreting the inspired writings is how to distinguish universal principles from temporal applications. Such

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. Frank M. Hasel, "Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture," in Reid, ed., *Understanding Scripture*, 40-42.

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difficulty is largely caused by the fact that those writings are frequently considered merely from the perspective of the contexts in which they were originally penned and to which they were addressed. Such knowledge is indispensable to identify the temporal applications and their impact on the local community to which the message was originally addressed, but it still leaves the application open too much to the subjective views of the interpreter. Any serious interpretation should identify not only the specific context to which the messages were originally addressed, but also their broader interaction with the whole accumulated heritage of prophetic literature. While *contextual* knowledge helps one to better understand temporal applications, *interactive* knowledge helps to identify more precisely universal principles.

An interactive study of the inspired writings recognizes that prophets lived in different cultural settings, speaking largely to those settings. For example, much of the Old Testament was written within the context of the surrounding Canaanite cultures. The New Testament came into existence within the Greco-Roman civilization. So, doctrinal teachings and ethical principles that flow from the Old Testament into the New Testament are most certainly universal in their application. In contrast, practices that are mentioned only in a certain context, without being kept in other ones, are more likely cultural in nature. Since the seventh-day Sabbath is commanded in the Old Testament and kept in the New Testament, it has to be regarded as universal. Meanwhile, Paul's advice not to get married (1 Cor 7:6-9) was undoubtedly a temporal application, for elsewhere he counsels younger women to marry (1 Tim 5:14). So, from this perspective, the interaction within the Biblical canon itself places the prophetic messages as evaluators of culture, instead of mere cultural products.

In many instances, the message of Scripture was presented not only in opposition to the local culture, but also as transcending that culture. Ekkehardt Mueller suggests that "what God has done for the Exodus generation applies likewise to later generations," who "still participate in his saving actions (Deut 5:2-4)."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, those who accept the predictive nature of Bible prophecy in general and apocalyptic prophecy in particular recognize that the content they carry applies to the time when a given prophecy is to be fulfilled. But, even so, in Scripture we find some cultural components that, being chosen by God as signs of

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<sup>31</sup>Ekkehardt Mueller, "What the Biblical Text Meant and What It Means," *BRI Newsletter*, Jan. 2007, forthcoming.

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loyalty, end up assuming a universal application. For example, baptism and the foot washing ceremony, based on Jewish cleansing practices, were perpetuated by Christ's commands to all Christians of all ages (Matt 28:18-20; John 13:1-17).

While Cottrell was not concerned with highlighting universal principles in his studies of the inspired writings, Thompson certainly was, as evident in his "law of love" motif, which unfolds itself from the one, to the two, the ten, and the many commandments.<sup>32</sup> But there are at least two major problems with Thompson's approach. First, the multiple universal components of the inspired writings are reduced basically into a law motif, which fails not so much by what is said but rather by what is ignored. The author would be better off by enriching his *law-monophonic* notion with a broader multi-thematic-*polyphonic* perspective,<sup>33</sup> including even the theme of grace in the Old Testament. Second, Thompson's "from-Sinai-to-Golgotha" hermeneutical principle tends to downgrade many of the universal components of the Old Testament and of Ellen White's pre-1888 writings. By accepting such a hermeneutical principle, we would have problems, for example, in handling the creation story. Since its most comprehensive records are found at the very beginning of the Bible (Gen 2 and 3), without any significant enlargement elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments, should we consider them as "less mature"? Or should we limit that principle only to matters of salvation?

Although prophets, like all other human beings, also grow in knowledge, understanding, and experience, God's supernatural revelation is not always dependent on the prophet's maturity. Actually, God does sometimes reveal information that goes far beyond the prophet's own level of understanding, as in the case of the prophet Daniel (see Dan 8:26,27; 12:4). This may happen in later or even in early stages of someone's prophetic carrier. So, it seems more consistent just to recognize the existence of thematic-existential developments in the inspired writings, without labeling them as "mature" and "less mature." The true Christian is indeed someone who lives "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4, RSV).

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<sup>32</sup>Thompson, "From Sinai to Golgotha," Dec. 3, 1981, 5-6; idem, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1991), 110-36; idem, *Escape from the Flames*, 112-36.

<sup>33</sup>See Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

**Summary and Conclusions**

Seventh-day Adventists are being strongly tempted today, as have been many other Christians in the past, to reread the universal principles of Scripture from the perspective of their own cultural practices and to use alternative hermeneutics to endorse such practices. The historical tendency has been either to *decontextualize* the message, leaving it almost incomprehensible and irrelevant to the present generation, or to *acculturalize* it in such a way that it loses much of its original identity. The risk of decontextualization can be lowered by recognizing that the divine message became incarnated in the inspired writings by the work of the Holy Spirit, who spoke through available human resources and addressed concrete contemporary issues. The danger of acculturalization can be avoided by rejecting those aspects of the *horizontal* perspective of cultural conditioning which end up reading the writings as a mere product of an ancient religious community, and by accepting the *vertical* perspective, which recognizes the presence of cultural elements within the inspired writings, without denying their general status as the Word of God.

A careful interpretation of the inspired writings has to recognize in them the existence of an ongoing dialogue between universal principles and temporal applications of such principles. But, after recognizing such dialogue, the interpreter is faced with the challenging task of distinguishing universal principles from temporal applications. Contextual studies help the student to identify the temporal applications and their impact on the local community to which the message was originally addressed, but they still leave the interpretation open too much to the subjective views of the interpreter. Any serious interpretation should also identify the broad interaction of the messages with the whole accumulated heritage of prophetic literature. While contextual knowledge helps one to better understand temporal applications, interactive knowledge helps to identify more precisely universal principles. After all, the inspired writings have to be relevant to our own generation without losing their original identity.

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## **Politics—To Engage or Not to Engage? Seeking a Biblical Perspective**

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Historically, the Mennonites, a Christian faith community descended from the Anabaptists of the Protestant reformation, have avoided any involvement in political issues. The increasingly global reach of the denomination, however, and its involvement in mission and service activities have brought about significant changes in the Mennonite understanding of the place of politics.<sup>1</sup> Administrators and constituents alike have come to recognize that “all service is woven into social and political structures” and that “our service cannot escape the realities of power in the world system.”<sup>2</sup> Formerly insulated, Mennonites have been “catapulted into the world” as their understanding of the divine mission has brought them into contact with the cataclysmic events of revolution, war, famine, deprivation, racism, injustice, violence, and repression. The net result has been a dramatic shift in the way Mennonites think and act in the political realm.



Tired of being viewed by religious voters in the United States as too secular or even hostile toward religion, the Democratic Party has launched a determined effort to win their votes. This focus was evident on the primary campaign trail, where many of the Democratic candidates spoke openly of God and of religion. Senator Hillary Clinton described how faith carried her through the turmoil of Bill Clinton’s infidelity.

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<sup>1</sup> R. J. R. Mathies, “Witness and Struggle or Politics and Power: MCC Engages the World,” *Direction* 23/2 (1994): 77.

<sup>2</sup> K. G. Miller, “Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves: American Mennonites Engage Washington,” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1994), 93.

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Senator John Edwards spoke candidly of his “deep and abiding love for [his] Savior, Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> In a message to a multiracial evangelical congregation in Greenville, South Carolina, candidate Barack Obama stated that Democrats are not “fearful of talking about faith.”<sup>4</sup> Obama’s campaign, in fact, soon launched a grass-roots effort called “40 Days of Faith and Family,” intended to reach out to voters through a series of faith forums and gospel concerts. Senator Obama concluded his remarks in Greenville by saying, “We’re going to keep on praising together. I am confident that we can create a Kingdom right here on Earth.”



What do these vignettes have in common? Each, in essence, raises the issue of how a Christian should relate to politics—a matter increasingly relevant in a world of growing polarization and political agitation.

In this article, as we seek to address the relation of the Christian and politics in biblical perspective, we will consider the following questions:

What positions have been taken within the Christian community regarding the relationship to politics, and what rationale has been offered for each?

Which biblical principles can provide a reasoned framework for the relationship of the Christian and politics?

What orientation can be acquired from the lives of Bible characters and, particularly, that of Jesus Christ?

How might one then formulate an overarching Christian response to the relation of the believer and politics?

**A Gamut of Perspectives**

While there are probably as many nuanced perspectives on politics as there are faith communities, one might classify these positions in certain conceptual clusters. Building on the works of H. Richard Niebuhr<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> C. Brinberg, “Democratic Voters Trying to Reach Religious Voters,” posted July 23, 2007, via <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/07/22/democrats.religion/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> P. Hamby, “Obama: GOP Doesn’t Own Faith Issue,” posted October 8, 2007, via <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/10/08/obama.faith/index.html>.





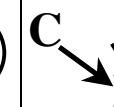
<sup>5</sup> H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951). It may be noted that this essay departs from Niebuhr’s classification by inserting a “Christ dominates politics” position, in which the perceived will of God is imposed by human agents. The “Christ transforms culture” perspective will appear later under the stance of Lordship. The insertion of the “domination” position thus makes a total of six categories, rather than Niebuhr’s five, and is reflective of socio-political developments that have transpired since his seminal work was written.



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and Norman Thomas,<sup>6</sup> these categories could be defined as (1) rejection, (2) paradox, (3) critical collaboration, (4) synthesis, and (5) imposition (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Perspectives on the Relationship of Christianity and Politics**

STANCE	Rejection	Paradox	Critical Collaboration	Synthesis	Imposition
Focus	Christ against politics	Christ and politics	Christ above politics	Christ of politics	Christ dominates politics
Kingdom View	Exclusive one-kingdom	Separate kingdoms	Higher-lower kingdoms	Inclusive one-kingdom	Revolutionary kingdom
Orientation	Politics is seen as inherently evil, the domain of Satan	Politics is viewed as relatively evil, yet necessary	Politics is viewed as basically good or neutral, but deficient	Politics is uncritically viewed as good, at least in principle	Politics must be forcefully reshaped to conform to divine standards
Depiction					
Advocates	Tertullian, Fundamentalism	Jaques Ellul, Lutheranism	Thomas Aquinas, Catholicism	Justin Martyr, Liberalism	The Christian Right, Liberationism

**Rejection—Christ Against Politics.** Many fundamentalists view culture as inherently evil, the domain of Satan. In this exclusive one-kingdom approach, advocated by Tertullian, Christians are citizens only of the heavenly kingdom. The gospel is limited to the personal life, and the world is left to the devil. Politics is rejected, and the faith community seeks to separate and insulate itself from its corrupting influence.

Carl Knott,<sup>7</sup> for example, asserts that politics is a prohibited arena for the Christian, a web of worldly entanglement. There is an underlying assumption that government is fatally flawed and incapable of solving

<sup>6</sup> N. E. Thomas, “Church-State Relations and Mission,” in James M. Phillips and Robert T. Cootes (Eds.), *Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 363.

<sup>7</sup> C. Knott, “The Christian and Politics” (2001), via <http://www.nlbchapel.org/politics.htm>

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even the most basic problems of mankind. The greater concern, however, is that involvement in politics will result in “wasted hours, wasted funds, [and] wasted lives.” With politics seen as hopelessly inept and the end of all things at hand,<sup>8</sup> Knott questions:

Who would go into a condemned building and start painting the walls and replacing broken windows? Who would stay on a sinking ship washing dirty dishes in the galley? . . . The ship of this world is sinking like the Titanic, and our job is to get people in the lifeboat, to safety in Christ, not to paint the Titanic or elect a new captain or lookout because the old ones failed!

While acknowledging that Christian revivals in the time of Whitefield and Wesley are attributed with averting civil war in England, Knott also maintains that the impact came through preaching and prayer meetings, not by canvassing, campaigning, or getting out the vote.

Similarly, Robert Saucy argues that “believers are here to witness to the coming kingdom, not to inaugurate the kingdom rule.”<sup>9</sup> The rationale is that the Christian at present is but a pilgrim traveling to the heavenly Kingdom. As a “foreigner,” the believer should not engage in politics, apart from desiring freedom to serve God, and should have no concern about who runs the territory wherein he or she temporarily resides. A pamphlet produced by *The Testimony Magazine* contends: “Neither does the Christian participate in the processes of democracy to select a new government, nor in political protest against the existing arrangements. The Christian will abstain from supporting political groups by voting or by membership. A Christian’s vote has already been given to the Lord Jesus Christ as King.”<sup>10</sup>

Anderson<sup>11</sup> notes that many evangelical Christians—especially premillennial evangelicals—have developed a “psychology of eschatology,” withdrawing from social and political involvement because they feel that political systems are evil and a fulfillment of prophecy. Believing that the current social, economic, and political systems are headed for

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<sup>8</sup> Ref. 2 Peter 3:10-11.

<sup>9</sup> R. L. Saucy, “The Presence of the Kingdom and the Life of the Church.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (January-March 1988): 46.

<sup>10</sup> “Basic Bible Principles: The Christian and Politics,” *Testimony Magazine* (undated), via <http://www.testimony-magazine.org/back/TheChristianandpolitics.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> K. Anderson, “A Christian View of Politics, Government, and Social Action” (2002), via <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/xian-pol.html>

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destruction, they see politics as “worldly and ultimately a culmination of the Antichrist.”

Other Christian denominations, including the Amish,<sup>12</sup> historic Mennonites,<sup>13</sup> and Christadelphians,<sup>14</sup> have taken a similar stance. Christadelphians, for example, maintain that the Bible teaches that believers should avoid all involvement in politics. They hold that God, not man, is in control of humanity, and that God will work out His plan and purpose in due time. Consequently, non-involvement in politics is a deliberate statement of allegiance to God, of full submission to His will. How, they ask, are we to know which of our leaders is the one God wants to be in power? How shall we be sure, if we cast our vote, that we are voting for the person who is the right one in God’s eyes? Christadelphians consequently believe that God has His own perfect political agenda and that all the believer must do is rest in full confidence that God’s purpose will “be done on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>15</sup>

**Paradox—Christ and Politics.** For individuals such as Jacques Ellul,<sup>16</sup> the Christian lives in the world as best he can. Christianity and culture are in paradox, with no resolution in sight. In this separate kingdoms approach, politics is seen as evil, yet necessary. As a Christian, one should play no significant role in politics, participating in government only when required by law, endeavoring meanwhile to avoid its contaminating influence. The church, as an institution, withdraws into the sphere of the religious.

Such “passive identification”<sup>17</sup> espouses three fundamental premises: (1) that the Christian should “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s”;<sup>18</sup> (2) that a Christian’s political involvement should not extend beyond those matters clearly required by law; and (3) that in matters of conscience, the believer’s stand may include civil disobedience, which may, in fact, be proposed and supported by church leaders.

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<sup>12</sup> D. Heffelbower, “The Christian and Civil Disobedience,” *Direction* 15/1 (1986): 23-30.

<sup>13</sup> Mathies, 77. Miller, 93.

<sup>14</sup> R. Carr, “The Christian and Politics” (2005), via [http://www.bibleed.com/bible\\_teachings/pamphlets/politics.htm](http://www.bibleed.com/bible_teachings/pamphlets/politics.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 6:9-10. Unless indicated otherwise, all biblical quotations are from the New International Version (NIV). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

<sup>16</sup> J. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas, 363.

<sup>18</sup> Mark 12:13-17.

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This stance of minimal involvement is predicated upon the concept that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, that we look for a city "whose architect and builder is God," and that we already have a full agenda with the gospel commission.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, we must repress the urge to "pull up the tares" that we find in the political field and instead allow the wheat and tares to grow together until the final judgment day, when God Himself will be the Judge.<sup>20</sup>

**Critical Collaboration—Christ Above Politics.** Thomas Aquinas maintained that while the Christian and culture must coexist, Christianity is superior to culture.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Yoder has emphasized "the absolute priority of church over state in the plan of God."<sup>22</sup> In this higher-lower kingdoms perspective, politics is viewed as basically good, or perhaps neutral, but still deficient. While accommodation and compromise may be inescapable in certain areas, the Christian's role is primarily that of (1) critique—evaluating political policies from the framework of the gospel, and of (2) judicious involvement in social issues—without compromising gospel priorities.

In the changing Mennonite view, for example, moral responsibility shifted away from a strict two-kingdom approach towards a perspective which called for action within the social arena. The ethical norm of non-resistance changed to a concern for justice, and the posture of separatism was traded for that of cooperation with the larger society. Mathies notes that the major theological forces forging these changes were ecumenical conversations and liberation theology.<sup>23</sup>

Other Christians have likewise focused on the "cultural mandate," seeking to improve living conditions and address moral corruption. Pratte, for example, maintains that while churches should not officially endorse candidates or finance political campaigns, Christians and their leaders should nevertheless speak out on social issues, such as abortion, gambling, pornography, homosexuality, contraceptives for unmarried teens, and an educational system that justifies these.<sup>24</sup> Pratte views this

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<sup>19</sup> Ref. John 18:36; Heb 11:10; and Luke 24:47,48.

<sup>20</sup> Ref. Matthew 13:24-30. K. Anderson, "Politics and Religion" (1991), via <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/pol-rel.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Niebuhr, 1951.

<sup>22</sup> J. H. Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, (Newton: Faith and Life, 1964), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Mathies, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> D. E. Pratte, "Should Christians Be Involved in Political Issues?" (2000), via <http://www.gospelway.com/christianlife/politics.php>.

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engagement as fulfilling one's God-given duty to preach truth and rebuke error.<sup>25</sup>

Peter Flamming, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, similarly draws the line between personal and institutional involvement, maintaining that while there ought to be a separation of church and State, there need not be a separation of citizen and State.<sup>26</sup> He warns, however, that pastors, as church leaders, should not themselves engage in politics. Further delimitations in this perspective include an over-emphasis on sociological issues to the abandoning of evangelistic priority<sup>27</sup> and aligning the cultural mandate with a particular political party or philosophy of government.<sup>28</sup>

**Synthesis—Christ of Politics.** In the tradition of Justin Martyr and reinvigorated by liberalism, government is viewed as inherently good, an element of the divine plan for humankind. In this inclusive one-kingdom view,<sup>29</sup> there is little or no tension between the Christian and politics. Christianity is, in fact, identified with politics at its best.

Hugo Zorrilla, for example, contends that the question is not whether the church is involved in politics, but rather what kind of political position should be taken. "Every Christian, every church, is involved in politics. . . . Every Christian activity—interpretation, preaching, prayer, singing—is carried out within a political framework. . . . Whether we like it or not, we are at the service of human beings in society for the glory of God."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Paul Marshall, from a Reformed perspective, asserts that "political authority is not an area apart from the gospel, but can be an area of ministry just as much as any office in the church. . . . The state is what God through Jesus Christ has set up to maintain justice. Its officers are as much ministers of God as are prophets and priests."<sup>31</sup> Politics is thus "a Christian calling, opportunity, and privilege."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ref. Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 5:11.

<sup>26</sup> P. J. Flamming, "The Christian and Politics" (2004), via <http://www.fbrichmond.org/ask/6-27-04ask.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> B. B. Beach, "The Christian and Politics," *Dialogue* 9/1 (1997): 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Ref. Luke 17:21; Acts 10:36.

<sup>30</sup> H. Zorrilla, "The Christian and Political Involvement," in Victor Adrian and Donald Loewen (Eds.), *Committed to World Mission: A Focus on International Strategy* (Winnipeg: Kindred, 1990), 103-105.

<sup>31</sup> P. Marshall, *Thine is the Kingdom: A Biblical Perspective on the Nature of Government and Politics Today* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan Scott, 1984), 46-47.

<sup>32</sup> P. G. Elbrecht, *The Christian Encounters Politics and Government* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 9.

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Supporting this position is the rationale that civil government was instituted by God, and that throughout the Bible, godly leaders, such as David, Moses, Daniel, and Nehemiah, were engaged in the political world and proved to be valuable assets in God's plan. Based on this understanding, Craswell warns that the privatization of the Christian faith could result in the complete secularization of government and that this would be "an affront to a Holy God."<sup>33</sup> Christians are to be the salt and light of the world,<sup>34</sup> and consequently cannot opt out of the political process. This "active identification" perspective<sup>35</sup> has, in fact, yielded leading politicians who seek to be known as practicing Christians and even political parties that include a Christian descriptor in the party name.

Certain parameters, however, are proposed within this perspective, namely that the Christian's involvement in politics must be peaceful, lawful, and honorable; respectful of other people's opinions; and concerned for promoting righteousness.<sup>36</sup>

**Imposition—Christ Dominates Politics.** Some Christians, perhaps best exemplified by liberation theology and the Christian Right, maintain that Christianity must dramatically reshape culture. Through the political process, evil must be opposed and divine standards established as the law of the land. In this revolutionary kingdom perspective, the world is viewed as fallen, yet redeemable. Christians are God's agents for dramatic renovation, realigning government according to God's political agenda.

In this perspective, political involvement must go beyond merely speaking out on social issues. A Christian worldview implies a Christian world order. Christians, in fact, have a right and responsibility to help determine who runs the country and to install a Christian platform. Votes and political activism can make a difference. To sit back and do nothing but pray would, in this perspective, be failing God, duty, and country. "Our nation," Anderson notes, can be "turned around only through the dedicated, unswerving, relentless involvement of true Christians."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> E. Craswell, "The Biblical Basis for Christians in Politics and Government" (2007), via <http://www.whateveristrue.com/heritage/ticipate.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Ref. Matthew 5:13-16.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas, 1993.

<sup>36</sup> K. Cauley, "The Christian and Politics" (2006), via [http://www.the-churchofchrist.com/government/the\\_christian\\_and\\_politics.htm](http://www.the-churchofchrist.com/government/the_christian_and_politics.htm).

<sup>37</sup> T. Anderson, "The Christian in Politics," *Straight Talk* 53/4 (January 28, 1988).

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Christianity’s main task, then, is to work toward creating a Christian political order that will result in establishing the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>38</sup> In essence, this is a move from quietism to militant activism, a mandate to bring the values and priorities of Christianity to government, to ensure that the “righteous are in authority.”<sup>39</sup>

**Biblical Principles.** As we have noted, differing perspectives on the relation of the Christian and politics appeal to particular biblical passages in formulating an underlying rationale. Indeed, it is vital to consider biblical principles when formulating a Christian position on any issue. This section will endeavor to present a representative response to the question: What principles does the Bible delineate regarding the Christian’s relationship to politics? (For a summary of these principles, see Figure 2.)

**Figure 2: Biblical Principles Regarding the Relation of Christianity and Politics**

Foundational Principles	God’s Role in Government	Relationship to Government	Action in Politics	Tension with Politics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The equality of man</li> <li>▪ Stewardship of the environment</li> <li>▪ A moral government results in prosperity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ God establishes civil government</li> <li>▪ God speaks out regarding corruption in government</li> <li>▪ God is ultimately in control of earthly government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ God expects citizens to respect and submit to civil authority</li> <li>▪ Christians, however, are not to blindly obey civil authority</li> <li>▪ God enjoins believers to pray for secular rulers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Christianity must permeate society</li> <li>▪ Christians have a responsibility to critique government</li> <li>▪ God encourages active involvement in social causes</li> <li>▪ Christians are to advocate peace</li> <li>▪ Christians must overcome evil with good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Political relationships involve inherent risks</li> <li>▪ Christians are Christians first</li> <li>▪ Heavenly citizenship carries both limitations and responsibilities</li> <li>▪ Christians must answer to a higher standard</li> </ul>

<sup>38</sup> R. J. Sider, *One-sided Christianity? Uniting the Church to Heal a Lost and Broken World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Proverbs 29:2.

**Foundational Principles.**

**The Equality of Man.** Any politics that takes the Bible as foundational must begin with the account of creation, where humankind is created in the image of God.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, all individuals, ethnic groups, and nations are created on a par, in the divine image. This becomes the basis of the legal and ethical system, in which all members of the community are considered equal in the eyes of the law. In the New Testament, we find this concept of the equality of man reiterated by Paul to the Athenians, when he observed that God “has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”<sup>41</sup> This concept of divinely endowed human potential, as Beach notes, gives purpose, direction, and optimism to Christians serving within society.<sup>42</sup>

**Stewardship of the Environment.** The Genesis account assigns to humanity the task of caretaker of the creation. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it”<sup>43</sup>—a stewardship mandate which has never been rescinded. Revelation 11:18, in fact, indicates that, at the end of earth’s history, God will “destroy them which destroy the earth” (KJV)—those who have been negligent in caring for the domain over which they had jurisdiction.

**A Moral Government Results in Prosperity.** Throughout Scripture, there is ample evidence that a government founded upon divine values results in national prosperity. “Righteousness exalts a nation.”<sup>44</sup> “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”<sup>45</sup> Individuals with a Christian perspective and commitment can contribute to this well-being of society—“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice.”<sup>46</sup> The implication would seem to be that Christians can be placed in positions of government, and that this involvement is beneficent.

**God’s Role in Government**

**God Establishes Civil Government.** After the flood, God instructed Noah regarding civil penalties, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made

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<sup>40</sup> Ref. Gen 1:26-27.

<sup>41</sup> Acts 17:26, KJV.

<sup>42</sup> Beach, 1997.

<sup>43</sup> Gen 2:15.

<sup>44</sup> Prov 14:34.

<sup>45</sup> Ps 33:12.

<sup>46</sup> Prov 29:2, KJV.



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man.”<sup>47</sup> In Exodus 21-23, God gave Moses a detailed plan for civil government—which addressed manslaughter, premeditated murder, assault, kidnapping, abortion, infanticide, property crimes, criminal negligence, and robbery. This divine plan also indicated that justice must be provided in court for the underprivileged and that checks must be established to ensure that the innocent are not condemned.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in Leviticus, chapters 13 and 20 address public health laws, while the first chapter of Deuteronomy describes a judicial system established jointly with cities of refuge, “so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial.”<sup>49</sup> In subsequent chapters (Deut 17-22), laws are delineated regarding violation of a court order, perjury, malicious accusations, building codes, juvenile delinquency, and rape.

Given this Old Testament backdrop, Paul declares, “There is no authority except that which God has established.”<sup>50</sup> One should note, however, that along with specifying the responsibilities of civil government, God also delineated qualifications for its leaders. These criteria stipulated that political leaders should be those who “fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness.”<sup>51</sup>

**God Speaks Out Regarding Corruption in Government.** God does not simply ignore political corruption; He directly confronts evil in government. “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees.”<sup>52</sup> “Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the LORD detests them both.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, those who accept bribes, who distort justice, and who do not defend the cause of weak and marginalized members of society are reprovved.<sup>54</sup> In biblical times, God spoke out against corruption in government through the voice of His prophets. So today, Christians can serve as channels of the divine perspective and take their stand against injustice, corruption, and oppression.

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<sup>47</sup> Gen 9:6.

<sup>48</sup> Ref. Exodus 23:6-7.

<sup>49</sup> Numbers 35:12.

<sup>50</sup> Romans 13:1. While various translations indicate that these powers are “ordained” (KJV), “established” (NIV), or “instituted” (NRSV) by God, Yoder (*The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) argues quite persuasively that these renderings suggest God’s endorsement and are too strong a translation of the Greek word *tasso*. Instead, the powers are “ordered” by God—that is, “told where they belong.”

<sup>51</sup> Exod 18:21, KJV.

<sup>52</sup> Isa 10:1.

<sup>53</sup> Prov 17:15.

<sup>54</sup> Ref. Isa 1:23; Mic 3:9.

**God Is Ultimately in Control of Earthly Government.** “Dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.”<sup>55</sup> If God is indeed “Lord of heaven and earth” and has given all authority to His Son,<sup>56</sup> then it stands to reason Jesus Christ is Lord of the political realm. Both politicians and political processes should therefore be willing to recognize His Lordship. Moreover, God, in the biblical view, is actively engaged in placing and removing rulers.<sup>57</sup> “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.”<sup>58</sup>

Government, however, is influenced, but not predestined, by God. “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, God at times permits events to take place that are not according to His will, abiding the time when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”<sup>60</sup>

#### **The Believer’s Relationship to Government.**

**God Expects Citizens to Respect and Submit to Civil Authority.** Believers are not to revile rulers, despise authority, nor show contempt for a judge.<sup>61</sup> Ezra 7:26, for example, warns that “whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.” Christians consequently are to respect the state and to submit to civil authority. Peter writes, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to the governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ps 22:29; see also Acts 17:26-27.

<sup>56</sup> Matt 11:25; Acts 17:24; John 3:35; 13:3.

<sup>57</sup> Ref. 1 Kings 14:14; Ps 75:6-7; Dan 2:21; 4:17.

<sup>58</sup> Prov 21:1, KJV; see also Prov 29:26.

<sup>59</sup> Jer 18:7-10; see also Amos 9:8.

<sup>60</sup> Rev 11:15.

<sup>61</sup> Ref. Exod 22:28; Deut 17:12; Eccl 10:20; Titus 3:1; 2 Pet 2:10-12; Jude 8-10.

<sup>62</sup> 1 Pet 2:13-15; see also Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:17.

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Compliance with civil laws and regulations, even those of a secular government, is the Christian's God-given duty. Despite the shameful treatment he had often received at the hands of the Roman government,<sup>63</sup> Paul wrote: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. . . . It is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes<sup>64</sup>; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."<sup>65</sup> Neufeld notes that Paul's counsel may have been rather difficult for a Jewish Christian in Rome to accept, particularly at a time when the empire was brutally oppressing and dominating the land of Palestine,

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<sup>63</sup> Ref. Acts 16:22-24, 37, 38.

<sup>64</sup> The particular occasion that generated Paul's counsel may be rooted in an attempt by certain Christians to join with their Jewish friends in an anti-Roman tax revolt at the beginning of Nero's reign, as recorded by the Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus [M. Borg, "A New Context for Romans XIII," *New Testament Studies* 19 (1973): 205-18. J. Isaak, "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7," *Direction* 32/1 (2003): 32-46. J. I. H. McDonald, "Romans 13:1-7: A Test Case for New Testament Interpretation," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 544.]. Additionally, Paul may be advising Jewish Christians, recently returned to Rome after having been exiled by the Emperor Claudius, against becoming involved in any Palestinian-Jewish nationalistic movement [A. R. Culpepper, "God's Righteousness in the Life of His People: Romans 12-15," *Review and Expositor* 73/4 (1974): 451.] Paul probably recognized that unity among the Christian believers would be impossible in mixed Jew-Gentile communities, were the Jews to be voicing anti-Roman ideas.

<sup>65</sup> Rom 13:1-7. Initially this passage was received as an exhortation urging Christian communities not to resist the state's efforts to govern [L. T. Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1997). J. E. Toews, "Peacemakers from the Start: The Jesus Way in the Early Church," in *The Power of the Lamb*, ed. J. E. Toews and G. Nickel (Winnipeg: Kindred, 1986), 45-55. W. Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).]. By the fifth century, however, it was interpreted quite differently by Augustine [*The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998, orig. ed. 462), book XIX, chapter 17.] to make two claims: (a) that the state is justified in its use of force, and (b) that church and state are to work together in the execution of justice. These claims were then used to promote the notion of a Christian state, to demand unquestioning allegiance, and to justify the extermination of those deemed as threats. This theology of state was subsequently incorporated in the Protestant understanding of Rom 13 (M. Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by J. T. Mueller (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954, orig. ed. 1515-1516), 163-65. J. Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Romans*, trans. R. Mackenzie, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960, orig. ed. 1540), 280-281.] and continues to inform contemporary thinking.

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the Promised Land.<sup>66</sup> To heed Paul's advice would mean placing obedience to instituted authorities ahead of love for race and homeland.

**Christians Are Not to Blindly Obey Civil Authority.** God orders the powers,<sup>67</sup> but this does not mean that rulers will always do God's will. Consequently, it is not by accident that the imperative is not literally one of obedience, but rather of subordination.<sup>68</sup> A conscientious objector, for example, who refuses to bear arms despite the command of his government, still remains under the sovereignty of that government and accepts the penalties which it imposes. He is subordinate, even though he is not obeying.

Similarly, Peter's instruction to submit to authority<sup>69</sup> does not mean that the believer must mindlessly obey government demands that are contrary to the Christian faith. Peter himself clarified that in such situations one must "obey God rather than men."<sup>70</sup> It is perhaps significant that when Paul asks, "Do you wish to have no fear of authority?"<sup>71</sup> he does not say, "Then do what the authority says," but rather, "Do what is good." The implication seems to be that there is a reflective intermediate step of discerning whether the demand of government is good or not, in light of divine requirements.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, we should note that Jesus warned that true believers would be arrested and brought to trial before governors and kings.<sup>73</sup> Implicit in this passage is that Christ did not expect His followers to obey every authority, but to bear witness to those authorities. Thus, for the Christian, the state is not the highest authority.

**God Enjoins Believers to Pray for Secular Rulers.** God's chosen people are urged to "pray for the well-being of the king and his sons" and for the peace of nations.<sup>74</sup> When the Jews were captive in Babylon, for example, the prophet Jeremiah sent a directive indicating that they were

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<sup>66</sup> M. G. Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7," *Direction* 23/2 (1994): 90-97.

<sup>67</sup> Ref. Rom 13:1.

<sup>68</sup> This concept is further developed in J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

<sup>69</sup> Ref. 1 Pet 2:9-17.

<sup>70</sup> Acts 4:19; 5:29.

<sup>71</sup> Rom 13:3.

<sup>72</sup> W. Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

<sup>73</sup> Ref. Mark 13:9-11.

<sup>74</sup> Ezra 6:10; also Ps 122:6.

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to pray for the empire's peace and prosperity.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in the New Testament, Paul urged "that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."<sup>76</sup> As Christians, we must not underestimate the power of prayer in politics.

**Action in the Relation to Politics.**

**Christianity Must Permeate Society.** In His inaugural address, Christ indicated that believers should be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world."<sup>77</sup> Salt does not properly flavor, however, unless it permeates its subject matter; light is not effective if cloistered. Given that government is a dimension of the larger society, it would seem to follow that Christians have a strategic responsibility to be socially and politically involved.

**Christians Have a Moral Responsibility to Critique Government.**

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.<sup>78</sup>

The concept of "watchman" does not appear to be limited to individuals, but to society, as well. Psalm 12:8-9 notes, for instance, that neglecting to address societal wrongs can result in the proliferation of evil. Furthermore, Paul writes that we, as Christians, are to "have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them."<sup>79</sup>

**God Encourages Active Involvement in Social Causes.** Christians are admonished to "do justice and love mercy."<sup>80</sup> They are encouraged to become actively involved in the issues facing society. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy

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<sup>75</sup> Ref. Jer 29:4-7.

<sup>76</sup> 1 Tim 2:1-2.

<sup>77</sup> Ref. Matt 5:13-16.

<sup>78</sup> Ezek 3:17-19.

<sup>79</sup> Eph 5:11.

<sup>80</sup> Mic 6:8.

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burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”<sup>81</sup>

In a dramatic parable,<sup>82</sup> Jesus outlined the standards by which individuals and entire communities would be judged:

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

Clearly, those who inherit God’s kingdom are actively involved in bettering the lives of those around them. These concrete acts of compassion for the less fortunate members of society are linked to attaining a personal relationship with God—“As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

Similarly, James notes that the “religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”<sup>83</sup> In essence, as Paul observes, “the entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”<sup>84</sup>

**Christians Are to Be Advocates of Peace.** Implementing God’s plan for humanity, nations “will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”<sup>85</sup> The passage suggests that Christians are to be advocates of non-violence. Paul reiterated this concept on various occasions: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”<sup>86</sup> As “Prince of Peace,” Jesus Christ instructed His followers: “If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.”<sup>87</sup>

**Christians Must Overcome Evil with Good.** In Rom 12:14-21, Paul calls believers to a life characterized by nonstandard behavior—“bless those who persecute you,” “associate with the lowly,” and “do not

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<sup>81</sup> Isa 58:6, KJV.

<sup>82</sup> Ref. Matt 25:31-46.

<sup>83</sup> James 1:27; see also Titus 3:1.

<sup>84</sup> Gal 5:14.

<sup>85</sup> Isa 2:4.

<sup>86</sup> Rom 12:18; 14:19; see also Titus 3:1.

<sup>87</sup> Luke 6:29; ref. Isa 9:6.

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repay anyone evil for evil.” He then continues with reminders to “live peaceably with all” and to “never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath [of God]”—a divine vengeance which involves the “public righting of wrong.”<sup>88</sup>

Paul then provides a directive to “heap burning coals on their heads.”<sup>89</sup> At first glance, this might seem manipulative, a form of psychological revenge to get the enemy to say “I’m sorry.” In reality, it may be a reference to an ancient Egyptian reconciliation ritual.<sup>90</sup> In early civilizations, fire was a valuable commodity for cooking and heating. Consequently, it was a life-giving act to heap coals into a person’s pot so that he might carry them on his head back to his campsite. In this way, the Christian community is not passive, but “overcomes evil with good.”<sup>91</sup>

**Tension in the Relation to Politics.**

**Political Relationships Involve Inherent Risks.** Throughout Scripture, the believer is repeatedly warned of worldly entanglements. “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”<sup>92</sup> “No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him.”<sup>93</sup> Passages such as these suggest that political relationships may involve potential risks.

**Christians Are Christians First.** Christians cannot live dualistic lives—“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, Christ’s believers are both “in the world” while not “of the world.”<sup>95</sup> This tension can be resolved by seeking “first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> J. Isaak, “The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7,” *Direction* 32/1 (2003): 32-46.

<sup>89</sup> Rom 12:20; ref. Prov 25:21-22.

<sup>90</sup> W. Klassen, “Coals of Fire: Sign of Repentance or Revenge? (Rom. 12:20; Prov. 25:22),” *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963): 337-50. See also Isaak, 2003.

<sup>91</sup> Rom 12:21.

<sup>92</sup> 2 Cor 6:14.

<sup>93</sup> 2 Tim 2:4, RSV. Similarly, “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” (2 Cor 6:17). “Do not love the world or anything in the world” (1 John 2:15).

<sup>94</sup> Matt 6:24, KJV.

<sup>95</sup> John 17:15-16.

<sup>96</sup> Matt 6:33, KJV.

and then all other aspects of life, including one's relationship to politics, acquire their proper place.

**Heavenly Citizenship Carries Both Limitations and Responsibilities.** Describing the "enemies of the cross of Christ," Paul notes that "their mind is on earthly things." By contrast, he states, "our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>97</sup> The implication is that the Christian's primary focus cannot be on "earthly things"—on politics from a purely secular perspective, for example.

Paul reiterates this concept in Colossians 3:1-2: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, . . . set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." In a similar vein, Peter adds, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," although "aliens and exiles" here on earth.<sup>98</sup>

While there are clearly limitations for heavenly citizens, there are also responsibilities. Paul notes, for example, that "we are ambassadors for Christ."<sup>99</sup> As an ambassador, each Christian is an official representative of another kingdom, seeking to establish positive relationships and favorably influence decisions in the nation to which he or she has been assigned.

**Christians Must Answer to a Higher Standard.** Paul observes that as Christians we are to align ourselves with that which is honorable "in the sight of God," and not merely what is legal "in the sight of men."<sup>100</sup> Certain political strategies, for example, may be inappropriate for the Christian—"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power."<sup>101</sup>

In sum, it seems evident that the Scriptures provide guiding principles for each facet of life, including politics. These include an understanding of God's role in government, the believer's relationship to government, and the Christian's relation to politics—both in terms of tension and action.

It is necessary, however, to consider context in applying biblical principles. Historical and political circumstances can create important

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<sup>97</sup> Phil 3:18-21.

<sup>98</sup> 1 Pet 2:9-11.

<sup>99</sup> 2 Cor 5:20.

<sup>100</sup> 2 Cor 8:21, KJV.

<sup>101</sup> 2 Cor 10:3-4.



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differences in the relevance and applicability of a given principle. The Old Testament state of theocracy, for example, is quite distinct from the New Testament situation of a marginalized and often despised Christian community. Furthermore, the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth provides an expanded ethical framework and clarifies the Christian stance regarding politics. Consequently, it can be particularly enlightening to examine how individuals throughout Scripture, under a variety of circumstances, applied the divine principles in their relationship to politics.

**Insights from Biblical Characters**

While biblical principles provide relevant guidelines for the Christian's relation with politics, orientation can also be gained from the lives of Bible characters. We find, in fact, the principles repeatedly illustrated throughout Scripture in the actions and priorities of individuals. In this section, we will examine a variety of cases from Old and New Testaments, and particularly, the example of Christ.

**The Case of Joseph.** Brought before the Pharaoh to interpret his dreams, Joseph makes clear reference to Jehovah as the One who is in control of history.<sup>102</sup> Joseph, however, does not rest with mere interpretation. He also proposes a plan of political action, including political appointments and taxation.<sup>103</sup> Recognizing the value of a spiritual perspective within government, the king of Egypt asks, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"

Some years later, in the midst of the famine, Joseph tells his brothers that it was God who "has made me lord of all Egypt" and that this occurred in order "to save lives."<sup>104</sup> Joseph, in essence, considered his position in government to be a direct result of God's intervention, in order that he might assist others through times of hardship.

**The Case of Moses.** As a political activist, Moses may be without peer in Scripture. Spotting the abuse of a Hebrew by an Egyptian taskmaster, for example, he took immediate action and killed the Egyptian.<sup>105</sup> This act aborted his early political career and led to forty years of exile.

By God's direct invitation, however, Moses initiated a second attempt to help his oppressed people, confronting Pharaoh and freeing the

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<sup>102</sup> Ref. Gen 41:25,28,32.

<sup>103</sup> Ref. Gen 41:33-38.

<sup>104</sup> Gen 45:5-9; see also Gen 50:20.

<sup>105</sup> Ref. Exod 2:11-15.

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Hebrew nation from slavery.<sup>106</sup> He then instituted a well-developed system of government for the Hebrew nation. As recorded in Heb 11:24-27, his work as an advocate of a down-trodden, marginalized people places Moses in the select group of heroes of faith.

During the years in which Israel journeyed through the wilderness, an insurrection arose, spearheaded by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. These individuals criticized the leadership of Moses and Aaron and defied their authority. Moses replied, “If the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt.”<sup>107</sup> In essence, this rebellion against an established government was viewed as an insurgence against God Himself and was quelled by God’s direct intervention.

**The Case of Saul.** Although not in His preferred plan of a direct theocracy, God nevertheless instructed the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul as a political “leader over my people Israel.”<sup>108</sup> Some years later, however, when Saul had rejected God, Samuel informed him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you.”<sup>109</sup> In both instances it is evident that God becomes directly involved in setting up and deposing civil rulers.

In the story of Saul, we also find an intriguing incident regarding civil protest. One day, in a fit of rage, King Saul vowed to kill his son, Jonathan. The king’s soldiers, however, protested, “Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the LORD lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God’s help.”<sup>110</sup> Their political intervention was effective and Jonathan was spared, illustrating that political activism can alter a course of affairs and result in favorable outcomes for citizens.

**The Case of David.** Samuel had secretly anointed David as the next king of Israel. King Saul, well aware of David’s popularity, pursued him tenaciously, determined to kill him. By a strange turn of events, however,

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<sup>106</sup> Ref. Exod 2:23-14:31.

<sup>107</sup> Num 16:30.

<sup>108</sup> 1 Sam 9:15-17.

<sup>109</sup> 1 Sam 15:28; see also Acts 13:22.

<sup>110</sup> 1 Sam 14:44-45.

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Saul was found in David's power and his men urged him to kill Saul. David replied, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord."<sup>111</sup> On yet another occasion, Abishai requested David's permission to slay Saul. Again, David refused, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives, the Lord himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed."<sup>112</sup> In both situations, David seemed content to leave in God's hands the removal of corrupt leadership, at least in terms of a situation in which it would serve his own political career.

Years later, one of David's sons, Absalom, began engineering for the throne.

He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom . . . would say to him, 'Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you. . . . If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice.' Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. . . . So he stole the hearts of the men of Israel.<sup>113</sup>

The result of this political ambition and underhanded campaigning was an ill-fated rebellion.

Fleeing the rebellion, David left Jerusalem. Zadok and Abiathar brought out the ark of God, determined to loyally follow the king. When David realized what was happening, he said, "Aren't you priests? Go back to the city in peace."<sup>114</sup> From his reaction, David apparently assumed that religious leaders should not engage in partisan politics.

At a later date, Adonijah proclaimed himself king without David's knowledge. Nathan the prophet, aware of David's promise to Bathsheba that her son, Solomon, would be the next king, notified Bathsheba of the

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<sup>111</sup> 1 Sam 24:6.

<sup>112</sup> 1 Sam 26:7-11.

<sup>113</sup> 2 Sam 15:2-6.

<sup>114</sup> 1 Sam 15:27.

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development and urged her to petition David. Furthermore, Nathan offered to come before the king and intercede in her favor.<sup>115</sup> In this case, we find Nathan, a religious leader, endeavoring to guide the political process within ethical and moral parameters.

**The Case of Ahab.** As recorded in 1 Kings 21:5-13, Ahab and Jezebel conspired to take possession of Naboth's vineyard. They sent a secret communication to local officials,

Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.

As might be expected, Elijah, a religious leader, reproved Ahab for this base crime.

The most tragic part of the story, however, is that "the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them." If they had taken a position of integrity, in opposition to the immoral political directive, the tragic course of the nation might have been altered. It seems evident that both citizens and community leaders have a moral responsibility to resist the devastating impact of a corrupt government on innocent lives.

**The Case of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar.** Finding himself unexpectedly in alien territory, Daniel soon distinguished himself as an individual of ability, conviction, and integrity.<sup>116</sup> Shortly thereafter, furious with his wise men's inability to resolve a dream, Nebuchadnezzar ordered his guards to round up the magi for execution. Daniel requested Arioch, commander of the guard, for a brief stay in order to enable him to interpret the dream. Meeting Arioch the next morning, Daniel's first concern was for the well-being of the magi, who served as political advisors to the king.

Delighted that his dream had been interpreted, Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel ruler over the entire province of Babylon, a political position that Daniel accepted. Furthermore, at Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as provincial administrators. Daniel, a prophet of God, did not view as inappropriate that believers should occupy positions of civil responsibility in a pagan government.

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<sup>115</sup> Ref. 1 Kings 1:11-30.

<sup>116</sup> Ref. Dan 1:8-20.

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Daniel 3 records that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were present at the dedication of the golden image, as Nebuchadnezzar had directed, but refused to bow down to the image. In essence, they submitted to civil authority—presenting themselves and not resisting punishment, but refused to compromise moral principle by worshiping a false god. God approved of their stance by joining them in the fiery furnace.

As is tempting for powerful political figures, Nebuchadnezzar came to believe that the success of his empire was the result of his own acumen, and this resulted in a period of personal insanity. Three times in Daniel 4, which records Nebuchadnezzar's reflection on the experience, the principle is repeated that "the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will".<sup>117</sup> It seems clear that God is ultimately in control, even of secular government.

Under the Medo-Persian empire, Daniel was again appointed to a high government position. Due to political intrigue, a law was passed that no one should worship any god but the king for thirty days. "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."<sup>118</sup> When confronted with an edict contrary to his commitment to God, Daniel did not hesitate to engage in civil disobedience, but at the same time, he did not resist the consequences of his convictions.

**The Case of Nehemiah.** Nehemiah held a position of responsibility in the court of Artaxerxes. Although a contingent of Jews had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild, news reached Nehemiah that little progress had been made. His face mirroring his despondency, Nehemiah was asked by the king what the problem might be. When Nehemiah explained, Artaxerxes asked, "What is it you want?" Nehemiah writes, "Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, 'If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.'"<sup>119</sup>

When the king agreed, Nehemiah courageously presented a further request: "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest,

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<sup>117</sup> Verses 17, 25, and 32.

<sup>118</sup> Dan 6:10.

<sup>119</sup> Neh 2:4-5; subsequently, verses 7-8.

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so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” Artaxerxes not only granted this second request, but provided an escort of army officers and cavalry. With divine blessing, Nehemiah used his position in the court of a civil ruler to extend the work of God.

**The Case of Esther and Mordecai.** Although God is never directly referred to, the book of Esther presents a vivid portrayal of the great controversy between good and evil, played out in the domain of politics. The story begins with Esther, a young Jewish girl, selected from obscurity to be the queen of Xerxes, and her cousin, Mordecai, a civil servant, refusing to pay homage to Haman, a high official in the court.

Enraged, Haman determined revenge, intending not only to annihilate Mordecai, but to exterminate his entire race. When news of the intended genocide reached Mordecai, he asked for Esther’s assistance. When Esther demurred, Mordecai responded, “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”<sup>120</sup> Esther replied, “Gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

Cleverly, Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet, but left the king in suspense as to her motive. Unable to sleep that night, Xerxes requested that the royal records be read. Providentially, a portion was selected which recorded “that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.”<sup>121</sup> As Mordecai had not been rewarded for this act of loyalty, the following morning Xerxes instructed Haman to publicly honor Mordecai. That evening, at the king’s urging, Esther presented her request, “If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation.”<sup>122</sup> She then identified Haman as the perpetrator of the sinister plot.

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<sup>120</sup> Esth 4:14; subsequently, verse 16.

<sup>121</sup> Esth 6:2.

<sup>122</sup> Esth 7:3-4.

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After Haman's death, Xerxes instructed Mordecai to write a new decree to neutralize the original law. Mordecai wrote an edict granting the Jews "the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies."<sup>123</sup> An ethnic cleansing was thus averted.

In this extended narrative, we encounter (1) civil disobedience—Mordecai refusing to bow to Haman and Esther entering the king's presence uninvited, (2) a plan to lobby civil authority and avert genocide—inviting the king and Haman to a series of banquets, (3) a report to authorities of criminal activity—Mordecai revealing the assassination plot, (4) the enacting of new legislation to counteract the effects of a damaging law, and (5) the granting a threatened people group the right to defend themselves.

**The Case of Deborah, the Prophetess.** After the death of Joshua, the Israelites were oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan. Deborah, a prophetess, summoned Barak, instructed him to lead a revolt against Jabin, and personally joined the military campaign. Some Israelites, however, declined to become involved. "'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the Lord. 'Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the Lord, to help the Lord against the mighty.'"<sup>124</sup> Based on this incident, it seems apparent that there are situations where passivity is an inappropriate response.

**The Case of Baasha.** As noted in the experiences of Saul and Nebuchanezzar, the case of Baasha confirms that God installs and removes civil rulers. In this instance, however, it is clarified that this intervention is not an arbitrary act, but rather a response to that ruler's leadership. "Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha: 'I lifted you up from the dust and made you leader of my people Israel, but you walked in the ways of Jeroboam and caused my people Israel to sin and to provoke me to anger by their sins. So I am about to consume Baasha and his house.'"<sup>125</sup>

**The Case of Jehoshaphat.** In his government, Jehoshaphat appointed judges in each of the major cities of Judah. He reminded these men that they were to judge according to the divine standard—justly and

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<sup>123</sup> Esth 8:11.

<sup>124</sup> Judg 5:23.

<sup>125</sup> 1 Kgs 16:1-3.

without partiality or corruption.<sup>126</sup> The implication is that politicians should be held to ethical norms of leadership and conduct.

**The Case of Elisha.** Appreciative of the kindness shown to him by the woman of Shunam, the prophet Elisha offered to do something for her—perhaps to speak on her behalf to the king or commander of the army.<sup>127</sup> As illustrated in this incident, it seems appropriate, even for religious leaders, to intercede before government on behalf of those who may find themselves without voice.

**The Case of Jeremiah.** In commissioning the prophet Jeremiah, God gave him a political function: “Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”<sup>128</sup> Again we see God actively involved in the realm of human government; this time, however, by means of a specially appointed messenger.

**The Case of Cyrus.** In Isaiah 45:1-4, God refers to Cyrus as His “anointed”, even though Cyrus was not aware of God’s direct involvement in his life. Furthermore, Cyrus’ political role was prophesied some 170 years before he was born, indicating God’s foreknowledge of political personages and events. We might note that God’s involvement was “for the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen”—in order to assure the survival and well-being of His people.

**The Case of John the Baptist.** We now turn to a number of cases in the New Testament, beginning with John the Baptist. “Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, for John had been saying to him: ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’”<sup>129</sup> Luke 3:19-20 adds that in addition to the adulterous relationship with Herodias, John had rebuked Herod for “all the other evil things he had done.”

From John’s experience, it seems apparent that there is an obligation to speak out against corruption and immorality. In essence, respect of authority does not include a glossing over of sin. Christians cannot simply excuse what rulers do simply because of who they are.

**The Case of James and John.** In order to gain influence and perhaps occupy key positions in the anticipated kingdom, James and John enlisted the aid of their mother to petition Jesus that they might sit “at

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<sup>126</sup> Ref. 2 Chron 19:5-10.

<sup>127</sup> Ref. 2 Kgs 4:11-13.

<sup>128</sup> Jer 1:9-10.

<sup>129</sup> Matt 14:3-4.



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your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”<sup>130</sup> Jesus, however, declined to offer the brothers these prized positions, stating that “these places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

When the other disciples heard of what had transpired, they were indignant. Jesus then called the disciples together and said,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The principle emerges that seeking political office for the sake of position and prestige is contrary to the spirit of Jesus.

**The Case of Pilate.** There is an inherent danger in politics of valuing position over principle. This is evident in the case of Pilate. He knew that Jesus was innocent; even his wife, warned in a dream, cautioned him not to have “anything to do with that innocent man.”<sup>131</sup> Afraid, however, of the possible consequences to his political career, Pilate “washed his hands” of the matter and condemned Jesus to death.

**The Case of Peter and the Apostles.** Brought before the Sanhedrin, a religious-civil government, the apostles were given strict orders not to teach in the name of Jesus. Peter replied, “We must obey God rather than men!”<sup>132</sup> When members of the council urged that the apostles be put to death, Gamaliel intervened on their behalf, persuading the council and securing their release. Although flogged, the disciples were not intimidated by the threats of the Sanhedrin. “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” This episode clarifies (1) that the Christian must maintain loyalty to a Higher Authority than civil government, (2) that civil disobedience can be an appropriate response, and (3) that when in a position of civil authority, as was Gamaliel, one is able to exert an influence on the side of good.

**The Case of Paul.** Prior to his conversion, Saul of Tarsus was deeply involved in politics. As a Pharisee and roving representative of the Sanhedrin, he was an energetic member of one of the most active

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<sup>130</sup> Matt 20:21-23; subsequently, verses 25-28.

<sup>131</sup> Matt 27:19-24; see also John 19:12-13.

<sup>132</sup> Acts 5:27; subsequently verses 34-42.

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political parties in Jewish society. He also saw good opportunity to advance his career by persecuting the followers of Jesus.<sup>133</sup> On the road to Damascus, however, he encountered Christ and the direction of his life changed. As this early incident in Paul's experience illustrates, it is possible that involvement in politics may run contrary to God's plan for a Christian's life.

Throughout his ministry, Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen on various occasions to further the gospel and to work for his own protection.<sup>134</sup> In Philippi, for example, Paul and Silas were publicly beaten and thrown into prison. During the night, freed by the jolt of an earthquake, they did not try to escape, but used the opportunity to witness to the jailer. In the morning, the magistrates sent their officers to release Paul and Silas. Paul, however, stated, "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."<sup>135</sup> In essence, Paul requested a public admission that the government position was wrong and that the fledgling Christian community in Philippi posed no threat to Roman law.

On a subsequent occasion, a Roman commander decided that Paul should be examined by flogging.

As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" . . . Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.<sup>136</sup>

A few days later, apprised of a sinister plot against his life, Paul notified the Roman authorities of the conspiracy and accepted the protection of two centurions and 470 soldiers to deliver him into the custody of Felix, the governor.<sup>137</sup> Once in Caesarea, however, Paul declined to bribe Felix for his release. Finally, appearing before Festus, Paul maintained

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<sup>133</sup> Ref. Acts 22:3-14.

<sup>134</sup> Incidents may be found in Acts 16:35-40; 22:24-29; 23:12-33; 25:10-12.

<sup>135</sup> Acts 16:37. The Lex Valeria (509 B.C.), Lex Porcia (248 B.C.), and Lex Julia (23 B.C.) shielded Roman citizens from humiliating public punishment, such as beating with rods. Furthermore, a Roman citizen was always entitled to a trial before punishment was administered.

<sup>136</sup> Acts 22:25-29.

<sup>137</sup> Ref. Acts 23-25.

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his innocence and used his right as a Roman citizen to appeal for a hearing before Caesar. We might note, however, that Paul's appeal for trial in Rome was not primarily to save his life, but in order to enable him to carry the gospel directly to the imperial court.<sup>138</sup>

These experiences in Paul's life illustrate several key concepts: (1) When knowledgeable of its laws, the believer may appeal to the state for justice and for protection of the well-being of its citizens. (2) Christians may use their legal rights as citizens to maintain freedom and to further the gospel. (3) A Christian must be submissive to civil authority (e.g., remaining in the Philippian jail when he had ample opportunity to escape), but refrain from participation in its corruption (e.g., refusing to bribe Felix for release).

**The Example of Christ.** In each facet of our lives, we are to follow the example and teaching of Jesus. Consequently, it is particularly important for us to ask: How did Jesus respond when faced with the political issues of His day? What did He expect of His disciples, and, by extension, of His followers today? It is in considering the life and ministry of Jesus that we may best clarify the relationship of the Christian and politics.

Christ was to exercise the power of government. Centuries prior to Christ's birth, Isaiah wrote:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called . . . Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.<sup>139</sup>

Shortly after His birth, Jesus was, in fact, targeted by Herod as a potential political rival, who tried unsuccessfully to destroy Him.<sup>140</sup>

After His baptism, Christ was tempted by the devil. The final temptation involved a political dimension: "The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'"<sup>141</sup> Jesus successfully resisted the allure of worldly power with

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<sup>138</sup> See Acts 23:11; 2 Tim 4:6.

<sup>139</sup> Isa 9:6-7.

<sup>140</sup> Ref. Matt 2:7-18.

<sup>141</sup> Mat 4:8-10

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the response, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

When Jesus announced in Nazareth the beginning of His ministry, He outlined far-reaching political principles, suggesting that fundamental changes would be needed in the basic structures of society: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.”<sup>142</sup> Christ’s daily life was, in fact, a grassroots effort—associating with castaways, eating with the rejected of society, bringing hope to the marginalized and exploited.<sup>143</sup> He spoke out against societal wrongs—not caring for aged parents and “devouring widows’ houses.”<sup>144</sup> He declined, however, to become installed as a civil authority, stating, in response to a dispute over inheritance, “Who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”<sup>145</sup>

Christ clearly dealt, nonetheless, with sociopolitical issues—so much so that people wanted to crown Him king.<sup>146</sup> How did Jesus, a leader with personal charisma and gifts of oratory, respond to this groundswell? Did He seize it as an opportunity to enunciate a political platform, to clean up an immoral and corrupt government, or to free his nation from the yoke of Rome? If He had decided to set up His kingdom on earth, there is ample evidence that He would have been successful.<sup>147</sup> It appears, however, that Christ was not interested in holding political office or in revolutionizing the political order. Rather, he made it clear that His kingdom was “not of this world.”<sup>148</sup> His goal was to change society one heart at a time.

Christ’s teachings are also instructive. He promoted, for example, the principle of non-violence. “If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.”<sup>149</sup> He focused on service, rather than on position. When a contention erupted among His disciples as to which of them was the greatest, Jesus advised, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them;

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<sup>142</sup> Luke 4:18.

<sup>143</sup> Recorded, for example, in Matt 9:10-11; Luke 7:34; Luke 19:1-8; John 4:1-42.

<sup>144</sup> Mat 15:5; Luke 20:47.

<sup>145</sup> Luke 12:13-14.

<sup>146</sup> Ref. John 6:15.

<sup>147</sup> See, for example, Luke 19:38; John 12:13-15.

<sup>148</sup> John 18:36.

<sup>149</sup> Luke 6:29.

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and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. . . . I am among you as one who serves.”<sup>150</sup>

Christ also advocated the concept of submission to civil authority within the framework of allegiance to God. When the unlikely alliance of the Pharisees and the Herodians tried to entrap Him with a question of taxation, Jesus replied, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”<sup>151</sup>

In particular, the final hours of Christ’s life speak persuasively regarding the Christian’s relation to government and politics. In Gethsemane, Christ prayed that his followers, although in the world, might not become “of the world.”<sup>152</sup> When confronted by a mob, sent by the civil-religious authorities to arrest Him, He did not attempt to resist or escape, although He did request that His disciples might not be apprehended. In an act of loyalty and perhaps desperation, Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant. Jesus responded, “Put your sword back in its place. . . . for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”<sup>153</sup>

Although Jesus would not defend himself against the false accusations, when the Roman governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “Yes, it is as you say.”<sup>154</sup> He went on to clarify, however, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest.”<sup>155</sup> Later, when Pilate asked, “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”<sup>156</sup>

Although Jesus was accused of being politically subversive, Pilate declared him to be innocent of political resistance to Roman power, stating, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”<sup>157</sup> Falsely condemned

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<sup>150</sup> Luke 22:24-27.

<sup>151</sup> Matt 22:21. Not Caesar *or* God, but Caesar *and* God. While the coins stamped with Caesar’s image belong to him, Christians are to give God that which is stamped with the image of God—their lives (Gen 1:26-27).

<sup>152</sup> Ref. John 17:11-16.

<sup>153</sup> Matt 26:52; also John 18:3-8.

<sup>154</sup> Matt 26:62-63; 27:11.

<sup>155</sup> John 18:36.

<sup>156</sup> John 19:10-11.

<sup>157</sup> Luke 23:2-4; also Matt 27:29.

on political charges as “King of the Jews,” Christ died on the cross, a sign of political execution.<sup>158</sup>

As disciples of Christ, Christians are to live the life of Christ. They are to practice the “politics of Jesus.”<sup>159</sup> In Christ’s own words: “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”<sup>160</sup>

**Sketch of a Reasoned Stance on the Relation of the Christian and Politics**

With a consideration of biblical principles and cases, as well as a backdrop of historical antecedents, we return to the fundamental question: How then should a Christian relate to politics? While each of the five positions earlier noted (see Figure 1) can help us to understand particular facets of this relationship, and could perhaps become an appropriate response in a given situation, it would seem that there should also be an overarching perspective which can guide the Christian in his or her relation to politics.

This response might be described as a position of Lordship—the recognition that Jesus Christ is Lord of all<sup>161</sup> and that human society in each of its dimensions must be cognizant of His sovereignty (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Relationship of Christianity and Politics—The Position of Lordship**

Focus	Depiction	Kingdom View	Orientation Toward Politics
Christ infuses and transforms Politics		The Encompassing Kingdom	Evil is opposed, but politics, as an element of human culture, is affirmed and elevated, by God’s grace.

In this perspective, the Christian acknowledges that the sovereignty of Christ extends to all facets of life, including the political arena. This approach is biblical. Paul, for example, writes, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>162</sup> “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of

<sup>158</sup> Ref. John 19:14; Matt 27:37. P. Hiebert, “Mission in Times of Conflict,” in Victor Adrian and Donald Loewen (Eds.). *Committed to World Mission: A Focus on International Strategy* (Winnipeg: Kindred, 1990), 37-45.

<sup>159</sup> Yoder, 1972, 190.

<sup>160</sup> John 20:21.

<sup>161</sup> Ref. Acts 10:36; 1 Cor 1:2.

<sup>162</sup> Col 3:17.

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God.”<sup>163</sup> The believer then sees himself not as possessing dual citizenship, but as a citizen of the *encompassing kingdom* of God.

In this perspective, politics is not viewed as a demonic domain (Rejection), nor as a necessary evil (Paradox). On the other hand, it is not seen as basically neutral, but deficient (Critical Collaboration), nor as essentially good (Synthesis). Neither is politics viewed as an arena on which the will of God must be imposed by human agents (Domination).

Rather, the Christian recognizes that mankind is embroiled in the cosmic conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan.<sup>164</sup> This great controversy perspective acknowledges manifestations of both good and evil in each aspect of society, including politics. Thus, in the Christian worldview, evil is opposed, yet human culture is affirmed and elevated, by the grace of God.

This position of Lordship may call for involvement in social causes—caring for the suffering and anguish of others, speaking out for social justice. It may include non-violent activism, particularly where moral issues are involved. Forms of political activism that could fit particularly well within this perspective include roles of advocacy, mediation, and conciliation. The Lordship perspective may involve casting one’s vote in favor of specific issues or platforms, rather than merely as a reflection of partisan alignment. Provided that one does not compromise biblical principle, it may lead a Christian to hold political office in order to better address injustices or enhance the well-being of others. Finally, while the Christian is to respect earthly government, there may be occasion for civil disobedience when the requirements of the state conflict with those of the kingdom of God.

The position of Lordship thus recognizes that there are perils as well as opportunities for the Christian. There are dangers of compromise of principle and of a corruption of values, as well allowing an involvement with politics to become all-absorbing. At the same time, there are key opportunities for fulfilling the divine mandate to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world,”<sup>165</sup> serving as an effective witness for God. This perspective may consequently involve a radical reorientation of thinking—from seeing Christian engagement primarily in terms of political action, to viewing political involvement as the faithful response of witness.

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<sup>163</sup> 1 Cor 10:31; also Ps 47:8.

<sup>164</sup> Ref. Gen 3; Rev 12:17.

<sup>165</sup> Matt 5:13-15; also Isa 43:10.

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While degree and form of political participation may vary for the institutional Church, its leaders, and individual members, the mission of the gospel must always include both the *proclamation*, as well as the tangible *revelation* of who God is. This commission involves standing with voice and vote against immorality and in favor of all that is just and compassionate.<sup>166</sup> It includes caring for God's creation in all of its diversity—even “the least of these my brethren.”<sup>167</sup> It involves furthering the kingdom of God through our witness and through our service. In essence, it is a commitment to live a life *like* Christ, *of* Christ, and *for* Christ in every way.

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<sup>166</sup> Ref. Mic 6:8.

<sup>167</sup> Matt 25:40.



## **Darwin and the Gospel Commission: How Does Our View of Origins Impact the Evangelistic Mission of the Church?**

Stephen Bauer  
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In 1991, James Rachels, professor of philosophy at the University of Alabama, Birmingham from 1977 until his death from cancer in 2003,<sup>1</sup> published *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James Rachels (1941-2003) first served as chair of the philosophy department, then as dean of arts and humanities. He returned to regular professorship in 1983 and continued in that capacity until his death from cancer in 2003. According to the University Radio Station, WBHM, his textbook, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is about to become the most sold ethics textbook in history, currently used as required reading in about one-third of all university ethics courses in U. S. colleges and universities. See, WBHM, "In Memoriam: James Rachels 1941-2003," Undated, <http://www.wbhm.org/News/2003/rachels.html> (18 May 2004). For an obituary of James Rachels copied from the *Birmingham News*, see, "James Rachels, Ph.D. 1941-2003," 6 September 2003, <http://www.bradpriddy.com/rachels/obituary.htm> (18 May 2004).

<sup>2</sup> James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991), 1-4. Hereafter cited as *CfA*. Rachels' book has a well-done presentation on the history of the debate between Christians and evolutionists regarding the moral implications of Darwinian evolution. See also, C. Leon Harris, *Evolution: Genesis and Revelations* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1981), 17-18, who also presents a series of fundamentalist assertions regarding the moral implications of evolution. A more general history is found in Duane McCampbell, "The Development and Failure of the Nineteenth-Century Evolutionary Theory of Ethics," *Restoration Quarterly* 26 (1983): 161-71. For a conservative Christian overview of evolutionary ethics, see Ian T. Taylor, *In the Minds of Men: Darwin and the New World Order* (Toronto: TFE, 1984), 340-430. Taylor credits Darwinism for being the root of today's teaching of situation ethics. He likewise cites a humanist author as declaring that Darwin's discovery sounded the death knell of religious and moral values (421-22).

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In this work Rachels sets out to demonstrate how Darwinism (or any other materialist view of origins) undermines traditional Judeo-Christian morality. Rachels sees traditional morality as centered on the protection of human rights at the expense of the rest of the natural world. His significance is that he seeks to establish the moral implications of Darwin's theory by directly attacking traditional Judeo-Christian ethics and morality.

As part of this attack on Christian morality, Rachels identifies two ways that Darwinism undermines forms of theism compatible with classic Judeo-Christian theology. The first way is through the problem of natural evil, which I shall only briefly explore in this article. The second is to argue that Darwin's theory centers on the rejection of teleology, i.e. design, and that any form of theism based in divine will and design is incompatible with Darwinism.<sup>3</sup> This article will focus mainly on this second issue to see if Rachels' claims hold true.

In order to get to the implications of Darwin's theory for the mission of the church, I shall first make a moderately extensive investigation of Rachels' claims concerning the impact of a non-teleological view of God on morality and theology. I will do this, in part, by examining views expounded by the new discipline of evolutionary theology. The reason for examining the discipline of evolutionary theology is that its theologians do not have the strong bonds of biblical tradition to hinder taking the implications of a theology based on Darwin to its logical conclusions, unlike many SDA scientists and theologians who have such traditions to limit their intellectual explorations. Hence, the evolutionary theologians provide evidence independent of our presuppositions regarding the implications of evolution for theology.

This exploration of moral and theological implications of Darwinism is necessary to set up key moral and theological concepts that will become the basis of my exploration of the possible impact of Darwin's theory on the mission of the church. I will particularly focus on how such theological views may impact the mission of the Seventh-day Church.

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<sup>3</sup> Rachels sees the human-preference element of traditional ethics as grounded in two principles that he labels the "image of God thesis" and the "rationality thesis." In the first, humans are entitled to special protection since they are the image of God while animals are not, while the second argues that humans hold a privileged position because they have reason and animals do not. Rachels summarizes his work at the end of chapter 4 in *CfA* by stating that chapter 3 is dedicated to showing how Darwinism undermines the image-of-God thesis, while chapter 4 is focused on undermining the rationality thesis (171).

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The unifying question for this article, then, is this: Can an interpretation of God devoid of design adequately support our current identity and mission?

A final observation is in order before embarking on our task. The scope of this article means that I cannot expend much effort in rebutting the various views of God, the problem of evil, and more, while keeping to the focus of my core question. Some footnotes will refer you to other work I have done in this area, but overall, the limits of this paper prevent me from playing the apologist in these matters. With these matters in mind, let us turn to our core question: Can an interpretation of God devoid of design adequately support our current identity and mission? To begin our search for the answer, we must address the question of how Darwinism undermines teleology in theology.

**Overview of Rachels' Position**

We shall open our inquiry by examining Rachels' use of the problem of evil to undermine Christian morality and theology. As Rachels notes, "The existence of evil has always been a chief obstacle to belief in an all-good, all-powerful God. How can God and evil co-exist? If God is perfectly good, he would not want evil to exist; and if he is all-powerful, he is able to eliminate it. Yet evil exists. Therefore, the argument goes, God must not exist."<sup>4</sup> Rachels lists five traditional answers offered by theologians<sup>5</sup> and then argues that the excessive amount of evil in the world and the distinction between moral and natural evil combine to undermine these traditional answers.<sup>6</sup> However, he admits that "All these arguments are available to reconcile God's existence with evil. Certainly, then, the

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>5</sup> 1. "Perhaps evil is necessary so that we may appreciate the good. . . . 2. Perhaps evil is a punishment for man's sin. Before the fall people lived in Paradise. It was their own fault sin that resulted in their expulsion. Therefore, people suffer because they have brought it on themselves. 3. Perhaps evil is placed in the world so that, by struggling with it, human beings can develop moral character. . . . 4. Perhaps evil is the unavoidable consequence of man's free will. In order to make us moral agents, rather than mere robots, it was necessary for God to endow us with free will. But in making us free agents, God enabled *us* to cause evil, even though he would not cause it himself. 5. Or, if all else fails, the theist can always fall back on the idea that our limited human intelligence is insufficient to comprehend God's great design. There is a reason for evil; we just aren't smart enough to figure out what it is." *CfA*, 104.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

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simple version of the argument from evil does not force the theist to abandon belief.”<sup>7</sup>

In reference to the theism issue, Rachels asserts that Darwin’s theory would expect natural evil, suffering and unhappiness to be widespread as it is, while the divine hypothesis view would not. “Thus,” asserts Rachels, “Darwin believed, natural selection accounts for the facts regarding happiness and unhappiness in the world, whereas the rival hypothesis of divine creation did not.”<sup>8</sup>

This last point is especially crucial for Rachels. He notes that Darwin sought an account of origins and life that most easily fits the facts of suffering with the least amount of explanatory contortions. On this account, Rachels claims that “Divine creation is a poor hypothesis because it fits the facts badly.”<sup>9</sup> In the mean time, the current patterns of suffering are said to be just what Darwin and his theory would expect with natural selection in process. Rachels thus argues that the biblical doctrine of creation is less parsimonious than Darwinian evolution, particularly in ex-

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in original.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. For a fuller exploration of the problem of evil and Christian responses to it, see Stephen Bauer, “Moral Implications of Darwinian Evolution for Human Preference Based in Christian Ethics: A Critical Analysis and Response to the “Moral Individualism” of James Rachels” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 2006), 243-266. A couple of interesting arguments I examine include Casserly’s argument concerning the problem of good: If our world is merely a system of natural cause and effect, where did all the good in this world come from? A purely atheistical viewpoint should not expect such levels of good. He concludes that the problem of evil for the theist is not nearly as vexing as the problem of good is for the atheist (J. V. Langmead Casserley, *Evil and Evolutionary Eschatology: Two Essays*, ed. C. Don Keys. Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 39. [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1990], 11; Idem, *Man’s Pain and God’s Goodness* [London: Mowbray, 1951], 38-39). See also, C. S. Lewis, who makes a similar argument, quipping, “It is mere nonsense to put pain among the discoveries of science. Lay down this book and reflect for five minutes on the fact that all the great religions were first preached, and long practiced, in a world without chloroform” (*The Problem of Pain: How Human Suffering Raises Almost Intolerable Intellectual Problems* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1962], 15).

Additionally, it seems that most who challenge Christianity with the problem of evil seem to have an overly optimistic view of human abilities in wisdom and knowledge. Hence, if we cannot understand why God permits something, there must be no good reason. The assumption is biblically fallacious, denying our limits and indicting God based on a hubris devoid of humble recognition of those limits.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 106.

plaining the presence of natural evil.<sup>10</sup> Since Darwin has, in Rachels' view, presented an alternative to divine creation that is viable and exhibits greater parsimony, the divine creation hypothesis is now undermined by good reasons. Feeling he has established this point, Rachels now turns to the issue of teleology.

### Teleology: The Central Issue

Rachels credits Marx with pinpointing the "philosophical nerve" of Darwin's theory. According to Rachels, Marx declared the theory of evolution to be "the death blow . . . to 'Teleology' in the natural sciences."<sup>11</sup> Thus, it may be that the most significant aspect of Darwin's theory is his overall rejection of teleology in nature. Rachels reminds us that "a teleological explanation is an explanation of something in terms of its function and purpose: the heart is for pumping blood, the lungs are for breathing, and so on."<sup>12</sup> Teleology thus implies a purpose or design, which must have been determined by the intentions of a maker. But there can be no designer in Darwinian evolution, and as Rachels notes, "If there is no maker—if the object in question is not an artifact—does it make sense to speak of a 'purpose'?" The answer is, "No," says Rachels. Any purposes attributed are merely those *we* assign. Thus, "the connection between function and conscious intention is, in Darwin's theory, completely severed."<sup>13</sup>

Rachels has thus highlighted the debate over the design argument (offered by Paley), which is considered by many to be definitively refuted by Hume.<sup>14</sup> The problem is, notes Rachels, that Hume and other critics of the design argument only pointed out logical deficiencies in the design argument, but "they could not supply a *better way* of understanding the apparent design of nature. . . . Darwin did what Hume could not do: he provided an alternative, giving people something else they could

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<sup>10</sup> Tom Regan places much emphasis on the principle of parsimony or simplicity in his argumentation, including some discussion and description of the principle. See *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983), 21-24.

<sup>11</sup> Rachels, *CfA*, 110-111.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Rachels admits, "It is an exaggeration to say that Darwin dealt teleology a death blow; even after Darwin we still find biologists offering teleological explanations. But now they are offered in a different spirit. Biological function is no longer compared to the function of consciously designed artifacts" (112).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-112.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

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believe. Only then was the design hypothesis dead.”<sup>15</sup> For Rachels, then, it is the fact that Darwin’s theory provided a rational alternative to teleology that makes Darwin’s theory so capable of undermining any form of theism necessary to sustain traditional Christian morality.

The issue here, however, is not the efficacy of the design versus materialism argument. It is, rather, that to accept Darwin’s theory is to accept that there is no purpose or design in nature at all. This completely opposes classic Judeo-Christian theism, in which there is a cosmic design and purpose, often articulated by Adventists in terms of the Great Controversy motif. Rachels asks his clinching question: “Can theism be separated from belief in design? It would be a heroic step, because the design hypothesis is not an insignificant component of traditional religious belief. But it can be done, and in fact it has been done, by eighteenth-century deists.”<sup>16</sup>

Deism, he notes, rejects any personal-relational view of God, replacing that with a God who created natural laws, made the world, and now lets it run itself by those natural laws. The God of deism is hands-off and not concerned with details. Thus, there is theism without teleological design.<sup>17</sup> What is the significance of this for Rachels? Rachels declares, “Since deism is a consistent theistic view, it is tempting simply to conclude that theism and Darwinism must be compatible, and to say no more. But the temptation should be resisted, at least *until we have made clear what has been given up* in the retreat to deism.”<sup>18</sup> In the words of Sigmund Freud, the God of the deists is “nothing but an insubstantial shadow and no longer the mighty personality of religious doctrine.”<sup>19</sup> All

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 120. Emphasis in original.

<sup>16</sup> Rachels, *CfA*, 125.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: Liveright, 1928), 57. Of further interest is that between pp. 25 and 35, Freud argues that deities are human inventions to personalize the forces of nature so that man can feel he has a relationship with these forces that will enable man to manipulate nature or at least be protected from it. Thus, Freud casts human culture as a tool to aid the dynamic of man versus nature. This clearly depicts a culture where man is viewed as special apart from nature and juxtaposed against it. In relation to Rachels’ use of the quotation in the text above, it is significant that Freud asserts, “And *the more autonomous nature becomes and the more the gods withdraw from her*, the more earnestly are all expectations concentrated on the third task assigned to them” (p. 31, emphasis mine). Freud astutely connects autonomy of nature to a withdrawal from divine dominance, thus underscoring Rachels’ assertion that deism is too anemic a theism to support traditional morality.

that is left is the concept of God as the original cause. But, says Rachels, Darwin has asserted that to say the original cause is God is merest speculation. It can be asserted but no good reasons can be given to substantiate it. And, in fact, Rachels asserts that if we can accept that God is uncaused, then there is no good reason to reject the assertion that the universe is uncaused.<sup>20</sup> Thus, for Rachels, Darwinism clearly undermines biblical theism so severely that, in Rachels' words, "the atheistical conclusion can be resisted, but only at great cost."<sup>21</sup> For Rachels, the cost is severe enough that he asserts that a theism compatible with Darwin's theory is too weak to support traditional Christian morality.

### Darwinian Theism

**Introduction.** Rachels has asserted that if theism is maintained with belief in Darwinism, then the type of theism permitted cannot support traditional ethics, especially in the matter of human preference. But how efficacious is this claim?

There are two issues imbedded in Rachels' conclusion. First, all the argumentation concerning God, from Darwin to Rachels, presupposes a particular doctrine of God. What doctrine of God is thus depicted? Second, are there any theologians who have attempted to build a theological view of God based on the principles of Darwinism? If so, what are some of the implications for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission?

**Darwin's God.** Plantinga offers us an initial answer to the first question. He notes that the only arguments for incompatibility between God and evolution "have turned from deductive to *probabilistic* arguments from evil." Thus, "the typical atheological claim at present is not that the existence of God is *incompatible* with that of evil, but rather, that the latter offers the resources for a strong probabilistic argument against the former."<sup>22</sup> However, the probabilistic argument (a type of parsimony assertion) itself assumes a particular doctrine of God. This issue is superbly developed by Cornelius Hunter.

Hunter cites numerous claims by evolutionists, giving various reasons why "God would not have created [the present natural order] in this way."<sup>23</sup> He calls this approach "negative theology" because it is offering

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<sup>20</sup> Rachels, *CfA*, 108, 126.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 127, 126.

<sup>22</sup> Plantinga, 71.

<sup>23</sup> In many parts of this book Hunter quotes or cites an evolutionist making such a claim. For examples see, Hunter, 12-13, 44-49, 63-64, 81-84, 98-99, 109-110.

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proof by negative instead of positive evidence.<sup>24</sup> But in so doing, argues Hunter, “they are beholden to a specific notion of God, and notions of God, no matter how carefully considered, are outside the realm of science.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, a major assumption of the evolutionary position is not scientific at all! And this point is foundational to why Hunter calls Darwin’s theory the “evolution theodicy.”<sup>26</sup> But why does Hunter see Darwin as so theological?

Hunter argues that a seminal influence on Darwin was Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In Hunter’s view, Milton was addressing the problem of evil, and solved it by distancing God from the creation. “Both men were dealing with the problem of evil—Milton with moral evil and Darwin with natural evil—and both found solutions by distancing God from evil. And most important, the two held similar conceptions of God.”<sup>27</sup> However,

Darwin’s solution distanced God from creation to the point that God was unnecessary. One could still believe in God, but not in God’s providence. Separating God from creation and its evils meant that God could have no direct influence or control over the world. God may have created the world, but ever since that point it has run according to impersonal natural laws that may now and then produce natural evil.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, “Darwin was now increasing this separation to the point that the link between creation and God was severed.”<sup>29</sup> According to Hunter, the result is that “God, on the one hand, is seen as all-good but not necessarily all-powerful, or at least does not exercise all his power. God is virtuous, not dictatorial.”<sup>30</sup> But notice, then, that elimination of God is no longer necessary. “The end result of Darwin’s theory is not that there is

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 47-48. See also 97, 103.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 13. Hunter frequently calls evolution a theodicy and, on 173-175, closes the book on this theme.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 17. Mattill makes an observation similar to Hunter’s by asserting that when Darwin proposed natural selection as the creative force, “Darwin rewrote Genesis and transferred God’s workload to the process of evolution, even as Newton had transferred another part of the divine workload to gravity. Biology and astronomy were *dislodging God from governing the world*.” A. J. Mattill, Jr., *The Seven Mighty Blows to Traditional Beliefs* (Gordo: Flatwoods Free, 1995), 26. Emphasis mine.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 146.



no God, but rather, that God is disjoint from the material world. . . . In evolution theodicy, the Creator must be disjoint from creation, but no more than this is required.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, Hunter disagrees with Rachels that Darwinism makes atheism difficult to resist, but agrees that the theory of evolution does entail a view of God not compatible with traditional Christian theism. Is Hunter on the right track in arguing that Darwinism offers deliverance from the problem of evil through a reinterpretation of God that saves God’s goodness by limiting his power?

### **A Theology of Evolution**

**Introduction.** From the late twentieth century until the present, we find movement in the direction of promoting such a theology. First, authors such as Michael Ruse and Kenneth Miller deny that Darwinism is incompatible with belief in God.<sup>32</sup> Both seem to leave the door open for a variety of theological options. But how wide is a wide array of options? Ruse recognizes that for those who read Genesis literally, “the Darwinian reading of Genesis is going to give you major problems—insoluble problems, I suspect.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, the portal to religious Darwinism may not be as wide as is touted. Not all may enter, though some have, and the results are fascinating.

**Putting Darwin into Theology.** John F. Haught, possibly the leading scholar in the recently formed movement of evolutionary theology, laments that it is not just the discipline of theology that has failed to grapple with the implications of Darwin’s theory; neither have the philosophers. “If theology has fallen short of the reality of evolution, however, so also has the world of thought in general. . . . Philosophy also has yet to produce an understanding of reality—an ontology—adequate of evolution.”<sup>34</sup> Thus he charges that, “to a great extent, theologians still think and write almost as if Darwin had never lived.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>32</sup> Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?: The Relationship between Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 138, 216, 217; Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin’s God: A Scientist’s Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), xii.

<sup>33</sup> Ruse, 217.

<sup>34</sup> John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder: Westview, 2000), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 2. One might be tempted to think that Haught has forgotten the work of Teilhard de Chardin in combining theology with Darwinian evolution, but Haught assures us otherwise. “Although Teilhard himself was a profoundly religious thinker, he was not a professional theologian, and so his own efforts to construe a ‘God for evolution’

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Haught responds to this problem by proposing the possibilities of a theology informed by evolution.

I shall argue in the pages ahead that Darwin has gifted us with an account of life whose depth, beauty, and pathos—when seen in the context of the larger cosmic epic of evolution—expose[s] us afresh to the raw reality of the sacred and to a resoundingly meaningful universe.<sup>36</sup>

Haught expresses high hopes about the prospects of a Darwinian theology: “I cannot here emphasize enough, therefore, the gift evolution can be to our theology. For us to turn our backs on it, as so many Christians continue to do, is to lose a great opportunity to deepen our understanding of the wisdom and self-effacing love of God.”<sup>37</sup>

But what would such a theology be like? First it is not the same as natural theology. Haught declares: “Evolutionary theology, unlike natural theology, does not search for definitive footprints of the divine in nature. . . . Instead of trying to prove God’s existence from nature, evolutionary theology seeks to show how our new awareness of cosmic and biological evolution can enhance and enrich traditional teachings about God and God’s way of acting in the world.”<sup>38</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu further asserts that: “Evolutionary theology wishes to keep open the possibility that all forms of creaturehood (plant and animal alike) are dimensions of divine disclosure and can enlighten us in our desire to understand God more deeply and respond in faith more fully. Evolutionary theology is committed to a radically open-ended understanding of how the divine reveals itself in and to the world.”<sup>39</sup> This means that in evolutionary theology, nature is not used as evidence to prove classical attributes of God. Rather, both Darwinian evolution and God’s creatorship are assumed to be true. Thus, evolution shows us how God created, and this method of creating, in turn, deepens our understanding of who God is and how He operates. However, Haught cautions, “trying to locate God’s

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stopped short of the systematic development his intuitions demanded.” See, John F. Haught, *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Boulder: Westview, 2003), 162.

<sup>36</sup> Haught, *God After Darwin*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> John F. Haught, *Responses to 101 Questions on God and Evolution* (New York: Paulist, 2001), 114.

<sup>38</sup> Haught, *God After Darwin*, 36.

<sup>39</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 88.

activity within or at the level of natural biological causation really amounts to a shrinkage of God. This approach is known as ‘god-of-the-gaps’ theology. . . . A god-of-the-gaps approach is a science stopper. . . . But, even worse, it is theologically idolatrous. It makes divine action one link in the world’s chain of finite causes rather than the ultimate ground of all natural causes.”<sup>40</sup>

This, in turn, means that we cannot ascribe specific activity to God, just as Rachels predicted. The result, as O’Murchu notes, is that “evolutionary theology borrows liberally from process thought.”<sup>41</sup> O’Murchu further asserts that “the process position challenges the assumption that our God must always be a ruling, governing power above and beyond God’s own creation.”<sup>42</sup> Why is the tendency to favor process theology significant? O’Murchu explains, “What conventional believers find unacceptable about the process position is the notion of a vulnerable God, allegedly at the mercy of capricious forces as are all other creatures of the universe.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the first significant theological impact of Darwin that we shall examine is the limiting of God’s power in order to save His goodness.

**Limiting God’s Power to Save His Goodness.** The limiting of divine power is one of the early issues that Haught examines in his book, *God After Darwin*. Early in the book, Haught examines David Hull’s argument that the present order is incompatible with the concept of God. Hull asks, “What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomenon epitomized by the species on Darwin’s Galapagos Islands?” He eventually answers, “The God of the Galapagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. This is not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.”<sup>44</sup> But would this not impeach the goodness of God, as Hull has charged?

A number of theologians and philosophers would answer this question, “No.” They argue that natural evil is unavoidable for God because His power is limited. Bertocci argues that “*the evidence indicates God is not omnipotent,*” and goes on to argue that only by having limited power

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<sup>40</sup> Haught, *101 Questions*, 18-19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> David L. Hull, “The God of the Galapagos,” *Nature* 352 (August 8, 1991): 486. The last lines are quoted in Haught, *God After Darwin*, 6.

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can God's moral goodness be preserved.<sup>45</sup> C. Don Keyes states that through the work of Julian Casserley, he has come to the conclusion that

God ought not to be defined primarily in terms of sovereignty and power. The implications of this statement liberated me from interpreting God's omnipotence as the kind of coercive power capable of always preventing evil. Instead, I now firmly believe with Plato that the goodness of God is his most essential quality and that he is the author only of the good things that happen. Ultimately 'power' and 'good' are different kinds of reality, but of the two, good is more absolutely attributable to God. The power of the good is almost always indirect.<sup>46</sup>

Keys gives no good reasons for ascribing goodness as an absolute quality while treating omnipotence as a symbolic or relative quality, other than the ability to explain evil, and possibly the support of Plato. It is also significant, as we shall soon see, that goodness becomes the supreme, untouchable attribute of God to which all other attributes, including power, seem to be subjugated.

Korsmeyer echoes the refrain in which God's power is limited in order to preserve his goodness.

The painfully slow evolution of life, spreading in great diversity into all available niches, trying out all possible avenues of advance, the huge role of chance, the stumbling advances to greater complexity, all these things suggest a divine nature *at*

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<sup>45</sup> Bertocci, 413-414. Emphasis in original. See also 466-467, where he repeats his argument that limited power is the only way to maintain God's moral goodness.

<sup>46</sup> C. Don Keyes, "Julian Casserley's Hope," in *Evil and Evolutionary Eschatology: Two Essays*, xxii-xxiii. Casserley actually says little about God's power, but what he says seems to agree with Keyes's reaction to his work. In this quote, Casserley is combating a form of humanism he perceives to focus on developing human power but not human morality:

"Strangely enough, most of those humanists who seem drawn towards a humanism of power are precisely the people who are most apt to react against a conception of God as kind of a celestial policeman wielding absolute powers over men. For myself, I not only object to a conception of God that thinks of him merely, or even primarily in terms of sovereignty and power, but I object also to any conception of man that thinks of him merely or even primarily in terms of sovereignty or power, and I object to both doctrines for the same reason, that they misapprehend the true value and excellence of personality [i.e., character]. The person, whether divine or human, finds authentic self-expression in the range and integrity of his loving and in the wide variety of his values. A humanism of power is as objectionable as the Calvinistic-type of theism and for precisely the same reasons." Casserley, *Evil*, 27. Emphases mine.

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*odds with the omnipotent God of classical theism. The universe, as we know it, was not created in an instant of absolute coercive power. . . . The universe's story is suggesting that divine power is different from what we have imagined. It is like the power of love, persuasive, patient, and persistent. . . .*<sup>47</sup>

All of these authors speak as if their position on limiting God's power is so self-evident that there can be no criticism of it.

Kraemer offers three rebuttals to the limited power view of God. First, is God only limited in power as claimed? If He is limited in power, why not in knowledge and goodness as well? Why limit God's power only? Second, he picks up Hume's argument that if God were this limited in power, He should have created fewer animals with better faculties for happiness. Third, Kramer questions if such a limited, imprudent God is worthy of respect and worship. He reminds us that "other great but limited beings, saints and heroes, clearly merit respect, but not worship. Once God is similarly limited, the problem of justifying the worship-worthiness of God needs to be addressed."<sup>48</sup>

**The Hidden, Humble God of Evolution.** Haught proposes that his non-omnipotent view of God depicts Him as actually being more deeply involved in the world than a deity who controls things by external power. This depth of involvement is based on a panentheistic doctrine of God. Thus, His work is "interior to the process of creation."<sup>49</sup> But why should we believe such a God inhabits nature? Is there any evidence for this conclusion?

Ironically, the answer is no. Three times in as many pages, Haught asserts that the concept of divine humility better explains the evolutionary data than does traditional theology or materialism.<sup>50</sup> In another work, he argues that "nothing less than a transcendent force, radically distinct from, *but also intimately incarnate in* matter could ultimately explain evolution."<sup>51</sup> Haught describes this immanent presence as God's "self-withdrawal," "self-absenting," and "self-concealment," so as to not have any external influence or exercise of "coercive power" over the universe.<sup>52</sup> "God is present in the mode of 'hiddenness.'"<sup>53</sup> Twice more he

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<sup>47</sup> Korsmeyer, 84. Emphases mine.

<sup>48</sup> Kraemer, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Haught, *101 Questions*, 119.

<sup>50</sup> Haught, *God After Darwin*, 53-55.

<sup>51</sup> Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 163

<sup>52</sup> Haught, *God After Darwin*, 195, 197, 203.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

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asserts that God is present in the form of “ultimate goodness.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, Haught associates the limited power of God, represented by His hiddenness, as being ultimate goodness.

It seems ironic, with Haught’s dedication to modern science, that he claims this hidden God can only be detected by faith. Says Haught, “The world is embraced constantly by God’s presence. But this presence does not show up as an object to be grasped by ordinary awareness or scientific method. It is empirically unavailable, in other words. . . . Only those attuned to religious experience will be aware or appreciative of it.”<sup>55</sup> This is amazing! Haught is appealing to subjective experience for a major pillar of his theology. And he makes the appeal more than once: “The raw ingredients of evolution flow forth from the depths of divine love, a depth that will show up only to those whose personal lives have *already been grasped by a sense of God.*”<sup>56</sup> A few phrases later he reiterates,

The very fact that nature can lend itself to a literalist reading is a consequence of the humble, hidden and vulnerable way in which divine love works. The very possibility of giving an atheistic interpretation of evolution is that God’s creative love humbly *refuses to make itself available at the level of scientific comprehension.*<sup>57</sup>

Haught further claims to base this subjective discovery of God in nature from Tillich’s concept of God as infinite depth, which is self authenticating.<sup>58</sup>

The pantheistic hiddenness of God has been argued by Haught to be an expression of divine humility to protect the absolute freedom of the universe. This concept of divine humility is significant, for Haught treats it as a metaphysics for grounding his theology.

The theological basis of this metaphysics of divine hiddenness and humility is the *kenosis* passage of Phil 2. For Haught, the *kenosis*, especially as seen in the crucifixion, is the *primary method* by which God

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 197, 203.

<sup>55</sup> Haught, *101 Questions*, 119.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 60-61. Emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>58</sup> Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 27-29. Haught also appeals non-Christian sources for this view of God as well: Indian, Taoist, Buddhist, and Platonic beliefs are all based on the concept of a hidden, deeper reality than the visible world. He further asserts that Christ espoused a similar concept by declaring that God’s Kingdom is within us (29-30). See also O’Murchu, 34, 88, 90, where he makes the same argument as Haught.

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relates to creation, from and throughout eternity. God hid himself through the incarnation in the humble servant-form of the man, Jesus Christ. Thus, for Haught, “It is to this image that Christian theology *must always repair* whenever it thinks about God’s relationship to the world and its evolution.”<sup>59</sup>

The application of this metaphysical principle leads to an openly espoused pantheism advocated through the concept of a divine incarnation with the material universe. For example, Haught describes his God of evolution as “a promising God already incarnate in matter.”<sup>60</sup> Commenting on the saying of Jesus, “if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me,”<sup>61</sup> Haught offers an alternative model of incarnation, declaring, “This image suggests that the most glorious form of power is that which humbly invites other beings to enter into *organic unity* with God of their own accord, and not out of compulsion.”<sup>62</sup>

**Love’s Power Is Non-Coercive.** For evolutionary theology, a key implication of this pantheism is that a truly loving God must be non-coercive. Haught makes this fundamental connection by stating:

The doctrine of grace proclaims that God loves the world and all of its various elements fully and unconditionally. *By definition*, however, love does not absorb, annihilate, or force itself upon the beloved. Instead it longs for the beloved to become more and more ‘other’ or differentiated. . . . To compel, after all would be contrary to the very nature of love.<sup>63</sup>

Miller argues in a similar fashion that the divine love is not a controlling power in the universe. “A world without meaning would be one in which a Deity pulled the string of every human puppet, and every material particle as well. . . . By being always in control, the Creator would deny His creatures any real opportunity to know and worship Him. *Authentic love requires freedom, not manipulation.*”<sup>64</sup>

Haught uses emotive and almost pejorative language to describe the traditional view of God in contrast to his humble, vulnerable God.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 111. Emphasis mine.

<sup>60</sup> Haught, *101 Questions*, 115.

<sup>61</sup> John 12:32, KJV.

<sup>62</sup> Haught, *101 Questions*, 117. Emphasis mine.

<sup>63</sup> Haught, *God After Darwin*, 39-41. Emphasis mine. Haught repeats these types of arguments on pp. 112-114.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 289. Emphasis mine.

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The God of Jesus is utterly unlike . . . our traditional images of God understood as divine potentate or ‘designer.’ Theology is offended by evolution *only when it assumes a rather imperious concept of divine omnipotence.* . . .

Evolutionary science, however, demands that we give up once and for all the *tyrannical* images we may have sometimes projected onto God.<sup>65</sup>

By contrast, evolution invites us to “recapture the often obscured portrait of a self-humbling, suffering God *who is anything but a divine controller or designer of the cosmos.*”<sup>66</sup> The evolutionary God “refrains from wielding the domineering power that both skeptics and believers often project onto their ideal of the absolute.” Yet God is not “a weak or powerless God incapable of redeeming this flawed universe, but one whose salvific and creative effectiveness is all the more prevailing because it is rooted in a divine humility.”<sup>67</sup> Thus Haught asserts that, “in the final analysis, persuasive power is more influential, more ‘powerful’, than coercion.”<sup>68</sup>

This rejection of any kind of hands-on rulership and intervention by God has some important implications for soteriology and eschatology. Korsmeyer expresses the ultimate destiny of the world in terms of apotheosis.

The divine life is constantly receiving the lives of everyone in the world, and adding each moment to the collected moments of their past. All these moments are experienced by God with no loss of intensity or immediacy. *The past of the world enters the everlasting present of the divine immediacy. The world is*

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<sup>65</sup> Haught, *101 Questions*, 127. Emphasis mine.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, *Deeper than Darwin*, 81.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 82. See also, Korsmeyer, 94, 96. In arguing for a power-sharing God, Korsmeyer sounds not unlike Mill. Mill argues that the problem of evil makes us worship a contradictory god, for “the ways of this Deity in Nature are on many occasions totally at variance with the precepts, as he believes, of the same Deity in the Gospel.” The only non-contradictory view of Deity for Mill is one that posits two competing principles or powers, one good and one evil. But this seems, for Mill, to diminish the good god’s power, for, “a virtuous human assumes in this theory the exalted character of a fellow-laborer with the Highest, a fellow combatant in the great strife; contributing his little, which by the aggregation of many like himself becomes much, towards that progressive ascendancy, and ultimately complete triumph of good over evil, . . . as planned by the Being to whom we owe all the benevolent contrivance we behold in nature.” Mill, 113, 116-117.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.



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*transformed in God, who weaves everything that is worthwhile into greater harmony, a greater whole.*<sup>69</sup>

For Korsmeyer,

Perhaps we have been called into existence to assist the great divine evolutionary plan to move the whole universe toward divinity, to be co-workers, co-creators in bringing about the Kingdom of God among us. Perhaps eschatology has to be rethought.<sup>70</sup>

**Evolution, Soteriology, and Eschatology.** Korsmeyer asserts that “the idea of God bringing the universe to an end in the near future through Christ’s second coming is not compatible with the evidence of the divine efforts in the universe for fifteen billion years.”<sup>71</sup> O’Murchu likewise affirms, “I no longer believe in the anthropocentric myth of the end of the world. There is every likelihood that we humans will destroy ourselves, but not creation. Creation has an infinite capacity to cocreate.”<sup>72</sup> Haught likewise denies, based on an evolutionary perspective of our world’s history, that there was an original, perfect world that lost its perfection and will once again be restored. “Thus, a scientifically informed understanding of redemption may no longer plausibly make themes of restoration or recovery dominant. . . . It would be absurd, therefore, to seek the restoration of a chronologically primordial state of material dispersal.”<sup>73</sup> Not only does evolutionary theology overturn our concept of God, but it also seems unable to support the hope of a restored, sinless perfect world. The second coming of Christ disappears

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<sup>69</sup> Korsmeyer, 102. Emphasis mine.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. In saying God has an evolutionary plan, Korsmeyer may be treading on dangerous ground. In the 1980s, one Protestant denomination combined the concepts of an evolutionary view of origins with the biblical doctrine of human dominion over nature to concoct a Christianized form of Julian Huxley’s Moral Darwinism, where man takes over the supervision of his own evolution. This included advocacy of eugenics and abortion as tools for managing our evolution. For more information see, Stephen Bauer, “Genesis, Dominion, and Ethics: A Critical Analysis of Ethics Based on the Concept of Dominion in Genesis 1:26-28,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 6, no. 2 (1995): 77-108.

<sup>71</sup> Korsmeyer, 88.

<sup>72</sup> O’Murchu, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 170.

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from the theological radar screen.<sup>74</sup> And it is in the context of this concept of eschatology that our evolutionary theologians see fit to raise the issue of human preference.

For Haught, “It would be callous indeed on the part of theologians to perpetuate the *one-sidedly anthropocentric and retributive* notions of pain and redemption that used to fit so comfortably into pre-evolutionary pictures of the world.”<sup>75</sup> Korsmeyer holds a similar position:

Any ‘exclusive’ theology, which in effect suggests that God is only concerned with one group of people on one planet of one small star, is not credible. It is the product of a theology that considers Scripture in a literalist manner, convinced it provides a comprehensive scientific worldview, and has not considered the scientific evidence of who we are, where we are, and how we got here.<sup>76</sup>

Evolutionary theology clearly has catastrophic implications for biblical eschatology. But this would seem to be the logical outcome of reinterpreting God without teleology (design). If God does not relate to the material universe through designs and purposes, the key elements of the biblical views of the plan of salvation, end-time judgment, and eschatology all crumble with the loss of teleology. A non-coercive, evolving God of limited power who is found in panentheistic hiddenness, a ground of being instead of a personal being, is what is offered instead. Rachels seems fundamentally correct in asserting that traditional Christian morality and theology cannot survive the implications of Darwin’s theory.

These implications, especially the theological ones, have a direct bearing on the biblical mission of the church. It has taken a moderately extensive excursus to identify those implications. We are now in a position to evaluate how belief in evolution would impact the Adventist identity and its understanding of its mission as a church.

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<sup>74</sup> Even without doing evolutionary theology, Darwin’s theory has historically shown a penchant for undermining the biblical doctrine of the second coming. One good example is, Zachary Hayes, *What Are They Saying about the End of the World?* (New York: Paulist, 1983), 40-46. Hayes cites a number of scholars holding to this denial. Of significance is that Hayes explicitly ties denial of the *parousia* to evolution.

<sup>75</sup> Haught, *Deeper than Darwin*, 169. Last emphasis mine.

<sup>76</sup> Korsmeyer, 89.

**Implications for the Mission and Identity of the Adventist Church**

Rachels alluded to the Ten Commandments as part of the biblical picture of God's regard for man. But if Darwinism is accepted as factual, then the lack of teleology means there can be no divine design for morality, just as there was none for creation. Why would God avoid design in creation only to have design in morals? The designless theism that Rachels rightly demands of Darwinism would have to eliminate the Ten Commandments and all other direct moral guidance by God, as shown in the Bible. In such a scenario sin is eliminated since there can be no divine law or design to violate.<sup>77</sup> Thus, Darwinism clearly undermines the foundations of biblical morality, yet our identity as Adventists lies heavily in the imperative to call people to obedience to God's commandments. How can we do so if our scientific paradigms eliminate the veracity of the Ten Commandments? It seems likely that Darwinism is quite toxic to this dimension of our mission as a church.

The elimination of the Ten Commandments (since there is no more divine design) means one would eliminate the ability to sin, since there is no design to rebel against. Furthermore, judgment becomes impossible since there can be no moral design as a standard to which one can be held accountable. For Seventh-day Adventist theology, this is especially devastating due to the great emphasis on the "investigative judgment." Such a judgment is incompatible with Darwinism or deism, leaving man with no real accountability to God. Neither Deism nor Darwinism can sustain such a doctrine. Our mission of announcing the judgment and calling people to acknowledge their accountability to God is incompatible with the implications of Darwin's theory.

This undermining of the doctrines of sin and judgment, in turn, removes the need for salvation from sin and its penalty, for there can be no sin or penalty without divine design and sovereignty. This would mean, therefore, that there would be no need for an incarnation and sacrificial death by Christ. Furthermore, the incarnation event was a designed, planned, unnatural act incompatible with Darwinism or a deistic god who uses no design. Removing teleology thus undermines several key pillars of Christian faith that are crucial to the salvific mission of the church.

Additionally, if there is no divine design, how can such a theism have any meaningful eschatology? If suffering and death are tools of evolutionary progress, then death and suffering are natural. Death is no

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<sup>77</sup> Rom 4:15; 5:13; 7:7. Paul here argues that sin is not reckoned where there is no law and that he would not know what sin is except for the law.

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longer an enemy as the Scriptures declare (for example, 1 Cor 15:26). If Darwin is right, then why should we hope for a world to come in which death and suffering will be no more (Rev 21-22)? Man's importance in the plan of salvation and divine future is replaced by an uncertain future of natural selection, personal insignificance, and death. There can be no special destiny since there is no divine design that calls for it.

**Conclusion**

There is much more that could be done to explore the implications of Darwin's theory for the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our core identity has been forged in the Great Controversy motif in which there is a battle of rival governing powers—something impossible if there is no teleology. Our mission is to prepare people to give account of themselves to a sovereign, yet loving, almighty moral governor and to prepare them for the eschatological restoration of all things which begins at the second coming of Christ in glory. It seems clear that the expulsion of teleology required by Darwinism will be catastrophic to the mission praxis of the Adventist church.

To attempt to mix Scripture with Materialism is to mix teleology with anti-teleology. This may appear to be successfully performed for a season because the pioneers of such a shift usually cling to enough tradition that they are unable, or unwilling, to pursue the new interpretation to its logical conclusions. Haught and his cohorts have no such tradition to restrain them. Thus, they are free to pursue the full implications of Darwin for theology. The Adventist church cannot maintain its mission and current identity while affirming Materialism. Sooner or later, a generation will arise whose sense of tradition is weak enough that they will take Darwinism to its full conclusions, and in so doing, will radically alter the mission and purpose of our church.

By contrast, those who hold to a biblical protology should have a robust theism capable of supporting the biblically defined mission of the church. God is sovereign. He rules and lays claims on us. A divine imperative impels us to labor for the salvation of souls and to call people to obedience to God's commandments as an expression of their faith and submission. The biblical God designs, decides, and reveals His will to man. We have the privilege of calling people to renounce rebellion against God's express will and surrender to God's divine designs in morals and lifestyle. Our mission, like Paul expressed to the Corinthians, is thus something that can reveal God's power in ways that mere arguments cannot. Adherence to the Genesis doctrine of Salvation provides not only

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the moral and theological foundations needed for mission, but a framework for God to empower that mission. Belief in non-teleological theories of origins inherently emasculate the mission of the church from the biblical concepts needed to make it effective.

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## **Exploring the Factors That Shaped the Early Adventist Mission to Jamaica**

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The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the strongest religious organizations in the tropical paradise of Jamaica. With a population of 2.6 million, there are over 220,000 church members,<sup>1</sup> making Jamaica one of the highest per capita areas in the world for Adventist membership.

There are three conferences, two missions, and one university with a student body of over 5,000, which makes it the largest Adventist University in the English-speaking world. The country also boasts eight secondary schools, scores of elementary schools, 597 churches, over 112 pastors, and hundreds of other workers employed in various other capacities.<sup>2</sup>

By any measurement, Adventism has been tremendously successful in this small country. Such a success story calls for an explanation and an analysis, especially of the formative years, to discover some of the factors that might have contributed to this success. Not much has been published on this topic except for a small book entitled *Thy Light Is Come: A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica*, by Linette Mitchell,<sup>3</sup> and a few unpublished term papers by seminarians at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Mitchell's book is a chronological narrative of the development of the Adventist work in Jamaica, focusing on significant people and events

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<sup>1</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book*, 2007, 159-161.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

<sup>3</sup> Linette Mitchell, *Thy Light Has Come: A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica*, Mandeville: NCUP, 2003.

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that shaped the work over much of the twentieth century. This is a useful book that provides basic facts about the work in Jamaica, but there is no serious analysis of those early factors that may have shaped the success of Adventism in Jamaica.

The purpose of this brief study is to discover and analyze those early factors that laid the ground work for such a successful launching and establishment of Adventism in Jamaica. Perhaps the Jamaican experience may provide a model for successful Adventist missions to other parts of the world.

**Adventism and Mission**

The early Adventists had no concept of missions and were in fact anti-mission. George Knight has identified four stages in the historical development of Adventist mission. The first stage, dated from 1844-1850, would be considered anti-mission. These early Sabbatarian Adventists had recently come out of the Great Disappointment of the Millerite movement and were trying to understand the reason for their disappointment. Because of their famous "Shut Door" philosophy, they believed probation was closed for most humans, and therefore mission outreach was not part of their agenda.<sup>4</sup>

The second phase lasted from 1850 to 1874, during which time they believed the door was partially open, especially to those sinners who had no prior knowledge of the Great Advent truth. Before the end of this period however, many Adventist members and leaders were convinced about the need for missions, but they still lacked a methodology and a global view of missions.

From 1874 to 1889, they fully embraced missions, but their outreach was limited primarily to Protestant European countries and their new colonies. They sent their first official missionary, J. N. Andrews, to Switzerland in 1874 to what George Knight calls the "heartland of Christian Europe."<sup>5</sup>

By the 1890s, Seventh-day Adventists had moved into the fourth stage, with a mission focus that now encompassed the entire globe. The decade of the nineties would be one of the most expansive eras in missions not only for the Adventists, but for many other Protestant groups in

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<sup>4</sup> J. H. Waggoner et al., "Conference Address: Organization," *Review and Herald*, (June 11, 1861): 21; quoted in George R. Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1995), 59.

<sup>5</sup> Knight, 68.

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America.<sup>6</sup> It was during this decade that the mission work was launched in Jamaica, and like so many other mission enterprises in the Seventh-day Adventist church, it began as a result of the publishing work and the subsequent request from the readers of Adventist literature for more understanding about the Adventist message.

An important issue to address at this point is: What was the nature of Adventist mission, and how was it launched in Jamaica? Did it follow the same pattern in Jamaica as in other places? George Knight has identified the Adventist missiological program as a “missiological quadrilateral,”<sup>7</sup> which means that Adventist mission consists of four dimensions: publishing, health reform, education, and church organization. Knight argues that the fourfold program did not come by conscious design, but may have arisen out of the Adventist view on the holistic nature of human beings. Adventists have historically repudiated the Greek dualistic view of humans and have affirmed the holistic view of human nature. They also affirmed the Protestant view of the sacredness of life and that nothing is secular in the sense of being separated from God. Adventist mission, then, focused not only on the spiritual dimension of the human experience, but also on the physical and the mental.<sup>8</sup>

The genesis of the quadrilateral view did not happen overnight. It had its beginning in the ministry of the Adventist church’s most influential leader, Ellen G. White. In 1848, after coming out of vision, Ellen said to her husband:

I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world.<sup>9</sup>

James White listened to his wife’s counsel and started a periodical called *Present Truth* that had a missionary focus. In the summer of 1850 he started a second periodical, *The Advent Review*, whose purpose was to reach out to the scattered Millerites. In November 1850, the periodicals were combined, and the name was changed to *The Second Advent Review*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 82.



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and *Sabbath Herald*, currently known as *The Adventist Review*, which is today the most important periodical of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The publishing work would be the first stage of the development of the Adventist missiological quadrilateral.<sup>10</sup>

The growth of a strong publishing work led to the development of the second stage in Adventism's missiological quadrilateral: church organization. The publishing work created a sense of unity in the organization and led to property acquisition, which necessitated a name and legal corporation under the state. Therefore, "the first concrete step in the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a legal denomination took place with the incorporation of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association on May 3, 1861."<sup>11</sup>

The early steps of organization would lead to the organization of conferences, with Michigan leading out in October of 1861, followed by seven other conferences in the following year. The final step in the organization process led to the formation of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, with John Byington as its first president.<sup>12</sup>

The third phase in the quadrilateral followed on the heels of the second. On June 6, 1863, Ellen White had her first major health reform vision, in which she wrote:

I saw that it was a sacred duty to attend to our health, and arouse others to their duty. . . . We have a duty to speak, to come out against intemperance of every kind,—intemperance in working, in eating, in drinking, and in drugging—and then point them to God's great medicine[:] water, pure soft water, for diseases, for health for cleanliness, and for . . . luxury . . . . I saw that we should not be silent upon the subject of health but should wake up minds to the subject.<sup>13</sup>

Ellen White would link health reform to missions. In a second vision, she was told to establish a health reform institution having the double missiological foci of preparing Adventists for translation and reaching out to unbelievers. Concerning the unbelievers she wrote:

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>12</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1976 ed.), s.v. "Organization, Development of, in Seventh-day Adventist Church"; quoted in Knight, 84.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, "Testimony Regarding James and Ellen White, unpublished manuscript, Ms 1, 1863; quoted in Knight, 84, 85.

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As unbelievers shall resort to an institution devoted to the successful treatment of disease and conducted by Sabbath-keeping physicians, they will be brought directly under the influence of the truth. By becoming acquainted with our people and our real faith, their prejudice will be overcome and they will be favorably impressed. By thus being placed under the influence of truth, some will not only obtain relief from bodily infirmities, but will find a healing balm for their sin-sick souls. . . . One such precious soul saved will be worth more than all the means needed to establish such an institution.<sup>14</sup>

The fourth and final dimension of the Adventist missiological quadrilateral took shape from 1872 thru 1874 with the establishment of a college in Battle Creek Michigan. This college, called Battle Creek College, was established primarily to train young people for mission. When the college was moved out of Battle Creek in 1901, its name was changed to Emmanuel Missionary College. In 1960 it became Andrews University, named for John Nevins, the first official Adventist foreign missionary.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, by 1874 the Seventh-day Adventist Church had all four pieces of the quadrilateral in place, “its publishing arm to spread the message, its medical branch to prepare the lives and hearts of people, and its educational work to train workers and nourish young believers,” and a conference system to coordinate all of these activities.<sup>16</sup>

**Exporting the Quadrilateral to Jamaica**

This quadrilateral model would be exported to Jamaica and would replicate some of the ways in which these four aspects of the work developed in the United States. The work began with and would be sustained by the publishing ministry. The work of colporteurs<sup>17</sup> would be critical in establishing and sustaining the work. It would be the first and most important factor in laying the foundation for Jamaican Adventism. The focus of the work in Jamaica, however, would not be on establishing publishing institutions, but primarily on the work of book canvassers distributing Adventist literature all across the island.

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<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:493 (emphasis supplied); quoted in Knight, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Knight, 87.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Colporteurs were book salesmen who made their living by selling Adventist literature.

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The second leg of the quadrilateral focused on conference organization. As the work developed and more churches were established, there was a need for a more central organization. During the first decade of Adventism in Jamaica (1893-1903), church growth was outstanding. From the humble beginnings of six members, growth reached 1200 members.<sup>18</sup> Ten years after the first official missionary landed in Jamaica, the Jamaican conference was organized, in March 1903, and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists voted to receive the Jamaica conference into fellowship. Jamaica's rise from mission status to conference was rapid, taking only seven years. In a general meeting in Kingston in 1903, a consensus was agreed on as follows:

Our workers were all united in the idea that the time had come in the progress of the cause in Jamaica when a conference organization, assisted though it must be for the present from Mission Board funds, would prove of educational value to the field, and would help to lay responsibilities upon the churches<sup>19</sup>

W. A. Spicer justified his call for a Jamaican conference because of the rapid way in which the church had progressed. He said, "In Jamaica I found nearly 1200 Sabbath-keepers, with about seventeen organized churches. All heartily favored the idea of bonding together as a conference."<sup>20</sup> Spicer further commented that Jamaicans were able to understand the nature of the work, the organization, and the responsibility of the individual member and church in relation to the conference. He advocated that more of the burden should be placed on local believers. These words were supported by real action when four ministerial licenses were voted for Jamaicans. He saw this as setting a positive precedent in developing workers for all the tropical fields. He even called for volunteers from Jamaica. Spicer went on to say that "as the work grows in Jamaica, I believe it will be able to furnish disciplined workers for all fields."<sup>21</sup> Little did Spicer realize that his words would be prophetic, for Jamaica would become the center for the work in the Caribbean and Central America. Much of the work in these regions would be established by workers from Jamaica.

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<sup>18</sup> Haysmer, "Jamaica, West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 20 August 1895: 539.

<sup>19</sup> Spicer, "The Jamaica Conference," *Review and Herald*, 17 March 1903: 16.

<sup>20</sup> W. A. Spicer, "Jamaica," *General Conference Bulletin*, 1903: 2.

<sup>21</sup> W. A. Spicer, "The Jamaican Conference," *Review and Herald*, 17 March 1903: 16, 17.

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The third major development of Jamaican Adventism was education, the fourth leg of Knight's Quadrilateral of mission.<sup>22</sup> From the very beginning of the work in Jamaica, it became clear that schools were needed. In 1896, A. J. Haysmer reported that plans were being made to purchase property in Kingston for a church and a school.<sup>23</sup> As converts were added to the young church, many children came with their families, so the need to educate these youngsters was very important. In 1898, Allan Moon raised the question of whether there should be a school in Jamaica and proceeded to provide a strong and defensible argument for such a school.

In America we feel that our children were not safe from moral contamination in the school of the land and so we provide schools of our own where our children can be under the best influence. . . . If it is necessary that we should have such schools here in the United States, and it is, how much more is this necessary in Jamaica?<sup>24</sup>

Once the Jamaican mission conference was established in 1903, the idea of a school for the training of workers became paramount. This idea will be developed later. The establishment of this training institute would be one of the most important factors in the consolidation of Adventism in Jamaica.

The third leg of the Quadrilateral, the health message, followed the educational. But as its tardy appearance might indicate, this aspect of the quadrilateral would be in Jamaica the weakest link. The health message, which has been described by Ellen White as the "Right Arm" of the message, never reached the same level of achievement as the other three legs. Although the health needs of Jamaica were great, it appears as if the church never invested the same level of resources and personnel to advance this aspect of the work. It did, however, establish a hospital in the capital city of Kingston in the year 1945 that continues to serve many in that metropolitan area. It is very likely that if this aspect of the work had been more developed, the appeal to the Jamaican middle and elite class would have been greater. However, much of the literature sold by the colporteurs dealt with the subject of health, and many of the converts to

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<sup>22</sup> Knight, 88.

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Haysmer, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 29 September 1896: 624.

<sup>24</sup> Allen Moon, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 11 January 1898: 315.

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Adventism eagerly embraced the healthy lifestyle of Adventism, so in that respect the “Right Arm” of the message was successful.

The Adventist mission work began in Jamaica at the beginning of the 1890s, a few years before Ellen White’s son, Edson White, began his pioneering work among African-Americans in Mississippi, USA. The work began in earnest in Jamaica in 1890 through correspondence from Mrs. Strong of the International Tract Society to Mr. William H. Palmer and subsequently Mrs. Margaret Harrison and others. In a letter to Mr. W. Palmer dated January 12, 1890, Mrs. Strong commented, ““It gives us pleasure to place your name upon our regular mailing list for present truth, a semi-monthly published in London, and the Good Health—a monthly issued in our little city of Battle Creek. These will be sent to you gratuitously for a season and are for your own personal reading”<sup>25</sup>.

There are various versions about how Adventism really began in Jamaica, but there are some basic elements of agreement. Three individuals are prominent in all the versions: they are Henry Palmer, who sent an Adventist book to his son William Palmer in Jamaica, and Margaret Harrison, the English woman who read some Adventist literature and wrote to the International Tract Society, located at Battle Creek, Michigan, the headquarters of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The previously named William James Palmer had read a tract before receiving the book *The Coming King*, written by Edson White, son of Ellen White, that his father had sent him, and noticed that the same publishers had printed both the tract and the book. After reading the book, he was convinced of the Sabbath and wrote to the publishers, the International Tract Society, for further information concerning the Sabbath. In response to the queries, he received a batch of tracts that he distributed in the city of Kingston. He gave one tract to Dr. Ross at the Kingston Public Hospital, who, not being particularly interested, passed it on to a social worker named Margaret Harrison, a white Jamaican of English descent of the upper class. She was a dedicated worker, spending much time with the sick and the poor.<sup>26</sup>

Mrs. Harrison was convinced through reading the tract that the seventh day was the Sabbath, but she decided to put the Sabbath literature

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<sup>25</sup> Mrs. L. S. Strong’s letter to Mr. W. H. Palmer, secretary of the International Tract Society, 12 January 1890; copy found at the Ellen G. White & Seventh-day Adventist Research Center at Northern Caribbean University.

<sup>26</sup> Editor, Nigel Coke, “Remembering Our Pioneers,” *West Indian Union Visitor*, Special Centennial Edition, December 2006: 5.

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out of her sight and not let the question of what day she should keep disturb her. One Sunday, in church, the minister read the law, and the members responded after the reading of each commandment with, "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." Conviction seized her heart. She went home, and alone with God and His Holy Word, she promised to obey His law.<sup>27</sup> In 1893 she made a trip to Battle Creek, Michigan, at that time the headquarters for the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church, where she received treatment at the Battle Creek Sanitarium and was given other Adventist literature on health reform, a subject in which she had great interest. While at Battle Creek, she attended the 1893 General Conference Session and appealed for a minister to be sent to Jamaica. She returned to Jamaica in May 1893, bringing with her the first resident pastor, A. J. Haysmer, and his family.<sup>28</sup>

On her return to Jamaica, Mrs. Harrison joined forces with William Palmer, and, together with a number of others, began worshipping at the Palmer home. They then moved to Mrs. Harrison's house, but soon their numbers exceeded the available space, and they moved into a rental hall. This is the traditional story. It must be noted, however, that when L. C. Chadwick came to Jamaica in January 1892, which was almost a year and a half before Mrs. Harrison's return from Battle Creek, he found a small congregation already worshipping at the home of William Palmer<sup>29</sup>

When A. J. Haysmer arrived, in May 1893, he was accompanied by Mrs. Harrison from Battle Creek, where she had been attending the General Conference session. Haysmer became the one in charge. It was probably Haysmer who considered the Palmers' residence too small and therefore moved the worship services to Mrs. Harrison's residence.<sup>30</sup>

Pastor Hubert Fletcher, one of the earliest native workers, used colorful and poetic language to describe the beginnings of the Adventist mission in Jamaica. He writes,

In the waters of the Caribbean and nestled in her arms are the romantic aisles of the West Indies. No grander sight can greet the eye than the rays of the rising sun reflected in the water of the sea. As it scatters, it fills everywhere with light and glory.

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<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Andross, "The Early Days in Inter-America," *Review and Herald*, 3 October 1929: 20.

<sup>28</sup> O. A. Olsen, "The President's Address," *General Conference Bulletin*. December 1893, 281.

<sup>29</sup> L. Chadwick, "British West Indies" *Review and Herald*, 1 March 1892, 134-135.

<sup>30</sup> A J Hasymer, "The West Indies" *Review and Herald*, 5 Dec. 1893, 766.

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So it was early in the nineties, when the rays of the third angel's message penetrated beyond the shores of America and glorious was the dawning of that morn in the fair island of Jamaica.<sup>31</sup>

Pastor Fletcher's description of the rise of Adventism in Jamaica was prophetic, for the march of Adventism on that island has been like the shining rays of the noonday sun, illuminating every nook and cranny of the island with the precious and unique truths of Adventism.

In the following paragraphs I will innumerate the significant factors that shaped the work of the Adventist mission to Jamaica.

#### **Role of the Colporteurs**

Perhaps the single most important factor in establishing the work in Jamaica was the role of the printed page. From the very inception and throughout the history of the work, the role of Adventist literature and the work of both canvasser and colporteur were pivotal.

The colporteur work began in 1892 and was spearheaded by stalwart pioneers like L. C. Chadwick, who was the president of the International Tract Society and who was sent to survey the potential of the entire West Indies and Central America region. He spent seventeen days in Jamaica, January–February 1892, and recommended that a colporteur be sent to Jamaica<sup>32</sup>. In response, James Patterson, the first black American missionary, was sent to Jamaica in 1892. Patterson subsequently suggested that “A white brother would do well in this city, while a colored one would do well in the country, white people in the country not being as prejudiced as their brothers in the city”<sup>33</sup>. In response, B. B. Newman was sent from the International Tract Society. Seven months later, the General Conference sent out Elder James Haysmer, the first official missionary to Jamaica, and Adventism began its dynamic, life-changing impact upon the island of Jamaica.<sup>34</sup>

Many years before the literature work began in Jamaica, Ellen White described the passion for that work in words that would find fulfillment in a very special way in Jamaica.

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<sup>31</sup> Hubert Fletcher, “Synopsis of Message in Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 2 March 1905: 12.

<sup>32</sup> L. C. Chadwick, “British West Indies”: 134.

<sup>33</sup> Extracts from letters, from a letter written by brother James Patterson dated at Kingston, September 7, 1892, *The Home Missionary*, November 1892: 262.

<sup>34</sup> Nigel Coke, “100 Years of Growth and Development,” *West Indian Union Visitor*, Special Centennial Edition, December 2006: 5.

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The chastisement of God is upon the world, to call all who know the truth to hide in the cleft of the Rock, and view the glory of God. The truth must not be muffled now. Plain statements must be made. Unvarnished truth must be spoken, in leaflets and pamphlets, and these must be scattered like the leaves of autumn.<sup>35</sup>

The work of those intrepid colporteurs would spread the Adventist truth like leaves of autumn all across Jamaica. Pastor Fletcher, writing in 1905, described the canvassing work being pioneered by a Brett Patterson of California, who placed books and literature in the homes of the people. As people read the truth-filled literature, a few of them began to keep the Sabbath. Hundreds of tracts and missionary papers were addressed and distributed which were blessed by God and brought in good results.<sup>36</sup>

The scale of this widespread distribution of Adventist material was given by Elder Haysmer during one of his reports on the progress of the work in Jamaica.

As the result of the efforts put forth in this island to scatter the truth among the people for the last four and one-half years, there have been over 18,000 *Signs of the Times* and other periodicals and 510,450 pages of pamphlets and tracts distributed. The books sold are as follows: "*Patriarchs and Prophets*" 2,670, "*Prophecies of Jesus*" 450, "*Helps to Bible Study*" 530, "*Christ our Saviour*" 1,720, "*Mount of Blessing*" 950, "*Gospel Primer*" 3,450, "*His Glorious Appearing*" 5,650, "*From Eden to Eden*" 5,285, "*Steps to Christ*" 8,862, trade and miscellaneous books 2,088, besides hundreds of health books, total number of religious books 32,480. As the result of this and other work, there is an interest to learn more of the truth in nearly every district in the island. The work on the whole looks more encouraging than at any previous time.<sup>37</sup>

W. W. Eastman, one of the early pioneers of the work in Jamaica, attributed the advancement of the work to this large amount of literature distributed.

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<sup>35</sup> E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:231.

<sup>36</sup> Hubert Fletcher, "Synopsis of Message in Jamaica", *Review and Herald*, 2 March 1905: 12.

<sup>37</sup> A. J. Haysmer, "Distribution of Literature in Jamaica," *The Home Missionary*, September 1897: 187.



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The rapid advancement of the truth in this field is largely due to the fact that a large amount of our literature has been sold in the island; further, the canvassers who have scattered the printed page have not been afraid of their colors. One instance will serve to illustrate this. A few weeks ago one of our canvassers came to a shop-keeper in the country parts to sell him a book. The man remarked that he had bought a book [*Prophecies of Jesus*"] which taught that the seventh day was the Sabbath and that he believed it. The canvasser then and there unfolded to him the Sabbath truth more fully, and told him of the work that was being carried on in the island by Seventh-day Adventists. As a result the man, his wife and father, and all the household began at once to keep the Sabbath. Being a man of influence in the district, this in turn created an interest among his neighbors to learn about the truth. The canvasser returned and held a few Bible readings with an increasing interest.<sup>38</sup>

G. A. King, colporteur from the United States, writing in 1894, described hundreds of books sold in Kingston which resulted in many accepting the truth, attending meetings, and keeping the Sabbath.<sup>39</sup>

Even those who opposed Adventism recognized the critical role of Adventist literature and the work of the colporteurs in winning converts. We see this in a complaint written by a Greek Catholic priest when he described Seventh-day Adventist literature as having a kind of hypnotic effect.

The Seventh-day Adventists carry on a very clever propaganda to win converts to their faith. The most powerful lever in winning people is the kind of literature they produce. It is written in a subtle way creating in part of the people a strong desire to read more of the literature until they are fully persuaded and undermining the belief of our church members. We don't mind their preaching so much, but it is their literature that gives us trouble. We find it everywhere. These people have sold \$6000 worth of their literature in this district and the worst part of it is our members of this (Greek Catholic) church have purchased this literature whereas they have hardly purchased a dollars worth of Catholic literature.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> W. W. Eastman, "A Year's Labor in Jamaica," *The Missionary Magazine*, September 1898: 22.

<sup>39</sup> G. A. King, "Jamaica West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 17 April, 1894: 249.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert J. Edmund, "Complaint of a Roman Catholic Priest," *Jamaican Visitor* 3/4 (January 1929): 4.

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The colporteurs themselves recognized the importance of their work and described it in powerful metaphors as the fight against evil. O. Perceival Reid, a colporteur, described the student colporteurs as on the firing line, storming the enemies with big cannons and machine guns directed by Christ, the mighty captain who is giving victory to his soldiers.<sup>41</sup>

C. A. Hall described Jamaica as a profitable field for the canvassing work. Books were sold from one end of the island to the other, resulting in believers springing up all over.<sup>42</sup>

A. J. Haysmer testified to the conversion of several families based on Adventist literature.<sup>43</sup>

Pastor Richardson pointed out in 1899 that the majority of the people who accepted the truth did so because of the direct work of the canvasser or from the publications that they sold.<sup>44</sup> He also spoke of the significant number of the members involved in the canvassing work, selling everything from *Signs of the Times* magazine to the largest books, and many of them were quite successful.<sup>45</sup>

G. A. King, an American colporteur, reported selling hundreds of books in Kingston, the capital city.<sup>46</sup>

These testimonies were corroborated by F. M. Wilcox in 1894, who described that much of the progress of the work could be attributed to the canvassers who actually engaged in distribution of Adventist literature throughout the island.<sup>47</sup>

C. A. Hall also testified of the work of colporteurs who sold books in every part of the island, causing the work to spring up everywhere.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> O. Perceival Reid, "Colporteur Experience," *Jamaican Visitor* 11 (July 1927): 11. O. P. Reid was the eldest son of Clarence Reid of Cornwall Mountain district in Westmoreland. Clarence Reid was baptized in 1924 by Methuselah Jones, and I believe that his three sons, O. P. Reid, D. P. Reid and E. C. H. Reid (all of whom became pastors) were subsequently baptized (Garnet Weir testimonial).

<sup>42</sup> C. A. Hall, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 1 September 1896: 559.

<sup>43</sup> A. J. Haysmer, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 5 October 1897: 635.

<sup>44</sup> F. I. Richardson, "Jamaica" *Review and Herald*, 26 May 1896: 332.

<sup>46</sup> G. A. King, "Jamaica West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 17 April 1894: 249.

<sup>47</sup> F. M. Wilcox, "Our Work in the West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 29 September 1896: 622.

<sup>48</sup> C. A. Hall, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 1 September 1896: 559.

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**Focus on Lay Leadership**

A second major factor that contributed to the success of Adventism in Jamaica was the early focus on lay leadership and the enthusiasm and passion with which these local lay leaders embraced the work. Scores of reports testified of active laymen and women preaching, teaching, giving Bible studies, engaging in house to house work, doing public evangelism, and accepting the work as their own. They did not wait on clerical or conference leadership to launch out in new territory. Without pastoral leadership or conference resources, many faithful laymen and women advanced the work of God using their own time, efforts, and resources. Much of the success of Adventism in Jamaica can be attributed to this lay ownership of the work. They saw the work as their work, and they engaged in it with all their energies. As a boy growing up in Jamaica, I rarely saw a pastor at our local church, but the work went on. My own family exemplified the spirit of lay involvement; we established a new church without pastoral leadership or conference resources.

Describing the role of the laymen in conversion, J. B. Beckner wrote that, "Six of these [new converts] were the result of the work of the Church at Grove Town without a minister; one by reading, and other six under the labor of Brother W. J. Tanner."<sup>49</sup> The place of baptism was twenty miles from Providence at Mild-river Spring Plain. "Yet the people did not complain about the walk. Two sisters walked forty-two miles to be baptized. Surely the argument of 'inconvenience' had no weight with them."<sup>50</sup>

In 1913, as Elder Hubert Fletcher enumerated the success of the work in Jamaica, he pointed out that much of it was due to church members who took an active part in missionary work, house to house, district to district, proclaiming the message to their friends, neighbors, and relatives.<sup>51</sup>

When making a report to the General Conference concerning the work of the laity in the Caribbean region, E. E. Andross had very high praises for the laity in Jamaica. He described their work in the following way: "Many of the lay brethren go out to the adjoining villages walking fourteen or fifteen miles to visit a town or village, every Sunday; and they raise up believers so rapidly that Elder C. E. Wood, president of the

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<sup>49</sup> J. B. Beckner, "Balaclava, Jamaica," *The Missionary Magazine*, January 1902: 46.

<sup>50</sup> W. J. Tanner, "Jamaica, West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 3 December 1901: 786.

<sup>51</sup> Hubert Fletcher, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 28 September 1913: 23.

conference, had been unable to visit them all and prepare them for organization”<sup>52</sup>

### **Spirituality of the Jamaican People**

A third important factor was the deep spirituality of the Jamaican people. Jamaicans were and still are a deeply spiritual people who believe in the power of prayer and hard work. They engaged in the work as if their success depended on their efforts and prayed as if it depended upon God. The early reports of these new believers described them as deeply fervent. C. E. Wood, writing in the *Inter-American Messenger*, June 1924, described some Jamaican Adventists as aggressive laymen, raising up churches, pitching tents in many of the major cities of Jamaica, and increasing membership even during a time of drought.<sup>53</sup> Mr. Woods, writing in another place, described a week of prayer in which the majority of the church members were at the church at 4:00 a.m. for prayer. One lady even got there at 1:00 am so as not to be late. He described them as earnest, full of fervor, spirit filled. He cited the case of a Jamaican immigrant who recently returned from California filled with the message and who raised up a company of twelve believers.<sup>54</sup>

W. A. Spicer, Seventh-day Adventist General Conference president, speaking of the work in Jamaica, described the strong fervency of the members, the beauty of the land, and the faithfulness of the workers, in spite of trials and struggles.<sup>55</sup>

During a successful week of prayer conducted by Elder H. Fletcher in the latter part of the year 1898, Fletcher recorded that, “although some had to come from three to six miles, their voices could be heard early in the morning rising in praises and thanksgiving to God. The Spirit of God was manifested throughout the meetings . . . [and] as the people considered what they had heard, reviewed their past lives, and submitted themselves anew to God, eyes were bathed with tears.”<sup>56</sup>

In another place, C. A. Hall reported that “thirty believers began to build a house of worship; one of the brethren gave the lot on which to

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<sup>52</sup> E. E. Andross, “God’s Leading in Mexico, Central America and the West Indies,” *Review and Herald* 17 Oct. 1924: 9.

<sup>53</sup> C. E. Wood, “Spreading the Word in Jamaica,” *Inter American Messenger*, June 1924: 4.

<sup>54</sup> C. E. Wood, “Week of Prayer in Jamaica,” *Inter American Messenger*, March 1925: 34.

<sup>55</sup> W. A. Spicer, “In Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 3 March 1902: 150.

<sup>56</sup> Hubert Fletcher, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 20 December 1898: 819.

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build the chapel, and another gave ninety feet of hewn stones for the foundation.”<sup>57</sup> H. F. Humphrey ascribed the success of the work to careful labor, house to house visits, Bible readings, and open air meetings.<sup>58</sup>

In another place, President Spicer extolled the pioneering spirit of the Jamaican worker and the tremendous benefit of the canvassing work. He described their courage and zeal and the deep appreciation the believers had for the Advent message. Spicer identified something that would carve a special place in the history of Adventist missions for Jamaican workers. He saw Jamaica as an ideal place for developing workers for all tropical fields, Africa in particular. He writes, “As the work grows in Jamaica I believe it will furnish us faithful and disciplined workers for other fields.”<sup>59</sup> This was proven correct, as pointed out earlier.

J. B. Beckner described the Jamaican believers as having great zeal for the message and eagerness to take it to others. They were willing to build the Lord’s house, make sacrifices, carry stones on their heads, saw lumber, and do whatever was necessary for success of the work.<sup>60</sup>

J. A. Strickland, former American missionary to Jamaica, who had ample opportunity to observe Jamaican Adventists, had these kind words to say about their devotion and spirituality: “I wish our American brethren would have the same love, faith, zeal and intelligence manifested by our native brethren in the deliberation and devotions of the conference. In spite of the devastation caused by the hurricane that swept Jamaica last year, progress was reported in every station.” The number of baptized Sabbath-keepers as of January 1, 1903, was 1188. During 1903 there were 174 baptisms, tithes of \$1,462.76, weekly offerings of \$420.24, and annual offerings of \$128, for a total of \$2,011.<sup>61</sup>

### **Organization of Conference**

No one could have imagined that these simple words written in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* on March 27, 1894, would mark the genesis of one of the most successful Adventist mission enterprises in the world: “Word has just come from Jamaica, West Indies that a Seventh-day Adventist church was organized at Kingston in that island March 21

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<sup>57</sup> C. A. Hall, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 2 April 1901: 221.

<sup>58</sup> H. F. Humphrey, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 12 October 1897: 650.

<sup>59</sup> W. A. Spicer, “The Jamaican Conference,” *Review and Herald*, 17 March 1903: 16, 17.

<sup>60</sup> J. B. Beckner, “Balaclava, Jamaica,” *The Missionary Magazine*, January 1902: 46.

<sup>61</sup> J. A. Strickland, “The Jamaican Conference,” *Review and Herald*, 11 Feb 1904: 17.

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consisting of thirty-seven members, of those thirty were baptized and six joined by letter.”<sup>62</sup>

This humble launching marked the establishment of the first Adventist church in Jamaica and laid the foundation for one of the strongest and most successful stories in Adventist missions in the world. The organization of the church and the subsequent organization of the conference was another vital factor for the Adventist success in Jamaica. Effective organization under capable leadership is capable of doing great things, and it appears that Jamaica was blessed with both.

The first church growth records of Adventism in Jamaica between 1893 and 1903 set the pattern and laid the foundation for future success. When A. J. Haysmer arrived in Jamaica, there were only six believers, according to him. He expressed disappointment. Twenty had been reported, but it seemed some had apostatized, while others had migrated.<sup>63</sup> By 1895 the number had increased to 105, and the following chart shows the steady increase in subsequent years.

Church Membership Growth in Jamaica	
Date	Members
1895	102
1896	300
1898	400
1900	713
1903	1200

In 1893, when A. J. Haysmer landed in Jamaica, it had been only 30 years since the Seventh-day Adventists organized themselves formally, so the church itself was still evolving in its understanding of what it meant to be an organization. The Foreign Mission Board, which launched the mission to Jamaica, was an autonomous organization under the umbrella of the church. As the work progressed in Jamaica, it became necessary to organize a more central form of leadership, so from November 5 to 15, 1897, representatives from Guyana, Trinidad, Barbados,

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<sup>62</sup> A. J. Haysmer, “First SDA Church in Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 27 March 1894: 208.

<sup>63</sup> A. J. Haysmer, “Jamaica, West Indies,” *Review and Herald*, 3 December 1893: 539.

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British Honduras, Bonacca, and Jamaica along with Elder Allen Moon, representative from the Foreign Mission Board of the General Conference, met in Jamaica with the goal of organizing the work on a more solid footing.<sup>64</sup>

During this 1897 meeting, the West Indian Mission was organized, with headquarters in Kingston, Jamaica, and A. J. Haysmer was appointed as Superintendent.<sup>65</sup>

In actual fact, Allen Moon, during his report to the Foreign Mission Board, December 5, 1897, recommended the establishment of the West Indies Union Mission. The recommendation was, of course accepted. The minutes of that meeting:

Allen Moon presented a detailed account of his visit to Jamaica, and the proceedings of the general council held, November 5-15, 1897, which revealed that there were about one thousand persons in and around the Caribbean sea who are keeping the Sabbath, and stated that in his judgment and in the judgment of those who attended the Jamaica meeting, it is desirable unite the work in that field under one general management, with headquarters, in Kingston, Jamaica. In harmony with this report the following actions were taken—ORGANIZATION—Voted that our work in Central America, Bay Islands, the West Indies, and northern South America, including Guiana, be united under the head of The West Indian Mission Field. HAYSMER-MANAGER—Voted that A.J. Haysmer be invited to act as Superintendent of the West Indies Mission field. . . . Voted, that Kingston, Jamaica, be headquarters for the work in the West Indian Mission Field.<sup>66</sup>

The mission territory was divided into seven districts and included the West Indian Islands, Central America, and South America, extending to the southern boundary of French Guiana, covering an area of 3,520 square miles with a population of 15,511,000.<sup>67</sup>

Seven years later, in 1903, a consensus was reached that Jamaica should be organized as a full-fledged conference. W. A. Spicer, General

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<sup>64</sup> Wesley Amundson, *The Advent Message in Inter-America*, (Washington: Review and Herald, 1947), 99.

<sup>65</sup> A. J. Haysmer, "Biennial Report of the West Indian Mission Field," *The General Conference Bulletin*, 4, 16 April 1897: 275.

<sup>66</sup> Foreign Mission Board Committee Minutes of December 5, 1897 meeting. Foreign Mission Board minutes vol.3 March 18, 1897-Jan 6, 1899, 40, 49.

<sup>67</sup> Amundson, 99.

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Conference Secretary at the time, expressed his sentiments in these words:

Our workers were all united in the idea that the time had come in the progress for the cause in Jamaica when a Conference organization, assisted though it must be for the present from Mission Board funds, would prove of educational value to the field, and would help to lay responsibilities upon the churches.<sup>68</sup>

**Establishment of a Training School**

Education has been a vital part of the Adventist mission outreach, as mentioned earlier, and it would play a critical role in the success of the work in Jamaica. The need for educating Adventist young people and the establishing of a college for the training of workers was evident very early in the Adventist work in Jamaica. The early Adventist missionaries recognized that education was necessary for the stability and consolidation of the work. As early as 1898, only five years after the landing of Haysmer, the first Adventist missionary to Jamaica, Allen Moon raised the question, "Shall we have a school in Jamaica?" and set forth a compelling argument for such a venture.<sup>69</sup> Other church leaders suggested that the moral climate in the Jamaican schools, and the fear of indoctrination by the Sunday-keeping denominations which controlled the Jamaican public schools, made the establishing of Adventist schools for Adventist young people a necessity.<sup>70</sup>

The great concern of the Adventists for their young people in these Jamaican public schools was the influence of the Protestant church groups on these schools. Jamaica did not follow strict separation of church and state, especially regarding the curriculum of the Jamaican public schools. The Anglican Church, which was the official state religion (because of British rule), along with other traditional Protestant denominations, essentially ran the "public schools," so the students who attended these schools were exposed to a good portion of their teachings. Adventists felt that such an exposure as this was dangerous to Adventist young people attending these schools.

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<sup>68</sup> W. A. Spicer, "The Jamaica Conference," *Review and Herald*, 17 March 1903: 16.

<sup>69</sup> Allan Moon, "Shall We Have School in Jamaica?" *Review and Herald*, 11 January 1898: 32.

<sup>70</sup> W. A. Spicer, "In Western Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 10 March 1903: 15.



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The greatest need, however, for Jamaican Adventists was the need for a training college to train workers to establish the work on a firmer footing in Jamaica. Nothing could boost the work more than the establishment of such a school.

There is much uncertainty about the genesis of the Adventist College in Jamaica, so I have relied on the testimony of the family who were foremost in getting the church to establish a college in Jamaica, as the story was reported to Garnet Weir, former Alumni Director of Northern Caribbean University.

I spoke with Maude Peart-Goulbourne in January 1972. She told me then that she had written to the General Conference, about establishing a school in Jamaica, after learning about the Oakwood manual training Center, from a friend of hers who had migrated to the USA, and was in attendance there. She also told me of getting a response from Mr. Briggs. My impression, though was that this was sometime in 1906. She told me that her father, Mr. Daniel Peart was one of the six men selected by the Jamaica Conference to search for land for the school, and that they identified such land in Bog Walk. On May 10, 1906, this land for the school was purchased from Elias Levy Stannigar of Linstead, and, comprising 66 acres, was registered under transfer no. 2081 (Certificate of Title, Vol. 49, No. 34) at the Registrar of Titles, in the names of Judson Barkley Beckner, Jannus Addison Strickland and Wellington Frederick Buckley – “Elders of the Seventh Day Adventist Society”- as joint tenants. The land by the writer’s observation and assessment borders and partly encompasses part of an area in Bog Walk now known as Old Church Road.<sup>71</sup>

The purchase of the land is supported by J. B. Beckner in an article he wrote in the *Advent Review & Herald* of July 19, 1906, page 15. In this he states,

We have secured subscription pledges to the amount of fourteen hundred and fifty dollars to our industrial school, to be paid within the year. On the strength of this we bought sixty-five acres in a valley, about twenty-five miles from Kingston, and one and a half miles from Bog Walk railroad station . . . The purchase price is fourteen hundred and sixty-one dollars. We also took a lease and sale on forty-one acres adjoining this

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<sup>71</sup> Testimonial of Maude Peart-Goulbourne as told to Garnet Weir in January, 1972.

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property. The purchase price of this will be eleven hundred and seventy dollars.”<sup>72</sup>

Floyd Greenleaf, in his book, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean*, commented,

The school that George Enoch described in such glowing terms in 1906 fell far short of expectations. During the second half of 1906, J. B. Beckner moved to the school site, a plantation known as Willowdene, with ten boys and four girls, to clear the land. By the time the earthquake struck they had about five acres in cultivation, but when C. B. Hughes assumed charge of the school in March, 1907, West Indian Union workers discovered the land was unsuitable for a successful farm. Immediately, they began searching for another location.<sup>73</sup>

The minutes of a meeting of the General Conference executive committee held on July 24, 1906, indicates that the petition from the West Indian Union Conference for assistance with the school was presented by Elder I. H. Evans, and the committee voted:

To permit G. F. Enoch (president of the West Indies Union) to visit as many camp-meetings as possible in the States, with the object of raising means for the Jamaican school, and after these visits to go to such conferences as he chooses and as can be arranged with the Presidents, to raise further funds . . . That the General Conference donate 2,000 ‘Christ Object Lessons’ to the West Indian field, to aid in securing this school.<sup>74</sup>

At a subsequent meeting on October 10, 1906, the committee voted:

- a) That we request the Keene Academy Board to release C. B. Hughes to take charge of the training school in Jamaica the next year.
- b) That we increase the appropriation of Christ Object Lessons to the West Indies, to 3000 copies, provided they are sold by

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<sup>72</sup> J. B. Beckner, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald* 19 July 1906: 15.

<sup>73</sup> Floyd Greenleaf, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 143.

<sup>74</sup> General Conference Executive Committee Minutes of July 24, 1906, meeting, 210, 211.

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July 1, 1907, and all the proceeds turned into the industrial school enterprise.<sup>75</sup>

When the second school year began in March 1908, Hughes had moved his teachers and students to another estate, Riverdale, which he and Bender purchased after scouring the Kingston area. Enrollment for that year reached about twenty-five or thirty, a near capacity figure. Long before the second year ended, the school board had to face the realities of trying to operate with virtually no cash revenues.

The training college for Jamaican workers, after having been moved from two previous locations and being discontinued for awhile, was finally established close to the town of Mandeville. In 1918, under the leadership of Elder G. A. Roberts, the 181-acre Coolsworthy property was purchased, and in January 1919, school was reopened with Professor Hughes as head. The buildings at Riverdale (last site of the school) were dismantled and sent to Coolsworthy, where they were rebuilt. Several industries were established, such as baking, farming, dairying, printing, and sheet metal work, which provided employment for the students. The first class of three graduated in June 1923 from the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The following year, the school was upgraded from an academy to a Junior College, and the name changed to West Indian Training College. Three years later, in 1926, seven students graduated from the two year college course.<sup>76</sup> The school initially served as a missionary base in supplying workers for the region and beyond. West Indies Training College would become the leading Junior College in the Inter-American Division. The college sought to implement many of the principles of Ellen White, one of major founders of Adventism. Education focused on the total development of an individual—heart, hand, and mind—so that the early curriculum emphasized not only intellectual development, but also the development of the physical and spiritual powers.

The school has progressed tremendously over the years. When the school was opened in 1906, there were only eight students and four teachers. In 1919, when the school was reopened in Mandeville, there were twenty students. By 1935 it had risen to 200, and by 1963 there were six hundred students and forty faculty.<sup>77</sup> The college has continued

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<sup>75</sup> General Conference Executive Committee Minutes of October 10, 1906, meeting, 159.

<sup>76</sup> Linette Mitchell, *Thy Light Has Come: A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica* (Mandeville: NCUP, 2003), 48.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

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to flourish, and since 1999 it has achieved university status and now has an enrollment of over 5,000 students.

The role that the college has played in the success and consolidation of the work in Jamaica is incalculable. The college provided a cadre of well-trained, qualified workers that helped to advance the work not only in Jamaica, but in the surrounding region. It was a source of continual inspiration to the young people, giving them hope of advancing themselves not only spiritually but also materially in the secular world. It was a magnet for youth all around the region who came in their numbers, bringing with them their unique cultures and languages to the college and thus enriching the educational experiences of their Jamaican colleagues.

The college provided Jamaicans with a global vision of the work, for it attracted many foreign workers who came to share their gifts and talents. The college provided continuing education to workers already in the field, thus sharpening and refining their skills for ministry. It gave the Adventist message a respectable profile within Jamaican society, for the college came to be seen as a valuable asset in nation building. Adventism would gain immeasurable respect and credibility through its graduates, spread far and wide in Jamaican society. Few Jamaican Adventist leaders would question the enormous role West Indies College (now Northern Caribbean University) played in the success and prosperity of Adventism in Jamaica. This noble institution sitting upon a hill commanding an impressive view of the surrounding countryside continues to train thousands for the work of God all over the world and continues still to inspire thousands more.

**Aggressive Public Evangelism**

Another critical factor in the advancement of the work in Jamaica was the early use of tent meetings for public evangelism. This method may have accounted for the largest number of accessions to the Adventist church in Jamaica. Elder F. I. Richardson, an American missionary, was the first to pitch a tent for public evangelism. In August 1894, he pitched a tent in the southwest corner of the Kingston Race Course. Pastor Fletcher, reflecting on the meetings, described them as “crowded, the singing inspiring and sung with devotion and fervency.” He continued describing how as the sublime truths of prophecy and other subjects were presented, the peoples’ hearts burned within them. Little groups were seen studying and discussing the subjects, while others were pricked in their hearts and were inquiring what they needed to do in order to be saved. As a result of the tent effort, the numbers of believers was greatly

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increased, and the original meeting house was no longer adequate to house the new members. This led the group to purchase an old Baptist church at 32 Text Lane, Kingston, and this would become the first organized Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica.

This first tent meeting by F. I. Richardson would mark the beginning of an evangelistic explosion that is now part of the storied legacy of Adventist evangelism in Jamaica. All across the island, for the next 100 years, laymen and pastors alike would engage in this method of evangelism on an aggressive scale that brought to pass the words of Jesus, “on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

J. A. Strickland described a tent meeting in Christiana that stirred up quite a bit of opposition among the local clergy and local officials who went from house to house to prejudice peoples' mind against the truth. They also disturbed the meeting, stoned the tent and attempted to eject the evangelist.<sup>78</sup>

A. J. Haysmer, the first American missionary and first president of the Jamaica mission, also engaged in many tent meetings.

**Geographical, Historical, and Cultural Factors**

There were a number of other factors that may not be considered direct causes for the success of the Adventist mission in Jamaica, but were necessary precursors and provided the necessary context that aided in the success. The accident of geography placed Jamaica in close proximity to the United States, the birthplace of Adventism. The travel time for American Adventist missionaries was relatively short. They could travel to Jamaica and return home frequently for rejuvenation and rest if needed. However, it was the proximity in culture, language, religion, and customs that made the transition and adaptation that much easier for both the missionary and the new believer.

Jamaica was the largest English-speaking country in the Caribbean and also the center of British colonial rule in the region, so Jamaicans shared a common cultural and linguistic heritage with the Americans. English was the major language spoken, so there was no need for the missionaries to learn a new language. Furthermore, since the vast majority of Adventist literature and books was written in English, these materials were readily available to the new believers in large quantity to speed

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<sup>78</sup> J. A. Strickland, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 9 February 1905: 17.

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up the process of indoctrination. The short travel time also accelerated this process. The missionaries themselves, once they arrived in Jamaica, could immediately begin preaching, traveling, and instructing the native workers and new believers.

The similarity in religious heritage was also significant, because of the British influence. Jamaica was a mainly Protestant nation and accessible to all kinds of Protestant missionary groups, such as the Moravians, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists. Although the Sabbath and other distinct Adventist doctrines would make Adventism unique, they still had many religious similarities, due to their common Reformation roots. Although Adventism experienced sporadic opposition from the religious groups all across the island, opposition never coalesced into a major national/state hostility that hindered Adventist mission work. So there was a religious receptivity that was already present that the Americans could never receive in any of the other surrounding Catholic nations of Central and South America and the Caribbean.

Another important factor was customs, especially as it related to race. The British abolished slavery in 1838, but the newly freed Blacks remained at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Many of these newly freed Blacks refused to return to the plantation, so the British imported Indian and Chinese workers to fill the need for laborers. However, another distinct group of people, the Mulattoes, would be the key players between the ruling English and the vast Black majority. This group, the offspring of the British planters and their slaves, would emerge in the Jamaican society and form an alliance with the remaining Whites to rule Jamaican society. As the White American missionaries landed in Jamaica, they seemed to gravitate to the Mulattoes, and it is from this group that the earliest group of native leaders would emerge. It seemed that those American missionaries, all of whom were White, found it easiest to establish friendships with these people and to train them for leadership. When we visually observe the very first group of ordained Jamaican ministers, we notice that all belong to this Mulatto/White group. Another reason for this was probably that they were already the educated group and were therefore much more easily trained. However, the success of this situation would become obvious over time, because as the darker elements of society flooded the church in large numbers, they would remain conspicuously absent from the leading positions of church leadership, as these positions were reserved for either the White missionaries or the White/Mulatto native workers. Why did I call this a success factor? It was obviously not a good thing, but we must understand that

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the vast Black population was accustomed to seeing these people in leadership positions in the wider society. Although a few dissident Adventist voices rejected this practice, most Black Adventist Jamaicans accepted it, as this is all they ever knew. This should not come as a surprise to any one, since these White American missionaries were coming from a racist culture that denigrated Blacks, although they themselves would vehemently deny their own racist attitudes and practices. What is remarkable, however, is that in spite of these challenges, the work still flourished, and the message was enthusiastically embraced by thousands of Black Jamaicans. It appeared that Divine providence overruled whatever racial prejudice these White missionaries may have had and greatly blessed their work.

The leaders of early Adventism in Jamaica would primarily be White Americans or White/Mulatto Jamaicans. So the church in some way was reflecting the social reality of Jamaican secular society, which was dominated by the White/Mulatto class that composed the ruling elite. Most of these White American Adventist leaders brought to Jamaica their views about race that essentially relegated Blacks to an inferior status. The Adventist Church in America at this time was practicing racism in all of its institutions, so it should not be surprising that these Adventist leaders would reflect this attitude. They admitted Margaret Harrison, a White Jamaican Adventist, into Battle Creek Sanitarium while excluding their fellow African-American Adventist patients from the same institution.

As early as 1908, Black Jamaicans began to agitate for equality, especially as it relates to salary. According to Weir, a Jamaican worker (Methuselah Jones) was making \$1.00 per week while his American counterpart was making \$6.00 per week.<sup>79</sup> Such blatant disparity would not go unchallenged, and so Jamaican workers would agitate for some level of equality.

The skin color of the early interests from Jamaica about Adventism may have been a factor that influenced the response of the Adventists to them and so in a strange sort of way benefited the advancement of the early work. Margaret Harrison, who was White, although a Jamaican native of English ancestry, was received warmly by White American Adventists, who responded quicker to her needs than they did to the millions of African-Americans living within their borders. It was one year after the Adventist leadership sent A. J. Haysmer to Jamaica before any

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<sup>79</sup> Weir, personal interview with author in 2008.

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systematic effort was launched to minister to African-Americans, and this was done by Edson White without the General Conference blessing and support.

Another important factor was the climate of Jamaica. Time and time again, the American missionaries wrote of the “salubrious” climate of Jamaica. Anyone who has ever visited or lived in Jamaica can testify of the majestic natural beauty of the place and the beautiful climate, with a yearly temperature in the range of 80 degree Fahrenheit and the cool ocean breezes with little humidity. Jamaica is still one of the most beautiful places in the world to live.

**The Truth and Prophetic Factor**

In trying to understand the early factors that contributed to the rise of the Adventist work in Jamaica, I have discovered three types of factors. The first factors focused primarily on organization and methodology. The second group of factors included those of geography, history, and culture, and I have dealt with those extensively. There is a third group of factors that focuses on the nature and content of the Adventist message itself. The fact that Adventism as a new faith born out of a great disappointment with an unpopular message would have such a great success all over the world has puzzled scholars. A number of them have suggested some answers by their analysis of Millerism and by extension Adventism as an outgrowth of that movement.

The first reason is a view of truth. George Knight describes Adventism, like Millerism, as an apocalyptic movement that attracted both rationalists and emotional types. Adventism, however, has appealed primarily to the rational element. “Thus in Adventism there is much emphasis on conversion to the truth.”<sup>80</sup> The content of this truth has contributed to the evangelistic success of Adventism because of many of its unique doctrines that are presented with a special sense of divine mission.

Hewitt, in explaining Seventh-day Adventist growth in contrast to lack of growth in his own Christian community, notes “that the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, while causing it to be viewed with suspicion by many traditional believers, have seemingly given its faithful members a resoluteness of individual and group character that goes far to explain its success.” Dean Kelly suggests that people want to join a movement that provides an alternative to the larger culture. Knight, although agreeing with these, also points

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<sup>80</sup> Knight, 134, 135.



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out that "Adventism is not so far removed from Protestant orthodoxy that people are hostile to it."<sup>81</sup>

A third element of evangelistic success was the organizational structure. I have dealt with that before. But it does appear that this centralized authority provided cohesion and direction, although Knight warns that this organization, which originally contributed to the success of the church, could also prove the undoing of the church.<sup>82</sup>

The fourth and most important element in the rapid success of Millerism and, by extension, Adventism, was a sense of prophetic mission and urgency that was guided by that prophetic understanding. Knight argues that Sabbatarian Adventists never saw themselves as just another denomination. They understood their movement and mission as a fulfillment of prophecy. They saw themselves as a prophetic people.<sup>83</sup>

The Sabbatarian Adventists, unlike the other groups that came out of Millerism, continued Miller's prophetic scheme of interpretation and explained their disappointment by re-interpreting the event of 1844. They affirmed Miller's prophetic timetable, but substituted a new event that occurred at the end of this period.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The Adventist mission experience in Jamaica, following the missiological quadrilateral, as proposed by George Knight, has proven to be an incredible success. Adventism has been enthusiastically embraced by many Jamaicans and is today the largest denomination in the country. Recently, the leader of Adventism in Jamaica and the surrounding region was appointed as the Governor General of Jamaica by the Prime Minister, perhaps a fitting tribute to the impact that Adventism has made on the island.<sup>84</sup>

I have identified three categories of factors that may have contributed to the success of Adventism in Jamaica. The first group of factors dealt with organization and methodology, and these were probably the most critical. The second group of factors included geography, culture, customs, and language, and although these factors were more indirect,

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<sup>81</sup> Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), quoted in Knight, 85.

<sup>82</sup> Knight, 136.

<sup>83</sup> George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 295-325; George R. Knight, *Anticipating the Advent*, quoted in George R. Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom*, 137.

<sup>84</sup> Mark A. Kellner, "From Adventist Pastor to Chief of State", *Adventist Review*, 19 March 2009: 9

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they provided a receptive context that facilitated the advancement of the work. The final factor was the nature and content of the Adventist message. This apocalyptic message, with its unique focus, presented with a sense of urgency appealing to the rational mind, struck a very responsive chord among Jamaicans, who by nature are a very spiritual people.

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