

JACOB MORRIS

Biblical and Theological Studies of
Jacob Morris

A Collection of Essays

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The Professors at Belhaven University - Thank you for providing a structured and consistent way for me to continue to learn about God, the history of Christianity, and my own faith.

Book Recommendations

The below are a recommendation of books that I have read during my studies, either directly related to the graduate program or on my own time. I also recommend videos created by Third Millennium Ministries.

A Grief Observed

Abolition of Man

Case for Christ

Case for Grace

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Covenants: God's Way with His People

Crazy Love

Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books

Four Portraits, One Jesus

From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the

Pentateuch

God Dwells Among Us

God is the Gospel

God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible

Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters

He Gave Us Stories

Knowing God

Letters to the Church

Major Problems in American Religious History

Mere Christianity
Mindful Christian
Miracles
Ninety-Five Theses
On Christian Doctrine
Pensées
Perfect Love
Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and
Our Roles Today
Reflections on the Psalms
Screwtape Letters
Surprised By Joy
Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief
The Business of Heaven
The Four Loves
The Great Divorce
The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and
Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament
The Problem of Pain
The Reason for God
The Return of the King
Thirteen Discourses on the Sermon on the Mount
Welcome to the Revolution
Wesley's Twenty-Five Articles

***Outside of Christianity, these books were also of interest in
exploring and understanding my faith:***

Buddha: His Life and Teachings
Quran
Sikh Code of Conduct
Simple Confucianism

Tantric Ethics
Tao Te Ching
Teachings and Tibetan Tantra
Teachings of Zoroaster
The Bhagavad-Gita
Twelve Major World Religions: The Beliefs, Rituals, and
Traditions of Humanity's Most Influential Faiths

Lastly, I read many apocryphal Jewish and Christian books that helped provide insight into the cultural contexts surrounding the creation of the Bible as we know it. It is important to remember that while they may offer insight, they are not considered canon by the majority of Christian denominations.

I

Essays on the Bible

The collection of essays in this section are specifically about the books of the Bible. Depending on the essay, this may include their theme, lesson, cultural context, or implications.

Authorship of the Pentateuch

Introduction

The most mainstream version of the documentary hypothesis states that the Pentateuch was created through the compilation of four separate documents, named primarily for the hypothetical authors of each and written and redacted over several centuries. It underwent several revisions until widespread consensus was achieved with the version developed by Graf, Vatke, and Wellhausen. However, by the end of the twentieth century the documentary hypothesis had collapsed primarily as a result of dating and questionable existence of each of the supposed documents. Moses remains the most probable author and the essential content of the book was written by him, while major editing and reshaping occurred as time went on.

The Documentary Hypothesis

According to the documentary hypothesis, the Pentateuch was created as a result of four individual documents being connected to each other with redaction and editing to blend to the overall story of Genesis to Deuteronomy as a single coherent story. This occurred over several centuries and was completed after the Jewish population was allowed to return

to Israel. The four supposed documents are named after their supposed authors: the J document (Yahwist/Jahwist), the E document (Elohist), the D document (Deuteronomist), and the P document (Priestly source).¹ The documentary hypothesis states that evidence of these documents being compiled can be identified by the divine epithets and specific repetitions in the text. Additionally, the use of the name Elohim in certain parts of the text and Yahweh in others is believed to be the result of differing documents being overlaid.² The documentary hypothesis was formed over multiple decades and has experienced multiple revisions and modifications; however, the most accepted and popular version was developed by Karl Graf, Wilhelm Vatke, and Julius Wellhausen.³

According to Graf, much of the Pentateuch was not reliable in a literal sense, claiming that the tabernacle never existed and such stories came from the Second Temple Period. He believed that the J and E documents were formed earlier than D, and that P document was formed after Deuteronomy. Building off of Graf's idea, Vatke believed that the Pentateuch's formation could be described as three stages: documents J and E emphasized a more spiritual awareness of nature and fertility, then the D document initiated how this spirituality applied to ethical and moral ideas, and finally the P document refined this development with organized religious guidance

¹ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 243.

² Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 235.

³ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 242.

and practices such as festivals and sacrifice.⁴ Wellhausen contributed significantly to the documentary hypothesis by further investigating the dating and compilation of these four documents. He believed that an editor, whom he termed the Jehovist, combined the J and E documents into a single document at some point before the creation of the D and P documents. The D document was then added on, and later the P document. Wellhausen believes that the major covenants found in the Pentateuch came from the P document, which is traditionally dated as post-exilic within the documentary hypothesis.⁵

Collapse of the Documentary Hypothesis

Although the documentary hypothesis was widely accepted for over a century, continued investigation and criticism revealed several flaws. Further analysis of the J document led to a proposal that it itself was composed of originally individual documents due to inconsistencies found within its own proposed material. With unclear dating, some scholars have started referring to the J document as simply “non-P”.⁶ The E document is also questioned. It is unclear if it was also a compilation of earlier documents, or if it ever existed

⁴ Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 243.

⁵ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 244.

⁶ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 272–275.

independent of the J document at all.⁷ The Deuteronomistic D document is somewhat unclear as it is evident that redactions have likely occurred throughout the Pentateuch and into the Deuteronomistic histories. However, this document does appear to rely on the P document, whereas the P document seems to be completely independent.⁸ The P document itself, however, may not have been an independent document and dating it has been difficult. If the documentary hypothesis is followed, then several narratives that are broken up lose their aesthetic and literary quality. The changes in vocabulary also do not necessarily equate to different authors – the author could have been using different words for emphasis on specific matters or may not have been actively aware of their change in word choice. Because of the many diverse assumptions with weak standing or concrete evidence, the documentary hypothesis has fallen out of favor with most scholars, although there does not appear to be a specific replacement that has dominated discussion.

Mosaic Authorship

It is likely that Moses utilized oral tradition passed down to him for writing much of Genesis. In Exodus 24:7, it is mentioned that he wrote the Book of the Covenant separately. He also quotes other books that he wrote. In a similar sense to the documentary hypothesis, Moses did compile previously

⁷ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 277–278.

⁸ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 280.

existing documents and oral tradition to form much of the Pentateuch. However, redactions and later editing likely occurred as the Pentateuch and the Old Testament reached its present form. Essential Mosaic authorship means that although the Pentateuch may be very different from its original writing, the vast majority of the content was likely written by Moses and the traditions and knowledge of God that was passed down to him.⁹ Mosaic authorship also strongly reinforces the concept of divine authority of Scripture.

Conclusion

The Documentary Hypothesis claimed that four individual documents were compiled over time to create the Pentateuch. However, as more scholars continued to investigate the origins of the Pentateuch, it became clear that the proposed sources themselves were inconsistent and many of the assumptions of the documentary hypothesis lacked any serious evidence that would prevent the Pentateuch from being a mostly unified work. It is likely that Moses himself wrote the majority of the Pentateuch, drawing on his own knowledge of traditions and other works that he had created. Over time, others modified the Pentateuch with further redaction and refining, but the overall content was largely written by Moses.

⁹ "Introduction to the Pentateuch: Lesson 1." Third Millennium video, 1:13:43, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/184>.

Exodus 12 Analysis

Introduction

The story of the Passover and Exodus 12 takes place four hundred years after the time of Joseph and his brother and is the start of the Israelite journey towards Canaan, God's promise to Abraham that they would inherit the land. Exodus 12 mostly concerns the rituals of the Passover to honor God for bringing them out of Egypt and the exodus itself. It also fulfills the statements that Moses made in Exodus 11. The events of Exodus probably occurred during the late Bronze Age when writing systems start to become more widespread and consistent across different regions. The chapter has a chiastic scheme with the first half generally following an ABC scheme and the second half following an AB scheme. The original meaning of the Passover served to demonstrate God's power and His willingness to both protect and punish them, as well as begin their journey towards Canaan. It also showed that the Israelites could not rely on themselves to survive but needed to depend upon God in order to reach the promised land. Exodus 12 and the Passover reflect the coming inauguration, continuation, and consummation of God's Kingdom that is brought by Christ. The inauguration, or Christ's first coming, sacrifice, and forgiveness of our sins is signaled by the death of the Egyptian first-borns, as Christ

was the first-born of God. The continuation of God is the present period where we must rely on Him as we spread His word. This is somewhat depicted in the Passover in that the Israelites were allowed to leave Egypt as a result of their faith in God, but it is much more evident in Exodus 16 when God provides sustenance for the Israelites as they travel through the desert. The continuation of God's kingdom is also relevant for modern application of the Passover story. The inauguration of God's kingdom will occur with the second coming of Christ, and as such is not represented in Exodus. However, an argument could be made for a representation of the inauguration of His kingdom with the conquest of Canaan or the story of King David.

Biblical and Historical Context

The story of Exodus takes place approximately four hundred years after Joseph and his brothers formally settled in Israel. God had promised Abraham that his children would receive a promised land after spending four hundred years in servitude to the Egyptians.¹⁰ By this time, the Israelites were severely oppressed and the Pharaoh would not allow them to leave. The time had come for the Israelites to leave Egypt and God has chosen Moses to serve as His prophet and spokesman. The exodus of the Israelites is the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Isaac that their descendants would inherit Canaan.

From a historical perspective, the Exodus likely took place some time in the 1300s B.C. near the end of the late Bronze Age. Writing systems were beginning to become widespread, which

¹⁰ Gen. 14:13-14 (CSB)

is likely why the events of Genesis were not written by Joseph or his brothers, but instead written by Moses despite having taken place several centuries and several centuries before his time. This is in line with the view that the later chapters of Joshua and all of Judges and Ruth take place during the Bronze Age Collapse, a time when cities and kingdoms were destroyed or abandoned, possibly by the invading Sea People (who may have then settled and evolved into the Philistines).

Literary Structure

Exodus 12:1–20 contains instructions on how the Israelites are to observe the Passover. Those who violate the instructions are to be cut off from the rest of the Israelites. Moses wrote these instructions before the first Passover had occurred in Egypt. Exodus 12:21–28 provide additional information concerning the Passover. Additionally, the fourteenth day of the month is an important date as it was on the fourteenth that God struck down the first-borns of Egypt.

Exodus 12:29–36 fulfills what Moses claims will happen in 11:1–10. In chapter eleven, Moses (speaking on behalf of God) tells the Israelites that the final plague will occur at midnight and all of the first-born Egyptians will die. After the deaths occurred, the Egyptians gave them gold, silver, and food to encourage the Israelites to leave even faster, just as predicted in chapter eleven.¹¹

Exodus 12:37–42 confirms that the Israelites have left Egypt. The final verses of Exodus 12 provide additional instructions

¹¹ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 102–103.

concerning who may participate in the Passover. It is even implied that even gentiles may become part of God's people so long as they are circumcised.¹²

There is also a chiastic structure present throughout Exodus 12. Exodus 12:1–28 follows an ABC scheme, with 12:1–11 concerning the sacrificial lamb for the Passover, 12:12–13 being the Passover itself, and then instructions concerning Passover rituals. The remainder of these verses follows the same scheme. The remainder of Exodus follows a mostly AB scheme. Exodus 12:29–32 starts with the death of the first-borns and Pharaoh's response. Exodus 12:33–41 concerned unleavened dough followed by the Israelites leaving Egypt. Exodus 12:42–51 states that God is the one who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, followed by a discussion of who is permitted to celebrate the Passover.¹³

Original Meaning

One of the original and direct meanings of the Passover is found in the fact that all first-born individuals living in Egypt were at the risk of death. Only those who marked their homes with blood would be spared. Although the tenth plague was a punishment for the Egyptians because Pharaoh would not release the Israelites, they were also at risk of being punished. If any Israelites failed to follow the instructions put forth by Moses prior to the Passover then they risked death. Part of the intention of the Passover was to demonstrate God's power and authority and His demand for the Israelites to be faithful and

¹² Exod. 12:48 (CSB)

¹³ "Literary structure (chiasm, chiasmus) of Book of Exodus," http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/02_Exodus_pericope_e.html

obedient to Him, unlike the Egyptians.

In terms of the purpose of the Passover and the Israelites claiming Canaan for themselves, the Passover event is what set off the official journey towards Canaan. By helping them leave, God demonstrated to the Israelites that He would protect them and defeat their enemies in exchange for their obedience. By establishing the Passover as a time of observation, the Israelites were expected to remember and reflect on all that God had done for them, including both the original Passover and all the events that occurred throughout the Old Testament, such as the various judges and their want for a king.

The exodus of Egypt and the Passover also demonstrated the helplessness of the Israelites. Pharaoh would not allow them to leave even after all the other plagues had occurred. Pharaoh had also changed his mind and pursued the Israelites after they left Egypt and was defeated by God and Him alone.¹⁴ Through these events, God intended to show the Israelites that He would keep His word and they could rely on Him to deliver them to Canaan, the promised land. As long as they obeyed Moses and God's instructions, God would honor His covenants with them and make them a strong and powerful people. The purpose of this is so that the Israelites would maintain their faith and trust in God and His promise that He would bring them to the land that He had promised to Jacob and Abraham. Unfortunately, the Israelites would constantly doubt and turn away from God throughout the majority of the Old Testament, which eventually leads their people to destruction subjugation by foreign empires until they are restored by Cyrus the Great.

¹⁴ Exod. 14:10-28 (CSB)

God's Kingdom

The inauguration of God's kingdom occurred at Christ's first coming. His death on the cross and forgiveness of our sins inaugurated the beginning of God's kingdom on earth. Although the Passover happened will before Christ was born, the deaths of the first-born Egyptians served as a representation of His death on the cross as Jesus Christ is the first and only son of God. The death of the first-born Egyptians convinced Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt and head towards Canaan. Just as the nation of Israel began with them leaving Egypt, God's kingdom began with Christ's sacrifice and forgiveness of our sins. Both events fundamentally changed the future, although Christ had an impact on the entire world.

The continuation of God's kingdom is the period that we are currently living in. We must keep our faith and trust in God to protect us from evil as we spread the gospel throughout the earth. The continuation of God's kingdom is more identifiable in the following chapters of Exodus when the Israelites are wandering the desert. Despite being ill-prepared to survive such a journey, God sustains them on manna¹⁵ and keeps them safe from those would do them harm. However, the Passover itself can also be seen as a depiction of the continuation as it was the Israelite's faith and trust in God that freed them from Egypt and kept them safe while they awaited the promised land. This fact is crucial in applying the implications of the Passover to the modern day.

The consummation of God's kingdom will not happen until Christ's return when He renders judgment and salvation, re-

¹⁵ Exod. 16:35 (CSB)

makes the earth, and ushers in the fullness of God's kingdom. Just as it has not yet happened today, there is not an equivalent event or concept in Exodus as they have only just left Egypt. The closest representation of the consummation of God's kingdom may be the end of Joshua when the Israelites have finally conquered much of Canaan and Israel is no longer a group of people but an actual geopolitical entity, or the reign of King David where, after defeating the corrupted King Saul, Israel is formed into a righteous and Godly kingdom, albeit only temporary.

Modern Application

God promised to deliver the Israelites from Egypt after a series of plagues. The final plague involved the death of all first-borns in Egypt. God made it clear that he would not discriminate between the first-born Egyptians and the first-born Israelites. However, God would spare the families who had marked their homes with blood. By following His command and remaining faithful, the Israelites were protected and freed from their slavery in Egypt. In the current consummation age of God's kingdom, there is wisdom in this. As long as we keep our faith in God and trust in Him through times of hardship, we will see the full kingdom of God. This does not mean that we will not experience any tests or trials, but that God will give us the strength to overcome them.

Just as God eventually delivered the Israelites to Canaan and made them into a strong and powerful people, we will also experience the consummation of God's kingdom, even if we are not alive to see it. However, we must also remain faithful in order to see and ask for forgiveness when we are not. Although

God brought them to Canaan, many did not survive the journey as a result of their disobedience and distrust of God, and the sins of Israel later led to its destruction after God had repeatedly sent prophets to warn the Israelites to turn from the worship of false idols and sinful ways. However, through repentance we are given unlimited chances to turn back to God. The remnant of Israel was restored under Cyrus the Great under limited independence and continues to exist today.

Conclusion

The story of Exodus and the Passover take place a little over four hundred years after the time of Joseph, which is the length of time that God stated the Israelites would stay in Egypt. This may have been in the late Bronze Age when writing was beginning to be much more fluid and widespread, which may help explain why it was Moses who wrote Genesis and not an earlier figure. God chose Moses to lead them out, but Pharaoh would not let them go until God slayed all of the first-born Egyptians and spared the Israelites who had followed His instructions on the night of the Passover. This could be seen as equivalent to the inauguration of God's kingdom in Christ, as the death of the first-born Egyptians freed the Israelites while the death of Christ freed us from our sin. God protected the Israelites in the desert, just as He protects us as we remain faithful today. The consummation of God's kingdom has not occurred yet, and the nearest demonstration of it may be the conquest of Canaan at the end of Joshua or the story of David in the books of Samuel. The literary structure is divided into at least four distinct sections that cover different aspects of both the Passover event and the celebration. A chiastic structure is present with the first half roughly following an ABC scheme while the second half tends to follow an AB scheme. The original

meaning was to demonstrate God's authority and power and that He would protect the Israelites as long as they were faithful to Him and followed His instruction. However, He was also willing to punish them if they disobeyed. Finally, the story of the Passover demonstrates that even during times of great hardship, God will give us the strength to survive and even overcome the circumstances around us and we will see the consummation of God's kingdom in one form or another as long as we remain faithful to Him.

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy and My Life

Introduction

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy have multiple themes throughout each book, but the theme of holiness and uncleanliness in Leviticus, fully trusting in God in Numbers, and expressing our genuine love through obedience to His commands in Deuteronomy stood out as the most impactful and meaningful themes. In my own life, I must strive to be more mindful of how I live my life and work towards imitating what Christ taught and the holiness of God. I must also put more trust in God and put my faith into practice when things do not go as I planned or wanted them to go. Lastly, I must remain obedient to God – willfully ignoring or violating what He has taught will not benefit anyone and only cause more stress in my relationship with Him.

Leviticus and Holiness

A significant portion of Leviticus focuses on God's holiness and how we are supposed to reflect His holiness in our own lives and actions. According to Thomas Alexander, holiness is the reflection of God's perfect morality and purity. For man

to be holy, they must live their lives in a way that imitates God and expresses love, purity, and righteousness. However, uncleanness is marked by an active or willful disobedience of God's instruction,¹⁶ and in some cases may reflect a literal state of uncleanness such as skin diseases or mold.¹⁷

It could then be argued that a part of imitating God's holiness is maintaining one's own hygiene and the cleanliness of their surroundings to the best of their ability. Although I bathe regularly and keep my home from being messy, I could vacuum and dust more. I am definitely guilty of not following Leviticus 14, although it may not necessarily be considered a sin. My bathroom has poor ventilation and mold frequently grows on the ceiling. I often wait months to clean it as I know that it will just come back. While this part of Leviticus 14 could be intended more to prevent an outbreak of disease or illness,¹⁸ it is something that I could be more mindful of. Instead of allowing the mold to constantly come back, I could investigate what is causing the problem and how to remedy it in a more permanent fashion, such as upgrading the fan or taking colder/quicker showers. Although I may be taking it more literally than intended keeping my bathroom (and the rest of my house) clean and in good condition not only helps me but reflects my appreciation for all that God has given me in that I will care for my things just as he has cared for me. Doing so will not only reflect my appreciation and love for God but help me better imitate His love and grace and move me further away

¹⁶ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 151-152.

¹⁷ Lev. 13 (CSB)

¹⁸ Lev. 14:33-53 (CSB)

from spiritual (and physical) uncleanness. One question that arose from Alexander's discussion is if one can either be holy or unclean but not both, is anyone still consistently holy in the modern world?

Numbers and Trusting God

One of the recurring themes found in Numbers is disobedience against God. The Israelites will be inconvenienced in some way and complain and demonstrate a degree of ungratefulness and God then decides to punish them, which is often reduced on behalf of Moses.¹⁹ This theme sets the tone for a majority of the remaining books of the Old Testament in which the Israelites turn away from God, who then punishes them unless they repent or someone acts on their behalf such as a few of the kings of Israel and Judah. After refusing to enter Canaan, God asked Moses why they despised and distrusted Him.²⁰

This is a sin that I have committed and likely still do. Whenever things go wrong in life, I will often figure out what I can do to correct the problem. Although there is nothing unreasonable about this, I often forget to pray about what I should do or what I should prioritize. Instead of seeking guidance from God, I often attempt to figure out how to solve a stressful situation on my own. While things may generally work out one way or another, trusting in God's plan would likely have resulted in a lot more personal and spiritual growth and clearer solutions to the problems I have faced. More importantly, sometimes

¹⁹ Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 186.

²⁰ Num. 14:11 (CSB)

my solutions cause unnecessary hardship for others, such as refusing to let a family member drive my car to work for a day because I already had plans with friends. Had I reflected more on the situation, it would have been more in line with Christ's teachings if I had sacrificed what I wanted to do for what my family member needed to do. Numbers encourages me to reflect more carefully on my decisions and whether I should pray on certain issues or if my desired decision is compatible with what Christ taught. Although not so much a theological question, I am curious as to why the cycle of sin-punishment-repeat was never able to be correct for a worthwhile amount of time, as the distrust and turning away from God is a recurring theme throughout the historical books of the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy and Loving God

Much of Deuteronomy covers Mosaic law and the festivals and rituals required by God to honor Him and receive His grace. While Mosaic law largely no longer applies to Christians as a result of Christ's death on the cross, the intention and spirit is still very relevant even if we do not celebrate Passover or perform animal sacrifice. One recurring statement is that we should love God.²¹ However, His love does come with a price: we must obey and follow His instructions. The Israelites almost constantly struggled with this, leading to a strained relationship between them and God. If they fail to love God, then He will remove His blessings from them.²² This still holds

²¹ Deut. 6:5 (CSB)

²² Thomas Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 200.

true today. If we turn from God, then God is less inclined to support us through all our endeavors. If we do not want His help, He will not give it.

Similar to how I often struggle to maintain my trust in God, I also struggle to genuinely express my love for God and follow His teachings. It is relatively easy to be a good person daily, but my faith and love for God is truly tested when it comes to rejecting sinful activities. Sometimes I am unaware that I am sinning, but on occasion I simply think to myself that I will “figure it out” later. That is not expressing a genuine love for God and His instruction. Although we are permitted to fail thanks to Christ’s sacrifice, that does not mean that we are allowed to freely and intentionally commit sin. When I consciously choose to disobey God, I am disappointing Him and only hurting myself in the long-term. One question concerning Deuteronomy is how much of the content has been changed, as Moses cannot be the sole author due to his death at the end of the book.²³

Personal Application

My daily life should reflect God’s holiness. While the uncleanness in Leviticus may not have the same purpose today, it does encourage me to take better care of both myself and my things. Even if God is not concerned about the dishes piling up in the sink, holding myself to similar standards to that of Leviticus will help me be more mindful of all that God has given me and hopefully lead me closer to God’s holiness. I also need to put more effort into deliberate sacrifices and

²³ Deut. 34:5-12 (CSB)

personal inconveniences so that I can experience the kind of growth that He wants to see through Christ's teachings. Finally, I should be more aware of my thoughts and feelings in the moment and whether or not they would be considered sin or otherwise against what Christ taught. I need to establish firmer boundaries to things that I know are sin, though that will likely be something that I must constantly work towards. Although much of the Pentateuch may no longer be literally applicable to my life in terms of Mosaic law, the wisdom and intention behind it is still very relevant to my faith.

Conclusion

Leviticus encourages us to live our lives in a way that imitates God's holiness and that includes staying away from both spiritual and physical uncleanness. Numbers tells us that we should put our trust in God with all of our heart and not our own abilities and works. Deuteronomy builds on the theme of trust by repeatedly stating that we should love God with all of our heart and demonstrate such love through obedience and following His commands. In each of these themes I found something that I can personally improve upon, ranging from being a better person and taking better care of myself, to rejecting the option to sin when it is presented to me.

Joshua to Judges: The Biblical Settlement of Canaan in the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age

Introduction

The conquest and settlement of Canaan by the Israelites, empowered by God, is estimated to take place amidst the Bronze Age Collapse, a time when civilizations were crumbling and whole cities and kingdoms were abandoned. The events of Joshua detail the initial occupation of Israel over the life of Joshua, the successor of Moses and leader of the twelve Israelite tribes. Judges depicts the events throughout Israel through the stories of the judges, individuals empowered by God to fight against the moral decline and enemies of Israel. Ruth is set during the period of the judges and demonstrates the hardships being experienced by the average person in Canaan, likely as part of the larger Bronze Age Collapse. Throughout these books, God's love for the Israelites is repeatedly demonstrated, even when they anger him. The stories foreshadow the eventual founding of a true Israel led by a powerful king. Some verses may reference or parallel life during the time of the monarchy or after the exile, which could be interpreted as the authors of each book retelling these earlier stories to help address issues

in their contemporary lives.

Joshua

The book of Joshua continues the Israelite's story and details the majority of their conquest of Canaan, the land promised to them by God. By faithfully following God's instructions and leading the Israelites, Joshua occupies much of Canaan and divides the allotments amongst the tribes. However, the conquest of Israel is not completed before his death, and the Israelites begin to live amongst the Gentiles and do not truly rule over the land.²⁴

The book of Joshua was likely written over time, as there is evidence of several layers of editing, though it's formation may have begun during the early monarchy of Israel²⁵ and as late as the sixth or seventh century BC. The evidence of Deuteronomistic editing confirms that it was at least written after Deuteronomy.²⁶ The destruction of cities and the lack of involvement by Egypt, which had territory in the area of Canaan, may have also been a part of the larger Bronze Age Collapse. One scholarly belief is that the books of Joshua through Kings were written in part to foreshadow the eventual kings of Israel, including Josiah, but later became somewhat of a critique of the monarchy in which parts of Joshua were written. It is possible

²⁴ Josh. CSB

²⁵ 2. Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville. *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007). 58–62.

²⁶ Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville. *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007). 204–227.

that a later author (or authors) wrote Joshua in its current form as a call to repent and return to God and to remember His loyalty to Joshua and the Israelites as long as they were faithful, and how He rewarded them with land. At the same time, it is also a reminder of God's wrath, such as when Achan disobeyed God's commands to not take any metals and was stoned to death as a result.²⁷

Judges

The book of Judges describes how the Israelites' memory of all that God has done for them fades, as well as their faith. They begin worshipping other gods and disobeying commandments from God. The conquest of Israel is not complete. God raises up judges, extraordinary individuals to help bring Israel's faith and loyalty back to God, but after each judge's death the Israelites soon return to their sinful lives away from God. Additionally, many of the judges themselves are self-serving, selfish, and vengeful. While the actions of the judges help bring Israel closer to becoming a true nation, they also highlight how they are no longer faithful and loyal to God.²⁸

Like Joshua, the book of Judges was likely written over time and with various forms and revisions. However, the constant reference of how "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him."²⁹ suggests that at least part of it was written during the monarchy and using the stories as foreshadowing David. The events and chaos that

²⁷ Josh. 7:20–26 (CSB)

²⁸ Judg. (CSB)

²⁹ Judg. 21:25 (CSB)

takes place during Judges may also be a sign of the Bronze Age Collapse, in which there is inconsistent and intermittent anarchy and a general collapse of firm rule, whether that be through a government or faith in God.

Unlike the Israelites under Joshua, the Israelites during the period of the judges were generally unfaithful to God and constantly violated His covenant with them. At the very least, the lack of faith and fear in God during the time of the judges is implied to foreshadow David's rule as a righteous king who will restore the Israelite's faithfulness. However, David was not a perfect king and allowed crimes similar to what happens in the Book of Judges to go unpunished.³⁰

Ruth

The story of Ruth is about a young woman and her mother-in-law, Naomi. After they both lose their husbands, Ruth stays with Naomi and travels to live in Israel, despite being a Moabite. After gleaning in a field, a relative of Naomi, Boaz, takes an interest in Ruth. As a family redeemer, Boaz marries Ruth, who accepts the God of Israel as her own god and in practice becomes an Israelite.³¹

At the earliest, Ruth was likely written during the monarchy. However, historians and scholars have had a difficult time dating its creation due to the writing style in Hebrew and the relations between Moab and Israel. In terms of when the story

³⁰ Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville. *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007). 94-99/

³¹ Ruth (CSB)

itself likely takes place during the period of judges, it may be in an area of Israel that is not being actively judged, or during a period between judges given the initial famine in the land.

Regardless of the exact date, the beginning of Ruth provides further context into the settlement of Canaan, and possibly even the larger Bronze Age Collapse, as the first verse sets the background: “During the time of the judges, there was a famine in the land.”³² This is originally why Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, had migrated to Moab. While the story of Ruth itself may not be immediately relevant to the Israelites settling in Canaan, it provides a glimpse into the life of ordinary life during this time. Elimelech and Naomi left Israel due to famine, which could have been an act of God due to the disloyalty and faithlessness of the Israelites. This lack of genuine worship by the Israelites towards God, or at the very least an awareness of punishment, is demonstrated by Naomi when she said, “I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has opposed me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?”³³

Conclusion

The book of Joshua tells the story of how the Israelite’s faithfulness was rewarded with land as cities were abandoned or weakened during the Bronze Age Collapse, while Judges explains how unfaithfulness leads to punishment. Ruth serves as a glimpse into the daily lives of those living during the period of the judges, as well as further evidence that all three books take place during the Bronze Age Collapse due to famine. The dating varies with each book, but they all have some sort of

³² Ruth 1:1 (CSB)

³³ Ruth 1:21 CSB

call towards a renewed faith in God during the periods in which they were originally written based on the issues that the authors were addressing at the time.

Samuel to Esther: The Theme of Kingship

Introduction

The theme of kingship is consistently present throughout the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and to a much smaller extent in Esther. In 1 Samuel, the Israelites wish to be like other nations and have their own king, rejecting God as their Lord. 2 Samuel describes the righteous reign of King David, but even he has his flaws. The books of Samuel depict the flaws and risks of a king in Saul, as well as a more ideal version in David, a king faithful to God. 1 Kings depicts the reign of Solomon, initially a wise and faithful king who eventually turns away from God. It describes in shorter narratives the successive kings of Israel. 2 Kings continues the stories of successive kings along with the rewards and consequences of their faith in God. The book of Kings demonstrates a pattern throughout successive kings, some of whom are accepting of God and some who are genuinely faithful, while others outright seem to reject God's authority. 1 Chronicles largely restates the events of the books of Samuel, while 2 Chronicles further examines Solomon and the kings that followed, as well as how the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were destroyed and the subsequent exile of the Israelites. Both Kings and Chronicles cover the split of Israel

and Judah. Ezra and Nehemiah focus on the Israelites' return to Jerusalem following the exile and the rebuilding of the city walls and temple, and there is no longer a king of Israel but rather the king of the Achaemenid Empire.

The concept of kingship is evident throughout the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and to a minor extent even Esther. The common theme is that while some kings may be faithful, others will not and none will be perfect. The only true and righteous ruler over Israel is God. These concepts are still applicable today in modern ministry – no leaders, religious or otherwise, take precedent before God, and people must submit themselves to His will to truly experience His love and support throughout life.

Kingship in the Books of Samuel

Although the desire and foreshadowing for a king for Israel is repeatedly mentioned in the book of Judges,³⁴ the actual request and establishment of a king does not take place until 1 Samuel. Starting in 1 Samuel 8, the people of Israel begin demanding a king to rule over them. Samuel's sons are not faithful judges and "They said to him, 'look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Therefore, appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have.'"³⁵ The rest of the chapter consists of Samuel warning Israel against the common selfish and despotic acts of kings, war, and taking any property or person that they desire regardless of whether or not it is in the kingdom's best interest. The people refuse

³⁴ Judg. 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25 CSB

³⁵ 1 Sam. 8:5 (CSB)

to listen and continue to demand a king to rule over them, so God tells Samuel to appoint a king for Israel.³⁶ Samuel chooses Saul, who comes to fulfill nearly all of the warnings that Samuel had previously predicted. Immediately after leaving Samuel, Saul attempts to hide.³⁷ While a general hesitancy or anxiety about leadership may be a positive trait in a humble leader, Saul was actively trying to disobey Samuel and God. He is found and seems to suddenly embrace his new role as king, displaying kindness by declaring no executions. Samuel then warns both Saul and the Israelites to continue to obey God, otherwise, His hand will be against them. Samuel reminds them of previous times when the Israelites turned from God and the consequences that followed. The people repent for their request for a king and it seems that Israel will finally enter a period of faithfulness in peace, assuming they do not do what is evil.³⁸ However, these hopes are immediately erased. Samuel told Saul to go to Gilgal and wait seven days for his arrival, and then they will offer burnt offerings together.³⁹ However, Samuel is delayed, and in a panic, Saul orders that the offerings are given without him. Samuel arrives shortly after and reprimands him.⁴⁰ Saul continues to act without consulting either Samuel or God and instead acts based on his own intuition. Saul is eventually rejected and David is chosen by God to be king over Israel. David loyally serves Saul, who comes to see him as a threat. Saul repeatedly tries to kill David, but God interferes

³⁶ 1 Sam. 8:6-22 (CSB)

³⁷ 1 Sam. 10:21-22 (CSB)

³⁸ 1 Sam. 11:13-12:25 (CSB)

³⁹ 1 Sam. 10:8 (CSB)

⁴⁰ 1 Sam. 13:8-13 (CSB)

each time and places an evil spirit upon him.⁴¹ The remainder of 1 Samuel depicts Saul's increasing depression and madness while David is in hiding. Saul and his sons are killed by the Philistines at the end.⁴² In 2 Samuel, Saul becomes king and acts righteously and faithfully for most of his reign, ensuring that the people are faithful and that the wars are successful, but he is not perfect. The beginning of his reign is marked by civil war between the houses of David and Saul, he sleeps with a married woman and kills her husband, and battles against his son Absalom.

Unlike Saul, David constantly sought out God's guidance, even when he falters in his faith. As a result, God rewards David with a great reign, even though it is marred with violence. Saul failed to keep God's commandments, and consequently, God does not establish a kingdom under him. Saul failed to put his absolute faith and trust in God when he was in battle, and God refused to aid him. David, on the other hand, consistently consulted God through his prophet, Gad, and in turn, God continued to guarantee his success.⁴³ Only through trust and faith in God can anyone hope to succeed, whether they are the average person or a noble king.

⁴¹ 1 Sam. 18:9-12 (CSB)

⁴² 1 Sam. 31:8 (CSB)

⁴³ Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 117-122.

Kingship in the Books of Kings

The beginning of Solomon's reign, much like the later years of David's, is marred with a familial civil war over who should rule Israel. Solomon successfully defends his authority and in the beginning is a righteous king faithful to God, following in his father's footsteps to build the First Temple. He initially asks God for wisdom and is rewarded with such as well as wealth, but over time he begins to turn from God and disobey His commands, marrying foreign women and worshipping foreign idols. Still, God remains largely faithful to Solomon and Israel and his reign is, for the most part, one of relative peace and prosperity.⁴⁴

The remainder of the books of Kings covers the later kings of Israel and Judah. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, failed to demonstrate to the Israelites that he would be a just ruler, and so Jeroboam staged a coup that established him as king over Israel, while Rehoboam became king of Judah only. Neither kings are faithful to God, and both Judah and Israel fall into various phases of idolatry, faithfulness, or somewhere in between throughout the reign of each of their respective kings. Despite the extensive efforts of Elijah and Elisha to save their people, the Israelites' lack of consistent and genuine faithfulness led God to allow both Judah and Israel to be destroyed, leading to the Babylonian exile.⁴⁵

Many of the kings did not repent their sins or rule over the

⁴⁴ 1 Kings 1:5–11:40 (CSB)

⁴⁵ Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 154–164.

Israelites fairly. Although God punished, when necessary, He was willing to forgive and to some extent help the kings who repented and truly sought His glory. One such example is Ahab, who takes a vineyard by force after the owner, Naboth the Jezreelite, refuses to sell it to him. Ahab frames Naboth and has him stoned to death and then takes ownership of the vineyard. Elijah then tells Ahab that God has condemned him and that the males of his family and estate will be wiped out and the blood of his cruel wife will be licked up by dogs. Ahab repents, and Elijah tells him that he “...will not bring disaster during his lifetime, because he has humbled himself before me.”⁴⁶ Despite humbling himself momentarily, Ahab continued to perform wicked acts and did not place his faith in God.

While God asks much of His people, He gives so much more in return to those who truly follow in His footsteps. His love and care cannot be rivaled by any other, and the kings of Israel and Judah cannot replicate this. Even Solomon was known by the time of his son Rehoboam to be hard on the Israelites, and despite the recommendations of his elders, Rehoboam had no intention of being any better.⁴⁷

Kingship in the Books of Chronicles

Much of Chronicles restates the events of 2 Samuel and Kings, with some additional stories reinforcing previous characteristics. One of the most notable things about Chronicles in terms of kingship is the use of the kings of Israel and Judah as fitting into a type based on Saul, David, and Solomon. The kings that

⁴⁶ 1 Kings 21:1-29 (CSB)

⁴⁷ 1 Kings 12:4-14 (CSB)

follow Saul's path are unfaithful, the kings who follow David are often during turbulent periods where faith in God must be reestablished, and the kings who fall under Solomon's type are often at peace and have gained God's favor, at least for the duration of their reign. Joash, who planned to restore the temple, and Hezekiah, who helped reestablish Israel's faith for a time, can be compared to David, while Ahaz is comparable to Saul⁴⁸ for refusing to have faith in God and instead worshiping other gods.⁴⁹

These cycles between king types reflect the realities of human kingship: some will be evil, some will be unnoteworthy, and some will be benevolent. Human nature is flawed, and no king will ever be a perfect ruler. Furthermore, just because a king is descended from a benevolent king does not mean that he will be benevolent or caring, nor does his ancestry imply that he would even be a competent ruler to begin with. Only God is consistently competent, merciful, and caring, demonstrating His love to those who worship him and put him as their true ruler.

Kingship in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

Kingship in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah looks very different than that of the kings of Israel and Judah. There are no more Israelite kings. Instead, Israel and Judah came under the rule of the Achaemenid Empire. The kings mentioned in

⁴⁸ Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 281-282.

⁴⁹ 2 Chron. 16:16-25 (CSB)

these stories, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, allowed religious freedom in the empire and let the Israelites return to their homeland and rebuild the temple.⁵⁰ Outside of the mention of their support for these events, they are not mentioned much further. Instead, much of Ezra-Nehemiah focuses on restoring the Israelites' faith in God. Unlike in Judges, there is no mention of how "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him."⁵¹ Instead, Ezra and Nehemiah simply want to bring God back to Israel and reinstate the Law of Moses.⁵² They appear to seek out God and God alone and have no explicit interest in restoring a king to Israel at this time. Although it is not explicitly mentioned, David's line still lives through Hattush and Zerubbabel. While the authors of these books do not draw attention to this fact, their return to Israel could be considered a foreshadowing of Jesus' kingship.

Jesus Fulfills God's Promise to David

Jesus fulfills God's promise to David that a son of his line will sit on the throne, although it is much greater in scope than the land of Israel. From one perspective, Jesus perfected David's actions. Where David sought to save the Israelites from God's punishments, Jesus sacrificed Himself to save His followers from their sin and eternal damnation. Just as David fought

⁵⁰ Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 244-245.

⁵¹ Judg. 21:25 (CSB)

⁵² Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 252-256.

Israelite's enemies, detestable to the Lord, Jesus fought against those who would turn His followers away from Him.

Modern and Personal Ministry

This concept of Kingship can still be applied in the modern day. Pastors and priests are excellent for guidance, but faith needs to be in God – not man. People can try to do things on their own, and perhaps they will have some success, but ultimately it is only through God that they will truly find freedom and success. Only through faith and trust in God can people truly prosper. However, no one is free from sin and individuals will suffer from their sin at times – just as David did. It is important to note that mankind's definition of success may not be the same nor does it mean that people are free from tribulations. Failure or poverty now may be rewarded later in life and beyond if one's faith in God remains true. Samuel-Chronicles demonstrates that no one is beyond saving and God will ultimately return His love and compassion to even the worst sinner. Even the cruelest kings were given a reprieve when they were humbled and repented their sins, with Ahab being a prime example.

Conclusion

The books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are rather direct about the implications of kingship in Israel. If the king is faithful to God and maintains the faith of his people, then God will allow Israel to flourish. But if the king and Israel are not faithful, then God will punish them. The stories of David and Saul are variously repeated throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles through various other kings. The prevailing theme throughout all of these is that only through the worship of God can Israel experience prosperity, both internally and against

its enemies. But even David is not a perfect ruler, and God does punish him for his flaws. This is because God is the true ruler of Israel, and the Israelites are at His mercy, not the king's. The repeated mention that God's promise to Israel lasts only as long as their faith also foreshadows the later kings of Israel and Judah. Ezra-Nehemiah marks a return to faith in God, although it is necessarily firm. They have no interest in restoring the monarchy of Israel and simply wish to return to the Law of Moses and rebuild the temple to express the glory of God. All the lines of kings in Israel and Judah came to a violent end because no king can truly rule over mankind because they are not God. Through Jesus, the line of David was returned to kingship as He established His reign to all peoples. His rule did not falter like the kings of Israel or Judah but instead called more people to follow in His path to worship and love God and his guidance.

Psalm 2: Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

Psalm 2 provides a direct link from the Old Testament to the New Testament and directly references Jesus Christ and the expansion of God's Kingdom. My own personal background influences how I view the chapter. Due to my interest in history and psychology, I often question many parts of the Bible instead of simply accepting the wisdom found in Scripture. However, I must keep an open mind and remember that the Bible is intended to help spread the word of God and glorify Him and that it is not my place to determine what is a correct or incorrect interpretation of the Bible. The fact that Psalm 2 is the second psalm and the parallels between it and Psalm 1 are no accident – its location helps highlight the importance that the author was establishing with the Messiah expanding God's kingdom and destroying all those who oppose him. The words of Psalm 2 may have been part of a coronation ceremony spoken by David himself, who is thought to be the author. As David served as both a type for Christ and a prophet of the Lord, it is likely that David spoke the psalm while simultaneously predicting the reign of the Messiah. The second verse may even reference events found in Revelation with the Second Coming of Christ. The author of Hebrews also associated Jesus Christ as the Son

found in Psalm 2. The psalm also serves as a reminder that God controls the flow of time and the actions that nations take, which should serve as a source of comfort as God has already planned out the events of our lives and will take care of us if we remain faithful in Him and actively seek out his help and support through prayer and reflection. The first verse of the psalm also reminds us that it is futile to rebel against the will of God. The psalm encourages Christians to hold onto their faith and await the Second Coming of Christ, where the remainder of sin and evil will be destroyed and the faithful will find rest and comfort as well as eternal life in the presence and glory of God.

Preparation

I was raised in church as a child and into my early teens, although I never really had much interest in church at the time nor was I sure what I really believed. I often tried to get out of church whenever possible. However, I was familiar enough with the New Testament to recognize that Psalm 2 likely refers to Jesus Christ. Academically, I have a strong interest in history and psychology. While such an interest is certainly helpful when studying the Bible, it has also made it difficult at times. Many other religions and myths exist throughout history and their origin and development can be seen in their technological and cultural contexts. Zeus, for example, likely came about to explain storms, thunder, and lightning. Poseidon similarly explained violent weather at sea. One of the most difficult aspects of my faith in God is trusting that the majority of the Bible (and primarily the Old Testament) is historically reliable. There may be harmless exaggerations such as the numbers of a population or army, but sometimes I struggle with other

stories such as many found in Genesis. Concerning Psalm 2 specifically, how do I know that my worldview and knowledge of Christianity isn't simply making Jesus Christ the figure of the Son because that is simply the conclusion that I was raised to come to? While this is something I struggle with immensely, I believe it is also the definition of faith – trusting and believing in something despite other potential explanations and doubt. In some ways, I think accepting this struggle as part of my faith has helped me be more open-minded when reading the Bible. Regardless of my doubts as to whether Psalm 2 refers to Jesus Christ, that is what is accepted and taught. As I begin putting myself into such a mindset, I find it easier to understand and accept that perspective myself. With Psalm 2, I must remember that I am not trying to disprove anything but rather determine the implications of the Son referring to Christ and how it applies to Christians today.

Investigation

One of the first things that a reader will notice is that Psalm 2 is the second psalm in the Christian Bible. This is no accident. Psalm 2 is intended to provide hope and reassurance to the Israelites that the Messiah will come. The very first psalm is about remaining faithful to God and how He will reward those who follow His commandments and punish those who sin.⁵³ Arguably, the first psalm is more important on a daily basis and especially to the Israelites that it was originally written to. Aside from simply remaining faithful to God, there is nothing more important than the Messiah, later revealed to be Jesus

⁵³ Ps. 1:1–6 (CSB)

Christ, from sacrificing His life to forgive our sins and offer grace and salvation to all of mankind. There is also a degree of parallelism present between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 – both start with evil people plotting against the Lord and ends with those faithful to God being rewarded in some way.⁵⁴

From a cultural standpoint, Psalm 2 may also have been part of a coronation ceremony for the kings of Israel and/or Judah.⁵⁵ Perhaps King David said these words to his royal court and/or to Solomon. Although the words may be somewhat generic-sounding in a courtly context, they imitate the relationship found within the Holy Trinity. God sent His only Son to die for our sons, but in doing so inaugurated His kingdom and began spreading it to the ends of the Earth as we are now empowered and support by the Holy Spirit. Because David also serves as a type for Christ it would not be unreasonable to think that even if David himself said these words, they still reflect Christ's ministry and intentions in His life to defeat those against God's will and bring peace to those who are obedient to God and Christ's teachings. The idea that it was David who said these words is further supported by the fact that Luke attributes David as the author of Psalm 2 in Acts, writing, "You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your Servant..."⁵⁶ It is entirely possible that David wasn't even aware of the prophetic prediction that he spoke and was simply performing his duties as a king.

⁵⁴ S. D. Ellison, "Old Testament Hope: Psalm 2, the Psalter, and the Anointed One," *Themelios* 46, no. 3 (December 2021): 536.

⁵⁵ Joseph Lam, "Psalm 2 and the disinheritance of earthly rulers: new light from the Ugaritic legal text RS 94.2168," *Vetus Testamentum* 64, no. 1 (2014): 35.

⁵⁶ Acts 4:25 (CSB)

Psalm 2 may even predict the eschatological Second Coming in verse two. The idea that the kings conspire together against the anointed one is very similar to some of the verses found in Revelation when Satan will deceive the nations into warring against God and His people.⁵⁷ In the immediate cultural context, it is likely that David simply said these words to prepare his son and court to defend against hostile nations that seek to destroy Israel. However, the Second Coming of Christ will see the defeat of wicked nations who have rejected God as well as sin and evil. In addition to the Messiah coming to save God's people, verse two provides a sense of comfort in that the present age of suffering will come to an end through the Messiah.

The book of Hebrews directly identifies Jesus Christ as the referenced Son found in Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 1:5. The surrounding verses in Hebrews make it clear that Jesus is not an angel and is in fact above them. It is significant that the author of Hebrews claimed that Son found in Psalm 2:7 is Jesus. There are also no known variations of Psalm 2:7, suggesting that there can be no mistake on the part of the author of Hebrews.⁵⁸ Although the Bible is inerrant and divinely inspired, this fact provides further reassurance that there is no misunderstanding when it comes to associating Jesus Christ with Psalm 2.

The language of Psalm 2 also supports the concept that the Son is both fully divine and fully human, which is what Jesus Christ is described as being in most Christian churches. Based on verses 7–12, the Son is a fully human king who has

⁵⁷ George A. Gunn, "Psalm 2 and the reign of the Messiah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169, no. 676 (2012): 429–430.

⁵⁸ Gert Jacobus Steyn, "Psalm 2 in Hebrews," *Neotestamentica* 37, no. 2 (2003): 272.

inherited the nations of the Earth, yet has the ability to exact divine retribution against rebellious nations.⁵⁹ Although this theological concept is better discussed in the New Testament, it is an important distinction in that Jesus Christ was not only God incarnate, but God incarnate as a human. The potential reference to this in Psalm 2 furthers the idea that at least some of the Israelites understood that the Messiah would not be solely human.

Psalm 2 also serves as a reminder that God controls the flow of time and history. The courses that nations choose and their prosperity and downfall are the direct works of God. Although Israel was a powerful and independent nation during the time of David, this would not last long as the nation was eventually split and later controlled by foreign powers. Later generations of Israelites as well as those living in exile would find comfort in Psalm 2, knowing that some day the Messiah would return to restore Israel because it was through God that the Persian and Babylonian empires destroyed Israel, and it would be through God that Israel would return.⁶⁰

The first verse is also significant, and reflects a common struggle found throughout the Bible and in Christianity. The author asks why the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain. It is in our nature to rebel against God and sin. However, it is useless to rebel against God.⁶¹ It is better to discipline ourselves and learn trust in and follow the teachings of Christ and be

⁵⁹ James W Watts, "Psalm 2 in the context of biblical theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 12 no. 1 (June 1990): 74.

⁶⁰ John Goldingay, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 104.

⁶¹ Allan Harman, *Psalms: A Mentor Commentary* (London: Mentor, 2011), 103.

rewarded by God through our struggles instead of revolting and trying to outsmart God, only to be destroyed and devastated. Within Psalm 2, God reacts to this rebelliousness by stating that His Son will rule over them and destroy any who rebel against His will.⁶² While this may not be apparent in a human life, it is likely much clearer who has been punished or rewarded with eternal life.

Application

Each verse in Psalm 2 is carefully connected to the rest of both the Old Testament and New Testament. Each verse, or group of verses, carry significant meaning that can be applied to Christians today. This includes daily spiritual practices such as resisting temptation as well as looking forward to the future resurrection and eternal life with Christ.

The primary theme and message of Psalm 2 is that Christ would come to establish God's kingdom on earth and would destroy all those who oppose His will. This is a central tenant of Christian eschatology in the now-but-not-yet age that we currently live in. Christ has come to establish the kingdom of God across the Earth and we enjoy many blessings such as the Holy Spirit, but sin and evil will not be defeated until Christ returns in the Second Coming in the consummation stage. Just as the promise of a Messiah brought hope to the Israelites that God would fulfill His promise, Psalm 2 now reminds us that Christ will return again to fully defeat evil. It is unknown when He will return, but we must always stay vigilant and genuine

⁶² Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011), 205.

in our faith otherwise we risk eternal condemnation. Psalm 2 serves as a reminder to Christians that God will keep His word and that all those who seek Him out and rely upon Him will be rewarded, however this reward may not be fully realized until after death with the promise of eternal life in His presence.

The fact that Psalm 2 predicted the future is also an indication that God already knows how the flow of time will play out. He already knows which nations and people will rebel against Christ's return (as well as His initial ministry). This should provide a degree of comfort and hope for some Christians, especially those experiencing hardship, as it means that He also knows what we will need and how to help us. It is important that we remain faithful to Him and actively seek out His help, as He will not help us unless we seek Him out in our prayers and works and obediently follow Christ's teachings.

The connection from Psalm 2 to Hebrews and Acts may also help build upon its authenticity. For those doubting whether or not Christ is truly the referenced Son, they can look to Hebrews 1:5 and see that the author makes the connection themselves and leaves no room for misinterpretation, confusion, or error in the Christian faith. In terms of Acts, Luke gives David credit for writing Psalm 2. While this may not be as verifiable and may simply be out of tradition, it provides some credibility to the verses as David was considered "a man after God's own heart."⁶³ If the authorship was considered unknown or anonymous and the verses were not significant, it is unlikely that any tradition would have developed the idea that Psalm 2 was written by David himself.

Lastly, Psalm 2 reminds us that having faith in God is ulti-

⁶³ 1 Sam. 13:14 (CSB)

mately a choice. Through Christ, we have all been called to come to faith and expand and glorify God's kingdom. However, we have to make that decision and endure the hardship and suffering that may come along with it. Ultimately, the difficulties that Christians experience are worth it provided they remain obedient and faithful, as the final line of Psalm 2 states: "All who take refuge in him are happy."⁶⁴ The ultimate reward for our faith is eternal life in God's presence. If we choose to not obey God and instead give into a life of sin and temptation, malicious or not, God will punish us and condemn us to Hell.

Conclusion

Psalm 2 directly predicts the inauguration and expansion of God's Kingdom on Earth through Jesus Christ. Despite my own personal bias and struggle with questioning Scripture, it is clear to see that the author of Psalm 2 was a prophet of some sort who was able to accurately predict the intentions of Jesus. Psalm 2's placement early in the book of Psalms, as well as the parallel theme with Psalm 1 is likely not an accident and highlights the important role that Jesus Christ would play in the salvation of mankind. Psalm 2 may have been part of a coronation ceremony spoken by David, the likely author, which increases the significance as David served both as a prophet-king for God and a type for Jesus Christ. Verse two may be a direct reference to the book of Revelation, which had not been written yet, signifying that God has already planned and has full control of both the past and future and will bring peace to His people. The author of Hebrews direct association of the Son with Jesus Christ leaves little room to doubt who the verse may have been referring to, especially because the psalm has no

⁶⁴ Ps. 2:12 (CSB)

known variations thus leaving little room for a mistranslation and misunderstanding by the author of Hebrews. Psalm 2 also serves as a reminder for later Israelites and Christians that all that happens comes from and through God. The first verse serves as another remind that rebelling against God's will is pointless – His will is going to be achieved with or without us, all we have to decide is whether we want God to punish us for rebellion or reward us for obedience towards His will. For Christians today, Psalm 2 serves to strengthen our faith and worship God until the Second Coming of Christ, where evil and sin will ultimately be defeated forever. However, it is also a reminder that Christians experience many of the blessings of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, including salvation and grace. The psalm also encourages Christians to remain faithful during times of hardship, as He will help us through our difficulties if we remain faithful, patient, and obedient to Him and rely upon Him.

Jeremiah and the New Covenant

Introduction

The prophet Jeremiah lived during the Babylonian invasions and exile who pronounced God's impending wrath on Judah. However, he also prophesied that the Israelites would return in the future. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, he discussed the new covenant that God would establish a new covenant different from his previous covenants. This new covenant would come through the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The historical context of Jeremiah 31 is important to understanding the full destruction of Judah, however the new covenant itself could have been mentioned at any point and still have the same impact following Israel's fall. Although Jeremiah 31:31-34 is somewhat of an isolated promise, it takes place in the larger theme of restoration in Jeremiah 30-33 and contrasts the old covenant with the grace of God presented in the new covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-34 only contains an oracle of blessing, but it is perhaps the most important one in the entire Old Testament. Jeremiah's prediction of the new covenant is fulfilled in Christ, and the authors of the New Testament agreed with this idea. In addition to Christ Himself announced that he was establishing a new covenant, he also fulfilled the prophecies set forth by the Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah's prophecy also supports

both the idea of “already but not yet” and the theological structure of inauguration, continuation, and consummation. These verses are not only a source of comfort in my faith when I am doubting but also serve as a source of inspiration.

Historical Analysis of Jeremiah 31

Jeremiah prophesied around 626 B.C. to 586 B.C. when Babylon had finally conquered Judah.⁶⁵ The chapters of Jeremiah are not chronological, and some do not provide any useful information that would help with dating. Jeremiah 31 could be dated to any point during his time.⁶⁶ However, the events that took place across Jeremiah’s ministry are generally applicable to most of his book. The northern nation of Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrians in the previous century, and now the Babylonians are seeking to conquer Judah as well. Initially, Jeremiah tries to warn the people to repent and turn back to God, but they do not. As the Babylonian invasions begin, Jeremiah prophesies against Judah that they will be removed from their promised land as a result of their sins and lack of faith in God. Near the end of his recorded ministry, Jeremiah is taken to Egypt where he predicts that the people of Israel would be restored someday.⁶⁷ It is unclear if Jeremiah 31 takes place before, during, or after the Babylonian conquest, the promise of a new covenant can be

⁶⁵ 1. “Historical Analysis of Prophecy: Lesson 5,” Third Millennium video, 43:38, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/30>.

⁶⁶ J. Daniel Hayes and Tremper Longman III, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 174.

⁶⁷ “Historical Analysis of Prophecy: Lesson 5,” Third Millennium video, 43:38, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/30>.

applied at any of these points as it was already evident that the remaining Israelites of Judah would follow in the steps of Israel and fail to repent and renew their covenant with God – they had repeatedly chosen to break their covenant and a new covenant would be needed to save them. Although Jeremiah may have been speaking literally to all of Judah, his message was likely intended for those who had remained faithful and could prepare for the impending hardship and have hope that they or their descendants will eventually return to Israel.

Literary Analysis

The only literary element directly present in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is an oracle of blessing – God will establish a new covenant with His people after Israel is restored from exile and forgive them of their sins.⁶⁸ While the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is isolated in the sense that it refers directly to the coming of Christ, Jeremiah 30-33 all contain a theme of restoration in which God will restore the Israelites. Throughout the chapters is also numerous references to sin and its consequences, but God repeatedly notes that they will eventually be forgiven. Although these statements don't directly imply the coming of Christ, it was His sacrifice that allowed us access to His eternal grace and salvation with our sins being forgiven without the need for offering or risking God abandoning us.

With the establishment of the new covenant, God has put a desire to have a relationship with Him in our hearts and minds. Under the Mosaic covenant, the relationship was almost purely

⁶⁸ "Literary Analysis of Prophecy: Lesson 6," Third Millennium video, 40:18, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/30>.

transactional – the Israelites only had a positive relationship with God if they followed His commands. The Israelites often felt an obligation to obey the ten commandments even though they may have disliked them or even disliked God. Under the new covenant, God has allowed us the opportunity to know Him on a more personal level out of a desire for him. Only those who want to have a relationship with God will have one. The new covenant also differs from the old covenant with Moses in that we are given an unlimited number of chances to repent and God will not leave us in our time of need. Under the Mosaic covenant, if Israel violated the covenant God's grace would be withdrawn and often times harsh punishment would ensue after years of warning of punishment. God even makes it clear through Jeremiah that he will never turn away from them and will do good for his people.⁶⁹

Canonical Analysis

The authors of the New Testament believe that Jesus Christ was the one who initiated the new covenant that Jeremiah spoke of, and this is reinforced with the concept that Jesus is part of the Holy Trinity. In Hebrews 8, the author quotes the entirety of Jeremiah 31:31–34, writing that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant (presumably the new covenant) and that the old covenant that God had made with the Israelites is now obsolete. Christ delivered the message that the new covenant was now in effect through His sacrifice and that it was now the only covenant through which both salvation and a relationship with God would be possible. Jesus also references the fact that the

⁶⁹ 5. Jer. 32:40–41

new covenant is through him when he says that his blood, which is the new covenant, is poured out for us.⁷⁰ The new covenant will ultimately be fulfilled when Christ returns to recreate the world and remove sin from our hearts.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 also fulfills the structure of inauguration, continuation, and consummation with Christ in the New Testament. In the theme of restoration, Jeremiah states that God will establish a new covenant unlike the previous covenants that He has established with the Israelites.⁷¹ This reflects the inauguration of God’s kingdom as Jeremiah is stating that God’s relationship with Israel (and ultimately, everyone) will be renewed in a way that the Israelites had not experienced before. Jeremiah 31:33 writes that God will put His “...teaching within them and write it on their hearts” and that all will know Him instead of having to teach one another.⁷² This reflects the continuation of the kingdom of God, as He is saying that all will know Him in their hearts, regardless of whether or not they explicitly hear about Him, the Bible or all that He has done. It is also possible that this is part of His inauguration as well. The section then comes to a close with God telling us that He will both forgive and forget our sins.⁷³ This act of grace demonstrates the consummation of God’s kingdom. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross has allowed us to be both forgiven and given an unlimited number of chances to return to God. While some may see the consummation in an “already but not yet” fashion, Jeremiah 31:34 may also be referring to the time when

⁷⁰ Luke 22:20 (CSB)

⁷¹ Jer. 31:32 (CSB)

⁷² Jer. 31:33–34 (CSB)

⁷³ Jer. 31:34 (CSB)

sin is completely erased from mankind and we return to a state that is comparable to the garden of Eden. Although the second coming of Christ is of great theological interest and debate, it is unclear how or what His return will actually look like as there is much scholarly debate over the narratives and descriptions in Revelations.

Personal Application

Jeremiah 31:31-34 has immense implications in my own life. Through Jeremiah's prophecy, I am able to have a personal relationship with God where I can see how He is present in my life and those who are close to me. In addition to being thankful for all He has done, I am able to both complain and ask for help during times of hardship, whether that be literal help or personal development. While Jeremiah 31:31-34 alone does not allow me to have a relationship with God, his prediction of Jesus Christ provides a sense of reassurance and comfort concerning any doubts I may have in my faith, as well as the reality that God will always keep His promises, especially the new covenant established through Christ.

As someone who enjoys helping others in any way possible, Jeremiah 31:31-34 also serves as a source of inspiration. Through Jeremiah God gave hope to the remaining Israelites in the face of their annihilation, which was the consequence of their breaking of the covenants that God had established with them. While I cannot truly promise someone that things will get better for them, I can help them work towards whatever goals that they have set and hopefully help them maintain hope through their hardship, whether it be financial, spiritual, or some other form of difficulty. Although it is nowhere near

on the scale of Christ, Jeremiah 31:31-34 encourages me to give others the hope that they will be saved, whatever their definition of that may look like/

From a spiritual standpoint, Jeremiah 31:31-34 may also serve as an anchor for those who are struggling with their faith or even their belief in God. Despite all of Israel's sin and punishment, God promised that He would restore them to the land of Israel and never turn away from doing good for His people. He would not abandon the Israelites under the new covenant or turn against them as he had in the Old Testament. Even in times of hardship, God will help us prevail and reminding others that hardship is not necessarily a punishment. Although God is always in our lives, we have free will that can ultimately hurt others on a large scale. God will always give us enough, and if he doesn't then there is likely something larger than we can truly understand going on in the world around us.

Conclusion

Jeremiah wrote during a time of great distress in Judah where the nation was destroyed and the remaining Israelites scattered across the region. His oracle of blessing predicted Christ's ministry on earth and establishment of a new covenant between God and man. The three verses are isolated in directly predicting the coming of Christ, but the larger theme of Jeremiah 30-33 reflects a degree of restoration of not only Israel itself, but of God's grace and permanent forgiveness of sins. Christians have the opportunity to try again and again to live a sinless life, whereas under the old covenant God would eventually withdraw from the Israelites after years of grievous sin and faithlessness. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is also referenced by both the author of Hebrews and Christ, lending further credibility that

many of the early Christians genuinely had faith in Christ that he was the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. God's message of hope and salvation inspires me to both stay strong in my faith and, where possible, do my best to spread both His message and feelings of hope and salvation to those around me – even if their view of salvation is simply getting through a bad week. Jeremiah 31:31–34 also serves as a reminder that God keeps his promises and will forgive us of our sins and all we have to do is genuinely and wholeheartedly seek out a relationship with Him.

The Gospels: Theme and Purpose

The gospels address various theological themes and have different purposes; however, they all ultimately call mankind to faith in Christ. The book of Matthew focuses on how Christ was the fulfillment of the Messiah prophecy and that the kingdom of God now has a presence on Earth. The book of Mark clarifies that the inauguration of God's kingdom is not a physical one but a spiritual one. The author of Mark also highlights the servanthood and suffering of Christ as an example for His followers to imitate. Luke focuses on confirming the truth of the gospel and that salvation is available to everyone and that everyone should rejoice and celebrate such news. John encourages readers to make the decision to have faith in Christ and to help them understand the concept of eternal life and the Holy Spirit.

Purpose and Theme of Matthew

The primary purpose of the book of Matthew is to demonstrate to the that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies surrounding the Messiah and how He is the key to salvation. It also provides proof and examples of how Jesus is the Messiah to help arm the church with a defense

against those who would claim that Jesus was in fact not the Messiah. The second purpose was to call new Christians to have faith and trust in God despite the difficulties that they would experience.⁷⁴ Matthew presents the culmination of salvation history that is predicted throughout the Old Testament. From various prophets' actions and prediction and individuals to the simple genealogy of Christ's ancestors, they all point to and culminate in Jesus Christ. Through Him and his suffering and sacrifice on the cross, all who have faith receive salvation.

The author of Matthew also emphasizes the kingdom of God. While much of it still remains in the future, His kingdom has arrived and now exists among us. The author also emphasizes that God is among us through His presence as Christ.⁷⁵ Through Christ, the kingdom of God was inaugurated in our world. Since His death we have lived in the continuation of His kingdom while awaiting consummation and His second coming on Earth.⁷⁶ Matthew also works to explain how Christians should react to Mosaic law. The Mosaic law and covenant was fulfilled in Christ, and we now have a relationship with God through His sacrifice. However, although the law was fulfilled, we should still make an effort to hold ourselves to Mosaic standards.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 300.

⁷⁵ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 297-298.

⁷⁶ Matt. 24:30-31 (CSB)

⁷⁷ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 298-300.

Purpose and Theme of Mark

Similar to the author of Matthew, the author of Mark wrote to confirm that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and brought about the inauguration of God's kingdom. However, Mark puts more of an emphasis on how Christ conquered the world through service and suffering. The author encourages Christians to follow this example and embrace suffering, sacrifice, and servitude in Christ's name.⁷⁸

The prophecies set forth by prophets such as Isaiah or Jeremiah describe God's kingdom and rule as being direct and physical. However, the author of Mark clarifies that the reality of His kingdom is that it is primarily spiritual. Jesus will not destroy any nations or governments, but instead suffers to pay for their sins. While a physical kingdom may be fully realized in the future, the inauguration brought about by the Messiah focus on faithful believers building up the world and spreading His word in preparation for His second coming.⁷⁹

The author of Mark also emphasizes that followers of Christ must be willing to suffer and die in His name. The twelve disciples are portrayed in a much more negative manner than that of other gospels, as they believe that following Christ will result in power and authority. In reality, servants of Christ should serve others and keep God's values in mind.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 247-248.

⁷⁹ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 246-247.

⁸⁰ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 247.

Purpose and Theme of Luke

The author of Luke wrote to confirm that the gospel was true. Jesus Christ was in fact the Messiah and that salvation and grace is offered through him. He also wrote to defend Christians against accusations of a false Messiah or prophet and that it is in fact a continuation (or fulfillment) of Judaism and is not dangerous to Roman authority.⁸¹

One of the major themes found in Luke and Acts is that salvation is available to all people everywhere, Jewish or Gentile, so long as they remain faithful to God.⁸² While this is repeated in the other gospels and even found in the Old Testament, Luke makes it a point to repeat this fact throughout the gospel, even before Christ's ministry had begun. Additionally, sinners and social outcasts were also welcome to Christ's salvation. Luke also makes a point to include women as important to Christ to a degree that is not present in the other gospels.⁸³ Luke encourages joy and praise for God throughout his book. Many of the stories that Jesus tells are at banquets. As Christ spreads His message, people rejoice and take part of the celebration. This tradition of joy and excitement continues today with the various Christian holidays and observations that Christians look forward to today.⁸⁴ Luke also calls on Christians to practice constant prayer in order to maintain a close and

⁸¹ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 349.

⁸² Luke 3:6 (CSB)

⁸³ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 342-344.

⁸⁴ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 346-347.

intimate relationship with God. Christ practiced this regularly throughout His ministry as an example to His disciples.⁸⁵

Purpose and Theme of John

The author of the book of John calls readers to respond to the story of Christ with faith. Throughout the book, there are several examples of miracles and wonders performed by Christ, which the author of John records in order to support and encourage new converts to the emerging Christian faith. Readers of John are given the opportunity to understand who Jesus Christ was and what His purpose was, as well as the opportunity to choose to follow him.⁸⁶ One of the main themes found in the book of John is that God loves the world and everyone in it to the extent that He sent and sacrificed His son to forgive its sins. Through this sacrifice, all people are able to have a personal relationship with God and receive His unlimited grace and salvation.

John also focuses on the concept of eternal life more than the synoptic gospels. Eternal life is viewed as knowing God through the Son.⁸⁷ Although there will be a resurrection on the last day, eternal life is already available to Christians today as a result of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the inauguration of God's kingdom and realized eschatology. As part of this inauguration and eternal life, John also explains that the Holy Spirit will take

⁸⁵ Luke 18:1 (CSB)

⁸⁶ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 398.

⁸⁷ John 17:3 (CSB)

the place of Christ and be with all who are faithful.⁸⁸

Personal Application

The themes and purpose of each gospel have incredible implications for how Christians should go about both their faith and their daily life. The most recurring theme throughout all four gospels is to maintain one's faith and trust in God no matter what the circumstances are. Another theme is that salvation is available to all regardless of their past or background – something that all Christians should constantly be mindful of.

Everyone will go through periods of hardship, whether it be more physical with housing or food security, emotional with relationships or loss, or even spiritual with an anger or frustration towards God. However, as Christians we must always keep God in mind. Even if we cannot tell whether or not things will get better, God will eventually reward us for our faith and perseverance through all hardships. It is easy to turn to worldly things such as money in order to make our lives better. These are not sins in and of themselves, but coming to rely on money over God reduces our faith to little more than an outward act.

Christians must also be willing to accept those who have made many mistakes in their past. Just as the gospels wrote about Christ eating with sinners and tax collectors, Christians must be willing to do the same. Just as God has forgiven us of our sins, we must forgive others. This is often easier said than

⁸⁸ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 397.

done. Many are also quick to display their faith as evidence of superiority over non-Christians or those who seem to embrace sin. However, many non-Christians may be more accurate examples of Christ than them.

Conclusion

Matthew focuses on providing evidence and proof that Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and that the kingdom of God has arrived, though not yet fully. Mark demonstrates how the inauguration of God's kingdom through Christ came through suffering and sacrifice, and that Christians should follow the example that He set forth. Luke writes about how Christ's salvation especially extends to the sinners, social outcasts, and Gentiles and is available to all who come to faith. John helps readers make their decision regarding their faith and expands upon the concepts of eternal life and the Holy Spirit. Although each of the gospels have a different goal, they all ultimately explain that salvation is offered to those who have faith in Christ.

Romans: Theme and Purpose

Introduction

Paul's primary purpose in writing the letter to the Romans is to address the divisions between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, as well as a request for assistance in moving onward to Spain to spread the gospel there. The central theme throughout the letter is the gospel and righteousness, especially in relations to the Jewish-Gentile divisions that the Roman churches appear to be experiencing. Many of the divisions between the Jewish and Gentile Christians have to do with beliefs of how they are saved, such as whether or not circumcision or Mosaic law has an effect on one's salvation compared to faith alone. However, even Abraham was saved before he was circumcised and it was his faith alone in God that led to God's covenants with him. Through act of resisting sin and repentance after failing, salvation in Christ becomes accessible to gentiles while maintaining a somewhat familiar structure of obedience-and-sacrifice that the Jewish Christians are used to. Paul also addresses the concerns of the Jewish Christians over whether or not God's covenants with Israel are now null. Paul also discusses the everyday lives that Christians should live, and that if other Christians have some differences, it is not worth judging as long as they love God and love one

another. Paul's hope is that by explaining much of the message of the gospel, Paul will heal the divisions between the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome so that they will better glorify God as a church and be in a position to help him spread the gospel to Spain.

Opening of Romans

The first few verses of Romans establish Paul's beliefs, the purpose of Christianity, and his own mission. Summed up in a single verse from his introduction: "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the gentiles"⁸⁹ Paul goes on to introduce himself and his mission in spreading the word of God to the Gentiles. He also makes it clear that the righteous will live by faith.⁹⁰ This sets the discussion of a majority of the letter, as he explains how righteousness is achieved and applied to both Jews and Gentiles.

The Sins of Jewish and Gentile Christians

The second half of the first chapter addresses the sins of the Gentiles. The unbelieving Gentiles were unrighteous because they did not believe in God. Paul additionally notes that God is evident around them and that their unrighteousness suppresses the truth. Due to this fact, Paul claims that they have no excuse to not have faith and glorify God since his existence

⁸⁹ 1.Rom. 1:5 (CSB)

⁹⁰ Rom. 1:17 (CSB)

should be obvious in their surroundings.⁹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner writes that everyone can recognize God's in the world around them through their own intuition, but then refuse to glorify Him and instead create their own gods and idols to worship instead of the true creator of the universe.⁹²

Paul continues his discussion of sin in his second chapter, this time addressing the sins of the Jewish Christians. Despite living under Mosaic law and having covenants with God, unless they follow the law to the letter and do not sin, they are also not saved. According to Schreiner, Paul explains that even though they are circumcised, this does not protect them from the wrath of God.⁹³ It only identifies them as God's chosen people.

Paul's purpose for pointing out the sins of both Jewish and Gentile Christians is that neither are truly spared from God's wrath through an ignorance of Him, Mosaic law, or circumcision. Everyone is a sinner. While the Israelites may still be God's chosen people, they are no longer His *only* people. In the eyes of God, Jewish and Gentile people are no longer different and have equal opportunity for salvation through Christ.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Rom. 1:18–20 (CSB)

⁹² Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 58–59.

⁹³ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 62.

⁹⁴ Rom. 2:11 (CSB)

Justification and Hope Through Faith

Verses 3:21–4:25 focus on justification and salvation through faith. The remainder of the third chapter explains that all “...are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”⁹⁵ This is perhaps the simplest explanation of what the gospel is and what Paul is trying to tell the Romans. Paul goes on to explain that there is no God of the Jews or God of the Gentiles, but that there is just God.⁹⁶ Faith in Christ does not outright forgive sin, but the opportunity for God to overlook past sins in exchange for true repentance and glorification of God,⁹⁷ and His grace is open to everyone, Jew and Gentile. Works of the law are great and may glorify God, but they do not lead to salvation themselves. Ideally, this reality would allow the divisions between the Roman Jewish and Gentile Christians to mend in a renewed sense of kinship, and consequently allow them to support his continue missionary plans towards Spain.

In the fourth chapter, Paul writes that David and Abraham were also justified through faith. David is often known as the man after God’s heart, and throughout his reign as king he is shown to glorify God as much as he can, and when he fails, he repents with honest sacrifices. As a result, God honored His covenant with David and ensured that his dynasty lasted forever. David performed great works, but it was his faith and obedience to God that led to his justification. Abraham was also credited with righteousness even before circumcision. The

⁹⁵ Rom. 3:24 (CSB)

⁹⁶ Rom. 3:29 (CSB)

⁹⁷ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul’s Letters*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 67.

circumcision was a sign of his righteousness and only came after.⁹⁸ This came as a result of his faith and trust in God and not because of his works. If he had been judged solely on his works, he likely would not have been saved as he had previously worshiped multiple gods and even doubted God's promise when it came to having a child with his sterile wife.⁹⁹

Chapters five through eight discuss the hope for those who have been justified. As a result of Christ dying on the cross, we have received the opportunity for God's grace through faith and may experience God's love for us. Because of His sacrifice, we are justified and reconciled with God and can look forward to the future resurrection with joy. Paul writes that it was through Adam that sin began and cursed every human and that it was through Christ that we receive the chance for a reversal through His love and righteousness. Christ goes even further to guarantee eternal life, which was not explicitly offered to Adam.¹⁰⁰

Paul writes that wherever sin multiplies, God's grace multiplies even further. However, this does not mean that we should continue to sin.¹⁰¹ Through Christ, faith alone is enough to receive forgiveness and God's love. Paul even writes that Mosaic law is an opportunity for sin to take hold in our hearts.¹⁰² The only works that we must perform is our best efforts to

⁹⁸ Rom. 4:11 (CSB)

⁹⁹ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 68–69.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 71.

¹⁰¹ Rom. 5:20–6:2 (CSB)

¹⁰² Rom. 7:11 (CSB)

resist sin and honest repentance when we fail. Although this contradicts Mosaic law in that salvation is through faith alone and not works, the spirit of the law is still found here: God's law is to resist temptation, and the punishment for failure is repentance. The punishment for repentance is a further damaged relationship with Him and eternal damnation. The reward for following His instruction is eternal life. This allows the Gentile Christians in Rome a clear way to express their faith and love for God, while maintaining some sense of the law to the Jewish Christians. Paul finishes the eighth chapter by noting that the Holy Spirit will help us in our weakness and that nothing can separate us from God's love.¹⁰³ By admitting this weakness that all humans have, everyone is able to receive His grace in exchange for faith. This new covenant includes all people, both Israel and the Gentiles, and was the both the primary message of Jesus's ministry and His death on the cross.

God Is Faithful

In chapters nine through eleven, Paul addresses the promises and covenants that God had made with Israel. Paul makes it clear that no covenant has been voided with Israel, and that God is just and will choose whomever he wishes to show mercy and compassion on,¹⁰⁴ which he has now extended to the gentiles outside of Israel. God now asks that the Israelites now have faith in Christ. The Israelites failed to do so, however, and instead established their righteousness not through faith but by the works of their laws, not by building a relationship with God

¹⁰³ Rom. 8:26, 8:39 (CSB)

¹⁰⁴ Rom. 9:15 (CSB)

but by attempting to establish their own self-righteousness through their laws. Christ's sacrifice brought an end to the Mosaic covenant, for it had been fulfilled.¹⁰⁵ Mosaic law had come to corrupt the pharisees into sin, and so through Christ a new path to God was revealed. However, God has not abandoned the Jewish people or Israel, but will return for them once the time has come to do so.

Living in Daily Righteousness

Paul closes his theological discussion in chapters twelve to the second half of fifteen, explaining how Christians should function on a daily basis. We should use our gifts to enhance our faith and glorify God while also helping others increase their faith or assist them in their struggles and temptations. Christians should look the other way when persecuted in any form. We should obey the laws established by governments. We should not judge others for their beliefs or customs, for that judgement is God's right alone.¹⁰⁶ These instructions from Paul echo what Jesus taught in His ministry as these instructions center around His two most important commandments: "... Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁰⁷ By following this commandment, Paul is trying to make it clear to the Roman Christians that they should love

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 90–91.

¹⁰⁶ Rom. 12:4–15:7 (CSB)

¹⁰⁷ Matt. 22:37–39 (CSB)

one another for their shared faith in God. It does not matter if one is circumcised and the other is not, or if one is party to a covenant while the latter is excluded. They all seek to glorify God and should come together to share that glorification and spread His word.

Paul's Mission to Spain

Paul starts his close to the letter by announcing his intention to travel to Spain after stopping to visit and rest with the Christian Romans. He explains that it is his mission to spread the gospel to those who have not heard it, defeating his original intention to preach in Rome. Instead, he wishes to stay with them for some time. Should the divisions between the Jewish and Gentile Christians be resolved, not only will their church be stronger for it and have a fuller, more complete understanding of the gospel, but they will be in a better position to support Paul in his efforts to preach in Spain if they accept Paul's teachings and work as a united church.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome to address some of the divisions that were happening between the Jewish and Gentile Christians, and used the gospel to explain that their divisions were man-made and that God's grace is available to all who have faith regardless of the law or heritage. In doing so, his goal was to strengthen the Roman church to glorify God and stand as a more united church and give them the opportunity to meet him and help him advance his mission to spread the Gospel to Spain.

¹⁰⁸ Rom. 15:22-32 (CSB)

Timothy and Titus: Importance of Godly Leadership and Sound Doctrine

Introduction

Paul writes about the importance of godly leadership and maintaining a sound doctrine for the church in his letters to Timothy and Titus. His lessons include the qualifications for church offices, refuting false teachings, and reliably spreading the truth of the gospel. The qualifications to hold church offices are discussed primarily in 1 Timothy. 1 Timothy also provides a brief discussion of the role of women in churches, although this may have been intended solely for the Ephesian church. Both overseers and deacons of the church should be respectable and tested in their faith and they should be able to effectively foster a community of faith, although only the overseer has the responsibility to teach and lead the church. Similar to modern quality control methods, these qualifications are set in order to maintain a standard of each church so that the truth of the gospel is kept and false teachings are resisted. Anyone who rejects the teachings of Christ or encourages false doctrines like asceticism or abstinence from marriage risk leading their community astray or causing some to lose their faith entirely. Wealth alone is not morally wrong as long as one is generous and responsible with it, but a greed and lust for it leads to evil,

false teachings, and money as an idol instead of true faith in God. The truth of the gospel must be purposefully maintained and spread otherwise all will fall prey to sin and false teachings, and there will be no one to safeguard against it. Christians must resist those who encourage others to sin or give in to evil desires. Through qualified and godly church leadership, adherence to sound doctrine, and the grace of God, a faithful Christian community can flourish.

Qualifications for Church Offices

In 1 Timothy, Paul discusses the standards that members of the church should adhere to, mostly referring to those holding an official capacity or position in the church. Although Timothy was not the head of the church in Ephesus, he played a major role in it. Paul wrote to him to address concerns regarding the structure of the church as well as false teachings.¹⁰⁹

In verses 2:8–15, Paul writes that men should not argue or get angry in the church and that women should dress modestly and remain quiet.¹¹⁰ While the controversy surrounding these verses questions whether or not they should be applied to all women in all churches or they applied only to the women at the Ephesian church, these statements had a profound impact on later churches throughout the Christian world, with many dressing in their best clothes and focusing on a shared worship of God. While the literal intention of these verses may be debatable, it is likely that they helped establish structure

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 373.

¹¹⁰ 1 Tim. 2:8–11 (CSB)

and routine for church-goers that helped solidify a sense of belonging and inclusiveness in church communities for several centuries. Verses 5:17–23 also encourage a sense of community through honoring elders, gathering support and witnesses for any accusations that may be made, and being diligent in the appointing of individuals to hold church offices.¹¹¹

Verses 3:1–7 discuss the qualifications for overseers: He must have a good reputation, experience in his own faith, control of his own household including his wife and children, and have a gentle nature, and be able to teach.¹¹² Although Paul does not go into detail about what exactly an overseer is, it is likely similar to (if not the same as) the role of a priest or pastor, or someone who simply guides the sermons as they are supposed to care for the church as they do their own household. Paul excludes new converts as serving as church overseers as they are simply inexperienced. Their own trials in maintaining their faith and godliness may not be fully realized yet and they may be at risk of falling victim to pride and a corruption of their ministry.¹¹³

Verses 3:8–13 cover the qualifications for deacons. Their qualifications are similar; however, they are not expected to teach or lead the church, likely relegating them to a supporting role. Beyond the actual qualifications, Paul is again vague in what responsibilities they should actually perform. However, their faith must still match that of an overseer and maintain the same level of godliness. Although disputed, it is possible

¹¹¹ 1 Tim. 5:17–23 (CSB)

¹¹² 1 Tim. 3:1–7 (CSB)

¹¹³ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 384.

that women were permitted to serve as deacons.¹¹⁴

There are several other qualifications that church staff should possess and Timothy likely knew these. Paul's intention in mentioning these qualifications in 1 Timothy were to remind him of the essential qualifications: those who hold an official capacity in the church should be a reflection of the teachings of the gospel as much as is humanly possible. Failure to meet these qualifications could risk either the collapse of the local church community or a corruption of the gospel's teachings. If a church leader is a new convert, they may still be in a prideful phase of their newfound salvation, which may lead to sinful pride that takes away from their faith and any sermon they may give. Similarly, a new convert may be more prone to accepting and spreading false teachings as they are not as familiar with the accepted doctrines and teachings. False teachings could also be spread by someone whose reputation is not great or well-known as they may be simply looking to gain attention and glory for themselves. In either scenario, false teachings could cause Christians to turn away from their faith and God or corrupt their faith and damage their relationship with God. The qualifications that Paul sent to Timothy help reduce the risks of either of these outcomes from happening. They help to ensure that those holding a church office are aware of sound doctrine and possess Godly leadership, otherwise the community may be led astray. While such corruption can still occur even if one meets these qualifications, there is less risk of eternal punishment for a community of Christians that is otherwise well-intentioned in their faith.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 385.

The Importance of Refuting False Teachings

Paul briefly mentions in 1 Timothy 4:1–5 that demonic influence may encourage false teachings, even though they may seem honorable. This includes asceticism and a rejection of marriage.¹¹⁵ While elsewhere Paul and the gospel teach that these things can help an individual focus on their faith and grow their relationship in God, they are by no means mandatory or necessary. However, marriage and food are a gift from God and should be appreciated as such.¹¹⁶ In verses 6:3–10 of 1 Timothy, Paul begins to directly discuss the dangers of false doctrine and greed. Any who give in to the allure of money risk wandering from their faith and embracing evils such as arrogance and greed, giving way to corruption within the church. Any who teach false doctrine, especially knowingly, or those who disagree with the teachings of Christ are conceited and also risk corruption within the church.¹¹⁷ All teachings must encourage a path of godliness among the members of the church. Those who teach false doctrines with a love of argument will confuse their debates as actual knowledge, likely as a result of a desire of their own prosperity and not that of the Christian community or the spread of the gospel.¹¹⁸ Paul also calls on the wealthy to be generous in giving and to be mindful of the risk wealth brings, such as an idolization of a false sense

¹¹⁵ 1 Tim. 4:1–5 (CSB)

¹¹⁶ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 386–387.

¹¹⁷ 1 Tim. 6:3–10 (CSB)

¹¹⁸ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 394.

of authority and security.¹¹⁹ Wealth itself is not a guaranteed fall from faith, but without vigilance it is difficult to resist the temptation to put one's faith in money and not God.

In Paul's letter to Titus, he also includes the qualifications for elders and overseers, and explains why in verses 1:10-14: They must be silenced for they are destroying households with false teachings so that they may receive money.¹²⁰ This is detrimental to the church, for it not only corrupts otherwise faithful members and risk their eternal souls but it also damages the church's reputation to outsiders who may have been interested in hearing the gospel.

The Importance of Teaching the Truth of the Gospel

The reason that false teachings must be refuted is because the truth of the gospel and Scripture must be maintained and taught properly. This is discussed in Paul's second letter to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1:8-12, Paul states that Timothy (and Christians in general) should not be ashamed of the gospel and embrace any consequent suffering, relying on God for strength. God has saved us for the purpose that He has.¹²¹ Paul then provides Onesiphorus as an example as he visited Paul in prison and did not abandon him,¹²² a decision that would have been logical

¹¹⁹ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 395.

¹²⁰ Titus 1:10-14 (CSB)

¹²¹ 2 Tim. 1:8-12 (CSB)

¹²² 2 Tim. 1:16-18 (CSB)

in in an honor-shame culture.¹²³ In order to guard against temptations that may lead to false teachings or a loss of faith, Paul encourages Christians to be diligent, speak meaningfully and in a way that glorifies God, and to flee from youthful passions and pursue faith, love, and peace.¹²⁴ Christians should correct those who spread false teachings, especially unintentionally, but in doing so they must remain gentle and not give into anger, otherwise any argument that arises will lead to nothing and the false teachings will likely continue. If the false teachers are truly genuine in their intentions, they will accept correction and God will allow them to return to their faith and truth of the gospel through His grace.¹²⁵ Paul goes on to warn that there will be difficult times ahead in this age, with people full of sin and evil attempting to spread their own way of life to the Christians and that this must be resisted.¹²⁶ Paul charges Timothy to continue to spread the gospel faithfully and truthfully because false teachers now spread a false gospel that has been adjusted to spread their own agenda and what they want to hear, and some may even embrace pagan mythology into their teachings. As Timothy is evidently qualified by Paul for church leadership, his ministering must be done in a way that combats the spread of false Christian teachings and brings others closer to God.¹²⁷

¹²³ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 399.

¹²⁴ 2 Tim. 2:15-22 (CSB)

¹²⁵ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 403.

¹²⁶ 2 Tim. 3:1-9 (CSB)

¹²⁷ 2 Tim. 4:1-5 (CSB)

In his letter to Titus, Paul encourages Christians to live godly lives worthy of His grace. Paul encourages Christians to teach what is good, love, and exercise self-control, all of which comes from a sound teaching of the gospel. He tells Titus that Christians should live as one who has been saved would live in God's grace. Paul also tells Titus to avoid foolish and senseless debates as they will lead nowhere, which he similarly wrote to Timothy.¹²⁸

Conclusion

In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul explains that certain qualifications must be met in order for individuals to serve in church offices, specifically in an overseer and deacon position. He also discusses how the community itself should behave. These requirements help ensure a sound teaching of the gospel so that the church community effectively grows in their faith and glorifies God. By encouraging godly leadership and sound doctrine, Paul believes that false teachings will fail and not overcome the truth of the gospel and the church shall persevere through this age. However, Paul also makes it clear that false teachings should be refuted when feasible, otherwise well-intentioned Christians will be led away from true faith and the reputation of the church may be damaged in the eyes of nonbelievers who may be interested in hearing the gospel.

¹²⁸ Thomas Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2019), 413–417.

James: Faith and Works

Introduction

The purpose of James 2:14-26 is to address the relation of faith and belief alone and that of works. The preceding verses also help to set up his argument, as he explains that someone who only hears the Word but does not practice it is not correct in their faith, and someone who seeks or shows favoritism within the church has not performed good works for the glory of God, but for himself. James does not contradict Paul's message that faith alone is what saves us, but instead offers a different perspective of how faith and works go together by examining the story of Abraham and Isaac. While salvation is achieved through faith alone, that faith should directly lead to good works as proof of faith. Additionally, a lifestyle that seeks to truly imitate Christ with genuine faith would allow for repentance and neighborly love that would also be reflected in our works. The main idea of James 2:14-26 should be taught often either in a sermon or perhaps as part of a Bible study. However, for Christians who are not interested in the theological background and how the verses fit into other lessons in the Bible, it is important to emphasize that a Christian should not parade around the good works that they have done or seek any sort of gain except that which comes

from God. Additionally, it must be made clear that good works alone do not lead to salvation and instead should come as a result of faith.

Main Purpose of James 2:14-26

The main point that James is trying to make in 2:14-26 is that faith in Christ and belief alone is not enough for salvation if there is no outward behavior (or works) that demonstrate that faith. In verses 2:15-17, James writes about how it does no good to wish someone to stay warm and be fed without taking any steps to actually help them achieve that. While our own actions should seek to mimic Christ and help and serve others, it is also a reflection of our own relationship with God. There is little value in telling God that you trust Him while refusing to love your neighbors and care for them. If you don't serve others, then your faith is incomplete. Verses 2:18-20 build upon this by stating that true faith is demonstrated by one's actions. If faith cannot be seen, then it is incomplete and useless. In verses 2:21-24, James references how Abraham was justified by his works in his offering up of Isaac, a sign of his faithfulness to God. Lastly, Rahab is also given as an example as she helped the Israelite spies despite the risk to her own life.¹²⁹

Both Abraham and Rahab demonstrated great service – Abraham to God directly, and Rahab to God's chosen people. In Abraham's case, he was willing to sacrifice Isaac (a work) to demonstrate his faith to God. In both scenarios however, faith

¹²⁹ James Kercheville, "James 2:14-26, Faith Works," West Palm Beach Church of Christ, June 6, 2010, https://westpalmbeachchurchofchrist.com/new-testament/james/james_2_14-26.html.

is still the key aspect. Works without faith is equally useless, as they are not done in God's name and do not actively glorify Him in the same way. It is always good to do good works and help others, but if it does not come from a place of love for God, it does not allow for justification or salvation through Christ. As John Calvin said, "It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone."¹³⁰

Preceding Verses of James 2:14-26

Several of the preceding verses to James 2:14-26 also help establish the point that James is making. James makes it clear that a person who is only a hearer of the Word and not a doer is not a true Christian. Only someone who has put what they have heard into action is a true follower of Christ.¹³¹ Additionally, James writes against showing favoritism in the church community, especially when it comes to worldly characteristics such as clothing or wealth.¹³² While an important value in its own right, it also supports the idea that those with many good works should not be treated above anyone else, and as such someone should not seek out good works with the expectation of special treatment.

¹³⁰ John Calvin, "Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote," https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin_trentantidote.html.

¹³¹ James 1:22-25 (CSB)

¹³² James 2:1-9 (CSB)

James Doesn't Contradict Paul

Because James states that faith without works is dead,¹³³ many people take the face value implications of this verse as directly contradicting Paul, who stated that we are justified by faith apart from works of the law.¹³⁴ Both refer to God's promise to Abraham as well as God's request for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. However, Paul and James view this story from a different perspective that does not actually contradict each other. From Paul's standpoint, Abraham's faithfulness in God and belief in the promise that God would bring him a child eventually resulted in his good works – in the example given in the Bible, his willingness to sacrifice Isaac in order to obey and glorify God. Paul writes that faith alone is what saves us, but ultimately true faith will be accompanied with works as a result. James has a similar view, but instead emphasizes the point that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac was not simply a work, but a proof of faith in God. If Abraham had been faithful to God in belief and trusting in His promises, but rejected God's command to sacrifice Isaac, then his faith would not have been a saving faith because it was not true faith and trust in the Lord.¹³⁵

¹³³ James 2:24 (CSB)

¹³⁴ Rom. 3:28 (CSB)

¹³⁵ Chris Bruno, "Does James Really Contradict Paul?" The Gospel Coalition, September 24, 2019. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/james-really-contradict-paul/>.

Relationship Between Faith and Works

It is true that we are saved by faith alone. No amount of good works, no matter how great, will lead to any measure of salvation according to what we know from the Bible. It is also important to note that when referring to good works, we are talking about service to our community and church and not Mosaic law. However, genuine faith should foster and ultimately lead to good works in order to glorify God and provide valid evidence of our faith. Repentance and neighborly love, however, are necessary for salvation. In this sense, it is possible to consider works to be part of the requirements in that your faith must actively reflect a Godly lifestyle.¹³⁶ Repentance is also a major aspect that allows faith alone to be the sole source of salvation. Our faith is demonstrated in part through our repentance of our sins and our attempts to do better. While good works may come from repentance, they are not a source of repentance. Sins cannot be “made up for” through anything except for Christ’s grace. Good works should instead be motivated by our faith in Christ and appreciation of His grace and forgiveness.¹³⁷

Teaching James 2:14-26

Because good works is so essential to having faith, it is essential that James 2:14-26 is emphasized regularly. There are a few

¹³⁶ Thomas Schreiner, “Faith and Works,” The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/faith-and-works/>.

¹³⁷ “Good Works Does Not Equal Salvation,” Preparing for the Kingdom Ministry, May 1, 2017, <https://www.preparingforthe kingdom.com/2017/05/good-works-does-not-equal-salvation.html>.

different things to consider: Explaining how in doing good works, one should not attempt to show off or otherwise seek recognition for their deeds, and how works is related to faith and salvation. Jesus made it clear that we should not seek out recognition or commendation for our good deeds, but rather we should do them in secret and without the expectation of worldly gain.¹³⁸ Otherwise, any good works that have been done will not have glorified God in the way that they were meant to. How then can we serve others, both in the community and within church, without receiving recognition? One way is by examining our intention – when serving others, it should not be with the expectation that any good will come to us from another person, whether it be financial or social gain. Any expectation of a reward should be expected to come solely from God. If our hearts are not true, we must reevaluate our own spiritual faith and relationship with God. Another way to guard against faithless works is to simply be humble about our activities. If someone recently helped repair a damaged shelter, they should not immediately brag to those in their lives about their good deeds. Instead, their work should only be mentioned if it is relevant – such as if volunteering results in a scheduling conflict, someone wants to know your plans, or if the experience could provide insight or direction in a conversation leading to further good works. Mention of our good works should only be stated as fact when it is relevant to another situation, for there is no point in telling anyone because God has already witnessed the deed and will reward us properly. Likewise, we should not treat anyone differently because of the magnitude or number of good works that they

¹³⁸ Matt. 6:5-8 (CSB)

have performed. While they may be an example and a beacon of faith, if they are true in their faith then their good works was not out of a desire for attention or positive reception.

Explaining how works is necessary for faith but not salvation is a much more difficult concept to teach, especially if they are not particularly interested in the theological or academic debates surrounding the idea. It is important to clarify that simply doing good works does not lead to a forgiveness of sins. Good works alone is not equivalent to repentance. It is absolutely good to help others and will ideally lead one towards a more Godly lifestyle, but in terms of salvation and faith good works are useless if one is doing it to atone for their sins without truly expressing sorrow. Christ died for our sins and He alone is the only one capable of forgiving our sins. While “earning” our forgiveness may seem like a noble goal, that strategy is more in line with Mosaic Law which has been rendered null in terms of our salvation. Instead, good works should come as a result of our faith in God in order to show our gratitude and appreciation for all that He has done. Good works that come as a result of true repentance is also a sign of faith as long as the work itself is not an attempt at repentance.

Conclusion

The intention of James 2:14-26 is to explain that faith without works is not realistically possible, as all faith should automatically lead to works and outward demonstrations of faith. James sets up this claim in the preceding verses by explaining that people who hear the gospel but do not act are not saved, and those who show favoritism or perform good works in exchange for special treatment have worked to glorify God. James agrees with Paul that while it is faith alone that saves, it is not true faith unless good works come as a result. This is shown in both their

use of Abraham and Isaac. According to James, had Abraham not been willing to sacrifice Isaac per God's command then his faith would not have been true. While Paul looks towards Isaac's birth as a sign of Abraham's faith, James sees Abraham's offering of his son as the true and tested sign of his faith. Works are not solely for the sake of the community or church, however – good works should reflect the lifestyle of repentance and neighborly love that Christ taught during His ministry. It is important for the lesson from James 2:14-26 to be taught to all Christians, however it should be made clear that works alone do not lead to salvation and are not a way to earn forgiveness for our sins. Good works should not come from a desire to seek any sort of worldly gain from those around us, but rather from a desire to glorify God as a sign of our faith.

Revelation: Comfort and Hope

Introduction

The book of Revelation provides a sense of comfort and hope for Christians who are suffering or being persecuted. Through their suffering, their faith glorifies God who will in turn reward them with eternal life. Each of the letters to the seven churches encourages a degree of comfort or hope for modern Christians as each church experienced struggles that are still present today. This includes simply following the doctrine without love, maintaining faithfulness despite constant pressure to turn away from God or embrace sin, combating spiritual decline and maintaining our faith as the Bible dictates and without the influence of false teachers, and consistently relying upon God for strength and not ourselves. Through these struggles, Christ has promised us eternal life with Him. The book of Revelation as a whole also reassures Christians that God has already planned out how the story will end and that sin will ultimately be removed from mankind. It may be difficult for some Christians to care for the book of Revelation, but we must remember that our suffering and hardship is experienced in order to be with God – not witness His vengeance on sin and evil.

The Letters to the Seven Churches

In the letter to Ephesus, Jesus Christ commends them for their faith but calls on them to return to their love of God and His ways as they are treating their faith as a rule book and not a source of love. When they fail, they do not repent. He calls on them to repent and continue to reject false practices so that they will be rewarded with the tree of life and eternal life with God.¹³⁹ This letter provides comfort to those struggling to live in a world with false and immoral teachings. If modern Christians continue to repent and reject false doctrines as part of their faith, they will experience the eternal life that is promised through Christ.

The letter to Smyrna continued the theme of faithfulness in the face of persecution. Although the church at Smyrna was found to be abundant in love and faith in Christ, they experienced harsh persecution and a constant risk of death. Jesus encourages them to continue to be strong and resilient in their faith despite these threats and that their faithfulness will be rewarded with the crown of life.¹⁴⁰ Although Christians in the Western world may not experience the same kind of persecution as early Christians, such acts are still present in the world and there will be people who try to dissuade us from our faith through more social means. However, we must persevere through these deterrents of faith in order to receive the gift that is promised by God.

¹³⁹ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 85–86.

¹⁴⁰ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 86–87.

The letter to Pergamum accused the church of allowing themselves to be tainted by false teachers, comparing them to Israel's multiple gods in the Old Testament when they would abandon their faith in God for other gods in the region such as Baal.¹⁴¹ This is especially true today in the modern world where we have instant access to media, information, and opinions. Many people will inject their own personal values and beliefs into their faith and tell others that it is in fact how Christianity (or another religion) was actually intended to be expressed. While some concepts and teachings may be compatible with Christianity, others may contradict the Bible directly. Although tiring and frustrating, faithful Christians can take hope in the fact that they're vigilance against contradictory doctrines and teachings will bring them closer to spending eternity with God. However, we must also be mindful that we are not forcing our own personal interpretations upon others and telling them that our way is the only correct way.

The church in Thyatira has the opposite problem of Ephesus – although they are incredible in their love for Christ, they do not follow His established doctrines very well. Their love for one another and for Christ is shadowed by their dismissal of His other teachings, leading them to mix their faith with pagan practices and sinful ways.¹⁴² Modern Christians must also make sure that their faith remains pure and that they resist temptation and sin from seeping into any part of their life. However, we will always fail and fall into sin. We can take comfort in our repentance by knowing that our friends, family,

¹⁴¹ Rev. 2:14–17 (CSB)

¹⁴² Vern Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 89.

and church community will support our struggle to live a life free of sin and that God recognizes our efforts and intentions regarding such matters.

The church in Sardis has experienced spiritual decline, and few remain truly faithful to God. In the letter, Jesus threatens to take action if the church does not repent and come back to faith in Christ, but recognizes that the remaining few faithful will be rewarded.¹⁴³ In a world where religion is declining in many regions, Christians can be reassured that even though they may be one of the few faithful in their community, they will not be punished for the sins of others. However, they should seek to reestablish their community and take care not to view their position as one of superiority.

The letter to Philadelphia encourages them to continue to remain faithful in the face of persecution by the Jewish population. In addition to the promise of eternal life, Christ also promises to spare them from the challenges that man will experience in the last hour.¹⁴⁴ Although perhaps not as comforting to modern Christians as some of the other letters in terms of the potential implication that we may still be tested, we may still take comfort in the simple fact that Christ promised that the Philadelphians' faith would be greatly rewarded. Even though we may feel like our faith goes unnoticed and unrewarded, we should strive to keep a similar degree of faith despite our hardship.

The final letter is sent to the church at Laodicea. They do not rely upon God's strength but instead rely upon their own wealth

¹⁴³ Rev. 3:1–5 (CSB)

¹⁴⁴ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 92.

and abilities. Jesus rebukes them for this attitude and calls upon them to repent and not practice self-reliance and to temper their pride.¹⁴⁵ This is a common and serious struggle for many Christians in a world where material security, comforts, and wealth appear to be a necessity. When we experience frustration or hardship, we often rely upon our own means to deal with the problem. While this is not bad in itself, we must recognize that our own strength comes from God and that it is Him we should be asking for help. This is also true for our own faith – we must ask Him to help us grow in our faith, as we are only able to know Him to the extent that He allows. The knowledge that we must rely upon God and not ourselves should bring comfort to Christians as we are ultimately in His hands and have no choice but to trust His grace and mercy.

Victory in the Spiritual War

The book of Revelation also provides comfort for Christians who are unsure whether or not there will really be a better era. Symbolic or literal, now or in the future – the interpretation does not change the fact that the book of Revelation tells Christians God's plan to defeat evil once and for all. God cannot be defeated or held back in any way – His will is law and if He says that Satan and evil will be defeated then it will be done. However, the book of Revelation also demonstrates that although there is still spiritual fighting and struggle, God has already won through Christ's sacrifice. In addition to the forgiveness of our sins, we now have the Holy Spirit to

¹⁴⁵ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 93-95.

strengthen us and provide us with the knowledge to glorify and expand God's kingdom. Although we must still persevere through hardship, Christ's return will end sin on Earth as it is remade.¹⁴⁶

At first glance, the Second Coming may sound more terrifying than comforting. Depending on the interpretation, there will be an immense amount of pain, suffering, and death along with global destruction. However, further analysis reveals that those who are faithful will survive and be rewarded with eternal life. The only question that Christians ought to struggle with is whether they are truly faithful or not and what they can do to continue to grow in their faith and glorify God. The Second Coming may also not appear to be significant for contemporary Christians. It is not currently happening, and it is unlikely that any Christian alive today will be around to experience the Second Coming. At the end of the day, Christians today are still suffering and struggling – what good does a future promise do today? While this may require more patience and acceptance to understand, there will be a point where we experience eternal life. We may not witness the downfall of sin as it happens under Christ, but we will be rewarded with the life that follows it. The point of our suffering and hardship is not to see the destruction of evil, sin, and those who perpetrate such acts, but to enjoy the peace and loving presence of God after our worldly deaths.

Conclusion

The book of Revelation, although apocalyptic in nature, provides hope for Christians who are struggling in their faith, either as a result of their own spiritual struggles or outward

¹⁴⁶ "The Book of Revelation: The King and His Kingdom," Third Millennium video, 1:59:33, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/135#qi5>.

suffering and persecution. The letters to the seven churches highlight some of our most common struggles and the fact that we must ultimately remain faithful and rely upon God and that we will be rewarded with eternal life. The book of Revelation also makes it known to us that the spiritual war between God and Satan will win and that in the meantime we have been empowered by both the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of our sins. The book of Revelation may not appear to be relevant to current Christians, but it is part of the promise of a better future and eternal life. We struggle so that we may experience God's promise, but we should not hope to see His judgement on the world out of malicious intent.

II

Essays on Theology

*This section contains essays regarding the theology of
Christianity based on the Scripture of the Bible.*

The Importance of Theology

Introduction

The study of theology is important to establish a coherent understanding of the Christian faith (to the best of our ability), the interpretations of the Bible and how best to approach the Word of God, and how to accurately follow and understand the teachings of Jesus. Because theology is the study of scripture and how to apply scripture, theology is directly relevant and important to the average Christian as it is essentially what they are taught. As such, theology is equally important to ministry as it is likely through a church ministry that a Christian learns about theology and Christianity and how it applies or further defines their faith. Theology is then practical because it is the means in which a better understanding of God can be achieved by Christians who may not be as well versed or capable of examining or interpreting concepts from verses in the Bible, such as the Holy Trinity, which is never directly mentioned in the Bible beyond “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Theology also helps Christians to stay true to the Bible and to help prevent hazardous interpretations that could ultimately pull people away from God, either through a misunderstanding of their faith or by causing people to lose their faith.

Importance of Theology in Discerning Theological Concepts

The main purpose of theology is to study the Bible. Theology is literally ‘thinking about God.’ Theology helps describe propositions and doctrine that can then be used throughout ministry to spread the Word of God and the teachings of Christ. It can also help condense other concepts repeatedly discussed or referenced in the Bible into ideas that are easier to explain to those who do not study theology. It is important to note that certain theological concepts may be interpreted differently or be entirely absent when comparing one Christian denomination to another. This does not always mean that either denomination is wrong or heretical to the Christian faith.

In theology, propositions help describe facts about the Bible. For example, explicit propositions can be found in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness...”¹⁴⁷ While the statement that all Scripture is profitable for teaching is clear and explicit, it can also be inferred that Scripture is used to communicate God’s will to us. From these views, it can further be inferred that Scripture is inerrant. Propositions such as these help Christians to further understand the Bible and how to apply the teachings found in it to their own life or ministry.¹⁴⁸

Theological doctrines are also critical to Christianity. Doc-

¹⁴⁷ 2 Tim. 3:16 (CSB)

¹⁴⁸ 2. “Building Systematic Theology: Propositions in Systematics,” Third Millennium video, 1:26:24, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/3>.

trines are syntheses and explanations of biblical teachings on a theological topic.¹⁴⁹ Doctrines tend to focus on a specific topic or group of topics. For example, the Apostles' Creed focuses on the set of main Christian beliefs that define Christianity from Judaism:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

This statement of belief is not found anywhere in the Bible, nor does it focus on the entirety of Christian belief, but rather on the main story of the New Testament. It helps establish a core doctrine of the church – the sacrifice of Jesus. It is also much more easily understood by the average person and helps create a “common knowledge” or sense of agreement and unity among a group of Christians when they may differ on other aspects of the Bible or the teachings of Jesus.

¹⁴⁹ 3. “Building Systematic Theology: Doctrines in Systematics,” Third Millennium video, 1:44:20, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/4>.

Importance of Theology in a Christian Life

Out of all of the possible uses of theology, perhaps the most noteworthy use is how theology can be applied to individual Christian lives. The Apostles' Creed, for example, defines one of the core beliefs of Christianity. For someone new to Christianity or who may be struggling with their beliefs or faith, the Apostles' Creed could be viewed as a starting point to either begin or start over. Someone may not be sure whether or not much of the Old Testament is historically accurate (regardless of the wisdom or themes it presents), but staying firm in their belief of the Apostles' Creed will ensure that they will continue to grow in their faith even though their beliefs may not be the exact same as others, and imperfect faith can still be faith. One who is fearful of their own doubt of different parts of the Bible can be reassured by Romans 3:22: "The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction."¹⁵⁰ While true faith may be more complex than simply "believing in Jesus Christ," Romans 3:22 and consequently the Apostles' Creed provide a strong foundation for someone to grow in their faith.

The doctrines and propositions that are established through theology are also influential on a Christian's life. Throughout the history of Christianity, it has been doctrines that generally guided and instructed Christians on how to live their lives. Just as theological interpretations may change, so can doctrines. The Catholic doctrine concerning indulgences, while present in a much more mild and positive manner today, was once used by Christians to "buy" their way into Heaven. Few, if any, modern

¹⁵⁰ Rom. 3:22 (CSB)

Christian denominations believe that someone can use their own money to simply get into Heaven. Such a belief does indeed seem to contradict several teachings of Jesus concerning wealth and Heaven. As theological perspectives change, so too can the daily lives of Christians – no longer being able to buy your way into Heaven was likely a terrifying realization to the moderately wealthy of the time.

Importance of Theology in Ministry

Most Christians will learn about the teachings of Christ and the majority of the Bible through Church, where the sermons are often based on theological understandings of His teachings and the context around them. Those in ministry must have a thorough understanding of theology to effectively and accurately convey the more complex messages from the Bible. One common example of this is the Trinity. The Bible never makes a literal claim that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are the same being. Without being instructed in church, many Christians would likely have little awareness of the Trinity or its implications. An understanding of theology also enables them to provide more detailed and coherent sermons that align with established doctrines and concepts. One can give a sermon with no real knowledge of theology, but then they are likely simply learning it as they go or creating their own version of theology without realizing what they are doing.

Theology can also help to remind those in Christian ministry that they do not necessarily have a stronger knowledge or relationship with God than others. It is possible that God has revealed Himself more to one individual than others, but it would be dangerous to say that we then know Him more

than others. God only reveals what He wants to reveal and as much as He allows, and it would be prideful to assume that one has access to any more insight or understanding than another.¹⁵¹ Not only does this risk damaging one's own relationship with God, but it can push others away if they are made to feel that their lack of knowledge about God is reflective of their relationship with Him. Just because one is well-versed in theology does not give them the authority to belittle or otherwise make others feel like lesser Christians.

Practicality of Theology

From the importance of theology in Christian life and ministry, it can be inferred that theology is practical. It allows for complex or paradoxical concepts to be better understood by the average person who may not be very familiar with the more subtle teachings that are found in the Bible. Overall, the study of theology and the Bible allows for a more well-rounded and fuller understanding of the Bible, even if we cannot truly comprehend every concept. Theology should be practical because one must consider contexts in the Bible and how they influenced the stories of the Old Testament and the cultural attitude towards Jesus during his life. What may have been relevant in one era of the Bible may no longer be relevant because of His sacrifice.

Theology should also be practical because, simply put, it should be able to be put in practice. Theology may lean towards an academic or scholarly pursuit, but any such discovery from one's research should be applicable to both the researcher's

¹⁵¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 34-35.

faith and Christians as a whole. To clarify, not all research will be literally applicable, but may help clarify other themes in the Bible. For example, there is some disagreement about whether or not Jephthah killed his daughter after offering to sacrifice whoever comes out of his house in exchange for defeating the Ammonites.¹⁵² Whether he killed his daughter or not may be of historical interest and fascination, but it does not take away from the moral of the story: that God is against human sacrifice. As punishment he has agreed to Jephthah's offer in exchange for his daughter's life, which he presumably hoped would not be the person (or creature) to greet him on his return. What may be useful in applying to one's own faith is that if he did not kill his daughter, it potentially demonstrates God's forgiveness and mercy, assuming God allowed Jephthah to let her live and it was not an act of disobedience. If he did kill his daughter, it demonstrates that oaths and promises are not to be taken lightly, especially if they are made to God, for He will hold you to them.

Theology Provides a Sense of Belonging and Unity

Through theology, we can determine that every individual person has a reason for being alive and that they have a place in God's family. It is through our faith in Christ that we are able to follow His teachings and receive endless second chances as needed. Every individual has a special call from God to play a role in each Christian community, and it is in Christian communities that faith thrives the most. Because we are part of God's family, we must love Him and listen to him and love

¹⁵² Judg. 11:1-39 (CSB)

each other,¹⁵³ just as one does in the common family dynamic.

Through this sense of belonging and unity comes a reinforcement of beliefs, literally how “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another.”¹⁵⁴ Theology helps prevent incorrect views from pushing away people who may otherwise be interested in learning more about Christianity or wanting to grow further in their faith. One person or congregation may believe and argue that immense wealth automatically condemns people to Hell. They may base this claim on Mark 10:25: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”¹⁵⁵ There are similar verses that are negative about wealth throughout the New Testament, such as in Paul’s letters and James. If one were to read no further or any other section, it would seem fair to make this claim. However Mark 10:27 immediately rejects this claim: “Looking at them, Jesus said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God, because all things are possible with God.”¹⁵⁶ Ephesians 2:8–9 also appears to support the idea that the wealthy can enter Heaven, “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift – not from works, that no one can boast.”¹⁵⁷ Without in-depth theology to examine how these verses interact and overlap on the same topic, Christians may take incorrect views and spread such views. The question of whether or not wealthy people

¹⁵³ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 115.

¹⁵⁴ Prov. 27:17 (CSB)

¹⁵⁵ Mark 10:25 (CSB)

¹⁵⁶ Mark 10:27 (CSB)

¹⁵⁷ Eph. 2:8–9 (CSB)

enter Heaven is evidently much more complicated – there is more to consider with these individuals than the fact that they are simply wealthy. If a wealthy person is immediately told that they are going to Hell for the sole fact that they are wealthy, it is likely going to discourage them from pursuing any faith in Christianity. In this scenario, this may prove the point of the person who is against wealth, but there are likely better ways to approach the topic of wealth with someone who is wealthy.

It is worth noting that while doctrines through theology allow for unity and a sense of belonging, theology is by no means a universally agreed upon subject. There are many different Christian denominations and it would likely be incorrect to say that any particular denomination is more wholly accurate or correct than all other denominations.

Conclusion

Theology is incredibly important for Christianity. It is through theology that doctrines and propositions are identified and used to form the core beliefs of denominations. Ministries must then use theology in their efforts to bring Christians closer to God. Christians must acknowledge doctrines and concepts derived from theology in their daily lives, otherwise they may struggle to understand or maintain their faith. Theology is also important from a practical perspective and should be viewed from such perspective in addition to a scholarly or academic one. It can demonstrate how one should live their life in accordance with the teachings found in the Bible, especially when compared to how the people in the Bible lived. Although theology has led to splinters and numerous denominations, theology is often the unifying factor that provides a sense of belonging and relevance to their faith and trust in God. While the average Christian may not think much of theology or how it

is relevant to them, theology is likely one of the defining factors for their faith and how they understand their relationship with God.

Importance of the Hermeneutical Process

Introduction

When investigating Scripture, we must focus on the original meaning of the passage and the cultural context that it was given in, otherwise we risk arriving at an incorrect interpretation which would lead to an even more incorrect application of the passage. The proper application of Scripture is important because the misapplication of Scripture can lead to a loss of faithful followers and harm the church community. This stage must also be careful to keep in mind that the decrees of God, characters, and era that we live in has not changed even though our culture has.

Preparation

Preparation is the first stage of the hermeneutical process. As the name suggests, it involves preparing oneself to examine Scripture. This involves inspiration, illumination, and influences. Inspiration involves recognizing that even though the books of the Bible were written by human authors, they had the divine influence of God to guide them in their writing or teachings. Illumination is the Holy Spirit allowing us to

understand the works found in the Bible. This does not mean that we do not need to study or put in effort to comprehend the Bible, but rather that the Holy Spirit will guide us in our efforts to interpret the Bible. Although we must put in our own human work to understand a passage, we must also be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to affect our efforts. It is important to remember that God allows us to know Him, and that we are incapable of understanding Him more than what He allows.

Perhaps the most important aspect to be mindful of in the preparation stage are the influences around us. We live in a world where everyone is connected instantly and news around the planet is at our fingertips. We are influenced by social media and political opinions. Many politicians argue that their political stance is the biblically accurate one, while others may claim that their opponent is working against God. Friends, family members, or celebrities may share their own interpretations of the Bible or certain doctrines which may be more popular or appealing but not necessarily in line with how God wants us to live. We may even have our own opinions where we feel that the Bible is wrong on a topic. We must set aside our own opinions, biases, and expectations before we investigate a passage in the Bible. We have to work to prepare ourselves to interpret with an open mind. If we do not, we risk misinterpreting or twisting a passage to fit a personal agenda that is not in line with the original meaning or intention of the verse.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ "He Gave us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation: Preparation for Interpretation," Third Millennium video, 45:57, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/153#qi1>.

Investigation

The investigation stage of the hermeneutical process is perhaps the most difficult and dangerous stage. While the Bible still applies to us in the twenty-first century, the original meaning is often unclear or no longer relevant in the literal sense – for example, we no longer offer sacrifice to God in repentance of our sins as a result of Christ’s crucifixion on the cross. Despite this, there is still wisdom and understanding to be found in the Bible even if we no longer follow all of the cultural customs. Regardless, it is still important to uncover the original meaning and context (or as much as is possible) in order to determine how it applies to modern Christians.

When investigating a piece of Scripture, one should also keep in mind that we no longer have the original texts. The texts that make up the modern Bible are copies and translations of previous copies and translations, with many variants resulting in many differing translations in the English language.¹⁵⁹ One should be open to investigating other translations of the Bible to determine which perspective or wording makes the most sense in the context of the larger theme or story being told.

Application

Correctly applying the interpretation found in the Bible may be the most difficult part of the hermeneutical process. It is a careful process that requires us to determine how God wants

¹⁵⁹ “He Gave us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation: Investigating Scripture,” Third Millennium video, 48:48, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/154>.

us to teach others. Failure to do so could not only lead to the incorrect interpretation and application of a teaching, but also the weakening or collapse of a Christian church and its community. One example of this is the views on homosexuality in the Bible – different interpretations have destroyed church communities and even resulted in denominational fractures such as with the United and Globalist Methodist church.

The application of how we interpret Scripture shapes both the social/physical and spiritual world around us. However, it is crucial that we remember a few important details when it comes to figuring out how to apply an interpretation: God's views/commandments are unchanging – no matter what the cultural climate may be towards certain ideas, God's ruling will not change and we must adhere to it regardless of whether or not we agree with it. The general ideas of the world are also the same – there are many sinners, false believers, and manipulators who will challenge our faith. In terms of the New Testament, we are still in the same era that Paul and the other apostles lived in. Christ has not returned, and we must patiently await just as they did.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

Investigating Scripture must take the original meaning and context of the passage and the intentions of the author in order to correctly interpret the themes or lessons that we can gain from the passage. The proper application of Scripture is necessary otherwise improper application could lead to the collapse of church communities. When working through the application

¹⁶⁰ "He Gave us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation: Applying Scripture," Third Millennium video, 46:41, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/158#qi1>.

stage, one should remember that God is unchanging, that we live in the same era as Paul and the apostles, and that the same archetypes of sinners, false believers, and nonbelievers are still present today.

Tasks and Functions of the Church

Introduction

The existence of the church is a blessing from God. Through the church, we are given the opportunity to help God expand His kingdom and glorify Him. The church has two primary instructions: the cultural mandate and the Great Commission. The cultural mandate is God's original instruction to humanity to populate and rule over the earth in order to glorify God, while the Great Commission is Christ's command to baptize in His name and create new disciples throughout the world by bringing others to faith in Him. The main tasks of the church are to worship, nurture, and provide witness. Worship involves living a godly life and keeping His teachings in mind as much as possible, as well as asking for forgiveness when we stumble. Nurture is the edification of the church community as well as the support system between individuals as they grow or struggle in their own faith and relationship with God. Witness is essentially demonstrating God's love and grace through Christ's sacrifice on the cross to non-believers through church activities. In addition, there are three main ministries within the church: the Word, rule, and mercy. My own view of the purpose of the church and its function has gone from bad to good as I have gotten older, with the church I grew up in being

very greedy and seeking recognition for its good works while the church I now attend is much humbler in its activities, seeks to truly replicate Christ's commands and teachings as much as humanly possible, and is honest about its expenditures.

God's Kingdom and the Church

God's kingdom existed long before the church and ultimately God does not really need the church, but wants humanity to help Him expand God's kingdom throughout the earth so that we have the opportunity to glorify Him and have a relationship with him. The church as we know it was established by and through Christ. Through Christ's sacrifice, the kingdom of God was formally inaugurated on earth. Those who are part of the church are joined with Christ and become citizens of the kingdom of God. Within the church, Christians are encouraged to support one another in their own faith and to work together to glorify and worship God.¹⁶¹ Outside of the church is the frontier of God's kingdom, where Christians are expected to bring more people to Christ and push the edge of His kingdom even further.

God's Mandate for the Church

God's mandate for the church can be split into two sections: the cultural mandate and the Great Commission. From one perspective, the church and its members are part of God's "army" to spread His kingdom to the ends of the earth. If the church is not active in its mission of spreading His word, then it

¹⁶¹ Col. 3:16 (CSB)

is not functioning properly as a church.¹⁶² The church's mission isn't to only teach people about Christ, but to also help those in needs and those who are less fortunate. The idea is to bring them into a relationship with God through helping them, but should be done regardless.

The cultural mandate of the church (and humanity) is found in the first chapter of Genesis and consists of three parts: a divine blessing, a command to populate the earth, and a command to hold dominion over the earth. The mandate itself is a divine blessing – out of all the creatures on the earth, or that God could have created, He chose us to rule over the planet and be part of his kingdom. Prior to the fall, populating the earth would have immediately and directly spread the kingdom of God as each new human would glorify God. After the fall, we are still encouraged to multiply but now must also coexist with those who do not worship God. We are also to hold dominion over the world in a way that glorifies God and His creation. However, holding dominion over the world does not mean that we should mistreat our resources or the environment, but rather protect them and do our best to preserve the world as God created.¹⁶³

The Great Commission is given to us by Christ after His resurrection. Similar to the cultural mandate, Christ blessed His followers (and consequently, the church) by instructing them on how to spread His teachings and bring others to Christ. This is the most notable role of the church – the

¹⁶² John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 1033.

¹⁶³ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 1034.

planet should be filled with disciples of Christ. This comes through preaching, outreach, and baptism in Christ's name.¹⁶⁴ Although international mission trips or trips to difficult-to-reach areas are admirable, Christian outreach efforts are also worthwhile and important in one's local community – the church is only as strong as the community it is in, and a church will not survive unless it performs good works in and has the support of the community.¹⁶⁵ Through the Great Commission, the church is able to resume the cultural mandate despite the fact that all of mankind is fallen in sin.

Specific Tasks of the Church

There are three major components to the church's task: worship, nurture, and witness. All of them come from the Great Commission and serve to grow both faith in ourselves and that of those who have just come to Christ. Worship is more than just attending Sunday morning service and praise, but also seeking out ways to glorify God and live a life worth of His love. Worship revolves around God and Christ and should further educate and teach the church community about Christ and how to grow closer to Him. Worship is often part of nurture – the edification of the church community through pastoral care, counseling, and ministry. In doing so, we are constantly reminded of our sinful nature and the need to reflect on our lives and decisions and repent. This task is performed

¹⁶⁴ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 1035–1036.

¹⁶⁵ Walter Klaiber, "The Great Commission of Matthew 28:16–20," *American Baptist Society* 37, no. 2 (2018): 116.

not restricted to church officials, but is a task for the whole community in order to support one another. Through the support of one another, we not only help those around us grow in their faith, but demonstrate God's love and mercy to those who may be interested in coming to church.¹⁶⁶ The final main task of the church is to serve as a witness of Christ. To be a witness of Christ, we must display evidence of God's love and grace and lead others to Christ regardless of what our own personal opinions may be about that individual and regardless of the cost that the church may incur. As disciples of Christ, everything that the church does must be done with the intention to spread God's kingdom and bring others into a relationship with Christ.¹⁶⁷

Ministries of the Church

Like the tasks of the church, there are three major ministries central to all churches: the ministry of the Word, the ministry of rule, and the ministry of mercy. The ministry of the Word involves the preaching of the Bible, and is primarily performed by church elders, who also perform the ministry of rule within the church. Within the ministry of rule and the Word, church elders primarily support the task of worship and nurture, although they are also likely to encourage witness. Some deacons also perform this task, although they may additionally function within the ministry of mercy. The ministry of mercy

¹⁶⁶ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 1037-1040.

¹⁶⁷ Willis G Bennett, "The witness of the serving church," *Review & Expositor* 66, (1969): 104-105.

is perhaps the most well-known arm of the church, as it is the ministry in which both members of the church and of the larger community are supported and aided through outreach and volunteer activities in an effort to spread the word of God.¹⁶⁸ While this office may be overseen and largely facilitated by a deacon or elder, the ministry of mercy is effectively supported by the entire church community, as its goal is to nurture and witness a constantly growing Christian community.¹⁶⁹ It is important, however, that church officials are involved in some capacity with this ministry's activities in order to prevent church members from distorting the message of Christ or causing more harm than good when attempting to spread His word, as some church members may be less familiar with certain doctrines or positions related to their church and unintentionally spread misinformation about the church's beliefs and stances.

Personal Impact of the Church

For better or worse, the church and its tasks and functions have had an immense impact on my life. Growing up, I had a very different and distrustful relationship with church. The church I attended was a larger church (that now has around ten campus locations in several different cities) that was very inviting at first. It became very clear after a year or so that while the church was somewhat involved in the community, it was clearly

¹⁶⁸ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 1041-1043.

¹⁶⁹ Rick Carmickle, "The deacon: Biblical foundations for today's ministry of mercy," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 10, no. 2 (2018): 338.

for-profit. This particular church had a “come-as-you-are” attitude, which is great for people looking to learn more about their faith or test the waters. Unfortunately, the leadership in the church began almost monthly donation campaigns. While some of the funds went to building and staff wages and some to outreach and community involvement, the several pastors of the church received most of the money. Several of the pastors would go on ocean cruises two to three times a year with their family, and a few even went on week-long vacations almost every month. Although the pastor I knew personally was very friendly and willing to talk with me about my faith, everything felt like a sales pitch and as if they didn’t even believe in God themselves. This led to about a decade of disdain for organized religion and put a significant strain on my relationship with God – I didn’t care whether I was sinning or what God thought of me.

About a year ago, my ex-girlfriend and I broke up largely due to this issue. I had been to her church but was still distrustful. A few weeks after our break-up, her Pastor sent me a letter with his phone number. I was at a low point and figured I had nothing to lose, so I reached out. We ended up meeting monthly for a year until he retired, and still stay in touch. I began attending his (and awkwardly, my ex-girlfriend’s) church. If it were not for him, I would not have a relationship with God. The church that I am now part of does not brag about its volunteer or outreach activities, but is instead welcoming to everyone. An email is sent out breaking down the tithing and expenses of the church so that I can see exactly where the money goes as well, which makes me feel a lot more comfortable and trusting. I also firmly believe that the pastor represents a perfect example of the Great Commission – he reached out to me and made a

disciple out of me, and I believe that God was directly involved with that phone call. The tasks of the church are good and certainly no church is perfect, but the community can easily be twisted and corrupted by those who ignore the teachings of Christ and instead use their positions within the church to receive profit or recognition for their own activities. It is important to recognize that not all churches are the same, as one church may not accurately represent God's kingdom or the aspects of Christianity that are important to you, while another may be a better fit.

Conclusion

As part of God's kingdom, we have been blessed with the responsibility to rule over the earth under God's cultural mandate and given specific directions on how to expand God's kingdom through the Great Commission. The main tasks of the church are to worship, nurture, and witness within both the church community and the world around it. Worship encourages living a godly life, nurture supports members of the community in the development of their own individual faith, and witness spreads God's kingdoms through the actions of the church and the creation of new disciples. To support these tasks, the church has three main ministries, which are the Word, rule, and mercy. Working together, the ministry of the Word and rule encourage worship and nurture within the community, and the ministry of mercy especially supports the task of witnessing Christ. Through personal experiences, I have realized that the intended tasks for the church can be manipulated and abused in a way that ultimately glorifies and rewards the church leaders instead of God, and it is important to seek out a church that strives to genuinely and sincerely carry out God's cultural mandate for the church as well as Christ's

Great Commission.

Humanity Fallen in Sin

Introduction

According to the Bible, we were made in God's image and intended to reflect His dominion over the lands and creatures of Earth. However, Adam was disloyal to God and chose to sin, disrupting his relationship with God and consequently all of humanity's relationship with God, creating a world that can only live in sin. Although we still reflect His image, it is no longer a pure or honest reflection of God's love and grace. As a result, humanity must live with the consequences of sin. While it is a Christian's responsibility to avoid sin as much as possible and repent, it is ultimately impossible to succeed until Christ returns to fully consummate God's kingdom on Earth.

Man in God's Image

The Bible tells us that we were made in God's image and that we would rule all life on the planet.¹⁷⁰ Our very nature as the dominant and apex species of Earth is a reflection of not only God's will but of God Himself. Just as He rules the universe with absolute authority, we have the ability to utilize nearly

¹⁷⁰ Gen. 1:26 (CSB)

every animal or landscape to our liking – so much so that reckless care or indifference on humanity’s part can destroy entire biomes and species. In a similar (but much greater and glorious) fashion, God controls the entire universe – He can create or destroy entire galaxies just as easily as he created the life on our own planet.

Although humanity was made in God’s image, the image is now corrupted. While there are many good traits and characteristics of humanity, it is often counterbalanced with acts of greed, lust, and violence that goes against the teachings of Christ. Although we still have dominion over the land and the Earth, this authority now requires great difficulty and work in order to exert that control, compared to the light and seemingly joyful burden that Adam and Eve experienced in the garden of Eden.

Humanity’s Failure

While it is unclear whether Adam and Eve would have simply lived a simple life in the garden of Eden forever or if it was a test, it is obvious that they failed. As the representative of humanity, Adam disobeyed God and sinned. As a result, God punished all of humanity with death and hardship.¹⁷¹ Intentional or not, Adam chose to question his personal relationship with God and whether or not God was genuine in their relationship. By questioning this relationship and sinning, he brought sin to all

¹⁷¹ “What is Man?: The Curse of Sin,” Third Millennium video, 1:21:47, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/221#qi1>

mankind.¹⁷² Even after Noah's flood humanity continued to sin and almost immediately returned to their sinful and rebellious ways. The only reason God has not devastated the world again in such a manner is due the covenant that He made with Noah and all of humanity.

Consequences of Sin

As a result of Adam's sinful decision, all of humanity is now guilty of sin. As part of that punishment, women now experience pain in childbirth and humanity must toil in their labor and everyone will now experience death.¹⁷³ Even though the rest of humanity did not commit the same sin as Adam, all of mankind has chosen to intentionally or unintentionally sin or reject God at some point in their lives. Because of this reality, the world is in constant suffering and hardship as individuals and nations fight one another for worldly wealth and comforts. Additionally, even if man resists sin, there is a constant struggle against the temptation to sin that everyone must wrestle with. Even the most devout Christians will struggle with the desire to sin, ranging from premarital sex to simple dishonest to murder. It is impossible for humanity to be worthy of God's love and grace, and attempting to earn such alone will result in eternal condemnation.¹⁷⁴

Fortunately, Adam's decision to sin ultimately fell in line

¹⁷² John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 852-853.

¹⁷³ Gen. 3:15-19 (CSB)

¹⁷⁴ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 854-864.

with God's grand plan. Humanity has been saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to forgive our sins. Through Christ, humanity now has the opportunity to spend eternal life in the presence of God. Followers of Christ can now experience the fulfillment and satisfaction that comes with knowing that their hardship in life and in resisting sin, while difficult, is ultimately worth the struggle as they can experience salvation and forgiveness through Christ. Although the personal relationship between man and God is still damaged, sin has perhaps given humanity the ability to experience a more grateful and appreciative connection with God now that it knows what it is like to live a life without God's ever-present love and grace.

Conclusion

Mankind was made in God's image to reflect His authority and dominion, with parallels being drawn to man's domination of Earth and God's absolute control of the universe. However, this image was corrupted by the first man, Adam, who chose to sin against God and condemn humanity to live lives of hardship as punishment. All humans now live in sin and constantly deal with the temptation of sin, no matter how much they love the Lord or how much effort they put into following Christ's teachings or the commandments. However, Christ's sacrifice has allowed mankind to experience a restored relationship with God in which He forgives us of our sins as long we genuinely repent and have faith in Him. Humanity has been (and will continue to be) unable to return to a world that is free of sin until the return of Christ.

The Covenants and Expansion of God's Kingdom

Introduction

The growth and expansion of the kingdom of God and of Eden is achieved primarily through successive and additional covenants that God has made with His people, primarily in the Old Testament and finally through Christ. Each covenant that God made helped shape the Jewish and Christian faith, and allowed for the teachings and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The covenants also help demonstrate a timeline of God's plan for Christ and the establishment of the new covenant. It is now time for Christians to spread the teachings of Christ throughout the world, and not in the sense of superiority or authority, but out of love and a desire to see all saved no matter their flaws. This has been reflected in my own state, Kentucky, as several natural disasters have struck the state over the past year and despite such tragedy, God's grace has been evident throughout it all.

Major Covenants in the Bible

God establishes covenants with mankind, and more often specifically with the Israelites, to advance His purpose. God defines the covenants that he makes, and the terms are non-negotiable. He makes it clear who the covenant applies to and who it doesn't. We can either agree to the covenant or refuse it, but we cannot change it and refusal is likely to lead to eternal condemnation.¹⁷⁵

The first major covenant that God establishes is with all of mankind: The Noahic (or universal) Covenant. God saves Noah and his family from the flood that destroys all others on the planet, but afterwards promises that He will never flood the whole earth again.¹⁷⁶ God had essentially “reset” land-bearing life on the planet and promised Noah that He would never cause such an act to happen again. This covenant was with all of mankind, regardless of their descent, beliefs, or morals. God then appointed the appearance of a rainbow as a reminder of this promise,¹⁷⁷ which is significant as rainbows often appear after rain. This covenant is still in effect today.

The Abrahamic covenant is the second major covenant established by God. This covenant is two-fold, and the latter half did not fully apply until Christ's appearance. The Abrahamic covenant, established with Abraham, declared that his descendants would be made into a great nation and become God's

¹⁷⁵ O. Palmer Robertson. *Covenants: God's Way with His People*. (Georgia: Great Commission Publications, Inc., 1987), 10–11.

¹⁷⁶ 1.Gen. 9:11–12 (CSB)

¹⁷⁷ O. Palmer Robertson. *Covenants: God's Way with His People*. (Georgia: Great Commission Publications, Inc., 1987), 9.

chosen people, at least for a time. Part of God's proof of His promise was giving Abraham a child from his wife, who was well beyond the age of having children. This great nation was later established through Moses and Joshua as Israel, whom God frequently showed great mercy on despite their constant sin and unfaithfulness to Him. The second half of the covenant established that all people on earth would be blessed through Abraham.¹⁷⁸ This portion could not be fulfilled or realized until Christ's coming, as the Israelites were exclusive – outsiders were rarely allowed to share their faith and marrying outside of their ethnicity was extremely discouraged. However, through Christ, God expanded His chosen people to any Gentile who repents and puts their love and faith in God and follows His commands and teachings.¹⁷⁹ Although circumcision is no longer needed because of Christ, God established circumcision of the Jews as a sign of their faith and outward commitment towards Him.¹⁸⁰

The Mosaic covenant established Mosaic law, set forth by God. In order to receive God's blessing and grace, the Israelites under Moses had to follow the laws set forth, namely the commandments but also those concerning the ways of life and sin offerings. Mosaic law emphasized works as proof of faith, which is no longer necessary through Christ. Instead, salvation is only required through faith in Christ and repentance, but works should come as a genuine result of true faith.¹⁸¹ Mosaic law is not necessarily harmful to one's salvation as long as

¹⁷⁸ Gen. 12:1-3 (CSB)

¹⁷⁹ Rom. 11:17 (CSB)

¹⁸⁰ Gen. 17:10-11 (CSB)

¹⁸¹ James 2:18 (CSB)

one emphasizes faith over works, but it is not needed to be saved anymore. However, this covenant that God established with Moses and the Israelites was crucial to ensuring that the Jewish faith flourished and succeeded in preparing for Christ's ministry on earth.

The Davidic covenant was established with King David of Israel. As a man after God's heart, God promised David that his descendants would always sit on the throne so long as they kept His laws.¹⁸² Although this covenant seems to apply directly to David's family and had little effect on the Israelites, its implications were made clear through Christ, a descendant of David through Joseph. The Davidic covenant is permanently fulfilled in having Christ as the ruler of God's Kingdom. Although the Davidic covenant may appear to be insignificant, this covenant directly leads into the new covenant that was established by Christ.

Through Jesus Christ, an entirely new covenant is established. Like the Noahic covenant, it is available to all of mankind, however unlike the Noahic covenant, the new covenant requires people to be faithful Christians, keeping His word and following the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Doing so leads to eternal salvation, while those who reject or ignore this covenant may end in eternal damnation. This is the last covenant that God has made according to the Bible, and there appears to be no need for any further covenants until the prophesied kingdom arrives.

The common theme across all of these covenants is that faithfulness and obedience to God will lead to His grace and blessing. The only slight exception here is that the Noahic covenant is

¹⁸² 2 Sam. 7:16 (CSB)

a result of Noah's faith and obedience and not as an exchange. Each covenant is built up as a result of the previous: the Noahic covenant allows for the Abrahamic covenant, which leads to his descendants receiving the Mosaic covenant. The nation of Israel, established through the promises of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant, allows for the Davidic covenant to lead to Christ's eternal rule and love in the new covenant.

The Present Kingdom

The present kingdom of God is in a period of expansion. Christians all over the world are working to spread the truth of the gospel and His teachings. God's people are no longer the Jewish Israelites, but all people of the earth who put their faith in Him. Through Christ, we have received salvation through substitution: His death on the cross absolves us of our sin so long as we remain faithful and repentant to Him. We no longer need to offer sin offerings, for He was the ultimate sin offering, and we no longer need to follow Mosaic law.¹⁸³ In order to help fulfill the new covenant and bring about the prophesied kingdom, we must diligently spread the gospel. This can be done through cultural causes such as social justice or volunteering, which is good in and of itself, but it must come from a place of submission to God,¹⁸⁴ so that our good works also glorify God. We must also embrace suffering, as it is needed for spiritual growth so that God may help us remain humble

¹⁸³ Vaughan Roberts. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 114.

¹⁸⁴ G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim. *God Dwells Among Us*. (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 54.

and help Him expand His work and purpose.¹⁸⁵ Suffering allows us to test our faith and trust in God, as well imitate the love of Christ and the suffering that He endured in order to forgive our sins. The present kingdom of God exists through Christians and the churches around the world, and by spreading the faith and establishing new churches, we are spreading God's kingdom across the earth. Doing so also expands Eden – by spreading the kingdom of God, the metaphorical Eden is also expanded. Those present in the kingdom of God will enjoy an eternal Eden in God's presence, and wherever God's kingdom is present, so is the possibility of Eden.

Personal Application

The expansion of the kingdom of God and His covenants has many parts that can be applied to my own personal life. Over the past year or so, I have been very conscious and reminded of the Noahic covenant, but not through rainbows. As a resident of Kentucky, I have heard of two devastating floods and a town-obliterating tornado just in the past year alone. While I was not affected by these events myself, the impact is evident across the state as people went on volunteer and mission trips to provide relief and aid to those affected. This reminds not only that God will not destroy the whole earth, but that people (and Christians that I personally know) will step up to help those in need and express support and love to those who need it, regardless of the faith or values of those in need. Their actions also demonstrate the spread of the kingdom of God:

¹⁸⁵ G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim. *God Dwells Among Us*. (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 110.

multiple communities coming together to aid another out of love. Although many of these volunteers may not be Christian or may not have done it in the name of God, their actions still reflect the love and grace that God has shown me throughout my life. The Abrahamic covenant is also reflected in this: as a member of the “all peoples of the earth” and not God’s original chosen people, I recognize His grace and mercy that he has shown to the people living in these devastated towns. In a similar sense, the new covenant encourages me to mimic such behavior, as the behavior of the volunteers mimic that of Christ: to help and love one another, especially those who need it. Although doing good works is in itself commendable and a right thing to do, I am further encouraged to do so as a result of His love. If He has treated me so fairly and mercifully, despite my constant sin and disobedience, then I should seek to replicate that love as much as I can with those that I can help, as well as in my daily lives. In doing so, I hope that I am doing my part in spreading God’s kingdom to people even if they aren’t fully aware of it yet or if they find their faith indirectly as a result of the situation requiring my help.

Conclusion

The Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants all helped set the stage for expanding God’s kingdom across the earth, as well as access to Eden. They are all interconnected because without the covenants, Israel would not have been established and Christ would not have come, and salvation of all people would never have occurred. However, without the goal of expanding God’s Kingdom and Eden, the covenants would have served little purpose except for those that they immediately applied to, and the new covenant would likely not have happened in the first place. By acknowledging this,

I can recognize that God continues to keep his promises and demonstrate his lives to those who continue to expand His kingdom and love their neighbors.

The Kingdom of God and Jesus

Introduction

God's kingdom will be brought about in three stages: the inauguration, the continuation, and the consummation. Each stage is represented throughout each of the gospels, and Acts focuses especially on the continuation stage. The inauguration began with the first coming of Christ and His ministry. This stage saw the first coming of Christ, the establishment of the Christian faith, and the availability of salvation and forgiveness of our sins without the need of Mosaic law or sacrifices. The continuation stage began with Paul and the disciples spreading the gospel and establishing the early Christian church. The consummation stage will begin when Christ returns and renders judgement and salvation along with the fullness of God's kingdom.

Inauguration

The inauguration of God's kingdom began with the first coming of Christ. Although the kingdom had not fully arrived with Christ, its presence was initiated among us. His ministry and sacrifice marked a major change in mankind's relationship with God that had not been seen since Moses. Jesus declared

this inauguration himself, stating that time had been fulfilled and that the kingdom of God had come near.¹⁸⁶ The phrase “come near” may imply that the kingdom of God, although present, has yet to be fully established throughout the world or in its spiritual entirety. Through Christ, followers are able to experience salvation and grace despite the evil that is still present in the world. We know that Christ brought God’s kingdom to Earth not only because of His miracles, but because of his ability forgive us of our sins.¹⁸⁷

Part of this inauguration also included establishing a new form of faith with His followers, teaching his disciples how they should in turn support one another and spread the gospel. Before Christ, forgiveness of sins was obtained through animal sacrifice and adherence to Mosaic law. However, through Christ and His sacrifice the forgiveness of sins is obtained simply through genuine repentance and His grace. To the surprise of the Jesus’ followers, the inauguration of God’s kingdom was almost entirely spiritual and not physical, with Jesus stating that He even though He would be among us, we would not be able to see him or any direct entity of God’s kingdom.¹⁸⁸ Jesus also makes it clear that the kingdom He is establishing is not a worldly kingdom, but truly the kingdom of God.¹⁸⁹

The inauguration stage was completed with Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection. The resurrection of Christ not only demonstrated that he was truly the Son of God, but also that His word was true. If he was able to defeat death,

¹⁸⁶ Mark 1:15 (CSB)

¹⁸⁷ Matt. 9:2-6 (CSB)

¹⁸⁸ Luke 17:20-21 (CSB)

¹⁸⁹ John 18:36 (CSB)

why would He be unable to offer salvation, grace, and the forgiveness of our sins? This final act and miracle confirmed that God's kingdom had truly arrived on Earth, even if it was not yet fully present. After His departure, the Holy Spirit took His place to keep God's immediate presence on Earth.

Continuation

The continuation stage is the current stage of God's kingdom, which began with Paul and the disciples' missionary efforts and the establishment of churches throughout their travels. As part of the continuation stage, we are tasked with keeping our own faith and spreading the gospel to those who have yet to hear it throughout the world.¹⁹⁰ It is also the time where Christians should support one another through encouragement and rebuke to ensure that no one twists or falls from their own faith. We should also always be on guard with our faith and do our best to never stray from our faith or reject Him, for He can return at any given moment.¹⁹¹ Just as God does not rest, we must continue to strive towards readying the world for the consummation of God's kingdom.

Not everyone is able to literally travel in order to spread the story of Jesus, nor is everyone suited for that type of missionary work. However, all Christians should work to share their faith (when appropriate) with those around them. Simply talking to those within your community is one way that someone can spread the gospel. By bringing just one person into a closer relationship with God, He is further glorified and His kingdom

¹⁹⁰ Acts 1:8 (CSB)

¹⁹¹ Luke 13:32-37 (CSB)

becomes a little bit bigger.

Part of the continuation of God's kingdom is hardship and struggle. Life will not be easy and there will be days where it appears as though things will not get better. These hardships may come in the form of physical, financial, emotional, or even spiritual hardships. However, it is important that we do not lose faith. The continuation of God's kingdom involves relying on both God for strength as well as the support of local Christian communities. Although the continuation stage of God's kingdom involves spreading the gospel, it could also be seen as a stage where Christians maintain themselves and their communities. Spreading the story of the gospels will not be very effective or worthwhile if the Christian communities (old and new) are no longer true followers of Christ.

Although primarily an example of God's eternal love for us, the story of the lost son also sets an example for how we should treat those around us, especially those who share our faith. The son lost his way, but he eventually realized his mistake and sought to humble himself. Despite his mistakes, his father forgave him and was overjoyed upon seeing his son.¹⁹² While this story demonstrates God's love for us, it is a reflection of how Christians should act towards others as well. Whenever one has been wronged, they should seek to forgive their antagonist as soon as possible. Even more importantly, they should welcome them back once the antagonist has repented and sought to make amends.

¹⁹² Luke 15:11–31 (CSB)

Consummation

The consummation stage of God's kingdom will begin with Christ's return. One of the first direct references that Christ will return is found in Matthew, when it was written that Christ will return at an unexpected hour that no one will know.¹⁹³ Aside from any other reference to the consummation of God's kingdom, this verse lets followers know that although there may be yet another pause in the stories found in the Bible, God has not finished His work.¹⁹⁴ When Christ returns, He will judge both the living and the dead. Those who remained faithful to Christ will be saved, while those who turned away from Him will be condemned.¹⁹⁵ This judgement is also discussed through His parables used throughout the gospels. God's kingdom will be fully brought upon the earth and everyone will be with God, and a new heaven and earth will be created and there will be no more pain or death.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

All of the gospels reflect on God's kingdom and discuss the stages of inauguration, continuation, and consummation. The inauguration stage was established by Christ at His first coming, His ministry, and His sacrifice on the cross. It established salvation and grace through Christ and the beginning of God's kingdom on Earth. The continuation stage, which is the present stage, is the period between the work of Paul and the disciples to

¹⁹³ Matt. 24:27 (CSB)

¹⁹⁴ Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 624-625.

¹⁹⁵ John 5:23-29 (CSB)

¹⁹⁶ Revelation 21:1-4 (CSB)

now, consisting of the spreading of the story of the gospels and a shared faith and the establishment of supportive communities and churches. The final stage, consummation, will begin once Christ returns. This stage will bring about the entirety of God's kingdom as well as judgment on the world.

Prophet, Priest, and King

Introduction

During His ministry on Earth, Jesus Christ played the roles of the prophet, priest, and king, which were significant characters throughout much of the Old Testament. Prophets spoke the Word of God and were very clearly called and at times dismayed at their involvement in the Lord's plan. Ultimately, His prophets remained loyal and their prophecies would be fulfilled even as their function changed throughout the history of Israel. Priests protected and taught the word of God and Mosaic law and served to mediate between God and His people. Priests would bless the Israelites on behalf of God and offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the Israelites. They themselves were held to a higher standard and disobedience could be met with severe punishment. Israel was not supposed to have a human king, as God was the true ruler over the Israelites (and earth), however after repeatedly asking Samuel for a king, God told Samuel to appoint a king for them. Although imperfect and ultimately disastrous towards the exile of the Israelites, the kings brought a temporary restoration of faith in God across Israel as they ensured the priesthood was not corrupt and often heeded the words of a prophet. Many of the kings, out of faith or not, attempted to expand Israel's borders

and influence into the greater Near East region, although with little lasting or significant success. Several also sought peace and justice, but were unable to truly establish any such concept in practice. Despite the promise of a great prophet, no prophet was comparable to that of Moses until Christ began His ministry well over a thousand years later and fulfilled the promise of bringing God's kingdom to earth. Christ served as a priest in that He taught the masses about God and His commandments, served as a mediator, and ultimately offered Himself as sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Although Christ was never a recognized king during His ministry, He brought forth God's kingdom into the world with a promise of reward for His followers in Heaven.

Prophet

The role of prophet is perhaps the most recurring of the three in the Old Testament. In the Christian context, a prophet is "someone who speaks the words that God gives him to speak." In the Old Testament, prophets also provided a link between God and His people, as the prophet would speak both to His people and sometimes to God on their behalf.¹⁹⁷ Although there were a few other ways that God revealed Himself in the Old Testament, many of the prophecies, warnings, and rewards from God are dictated through the use of His prophets. All prophets were called by God. However, there is often doubt, regret, or resistance from the prophet about their role throughout their career. Jonah may be the most well-

¹⁹⁷ Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2016), 21.

known example. Instead of heeding God's direct call, Jonah boarded a ship in a futile attempt to flee from God's presence.¹⁹⁸ Ultimately, however, they remain loyal to God and speak the word that is given to them by the Holy Spirit. All prophets are validated by the eventual fulfillment of their prophecies, although they are not always fulfilled in the way that people expect.

The role of prophecy also evolved throughout the Old Testament. In the pre-monarchy era, God's prophets often served as leaders of the early Israelite people and constantly reminded and encouraged His people to keep His covenants. However, during the monarchy of the Israel, prophets came to lead less and focused instead more on reminding the Israelites of their covenants with God and to remain faithful and loyal. Although not always the case, prophets during the monarchy era often contacted the king directly in order to push for reforms and political or cultural changes to promote faith and trust in God. In the exile, the prophets came to serve less as leaders or reminders of faithfulness, but instead called for repentance and patience. After the restoration, they continued to encourage the Israelites to keep their faith, repent of their sins, and continue to rebuild their kingdom given to them by God.¹⁹⁹

Although incredibly unique compared to the previous prophets, Jesus Christ also served in the office of prophet. His role as a prophet was prophesied by Moses and a later editor of the Pentateuch. According to Deuteronomy, a prophet would be raised up from amongst the Israelites and would be

¹⁹⁸ Jon. 1:3 (CSB)

¹⁹⁹ "We Believe in Jesus: The Prophet," Third Millennium video, 1:44:44, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/130>

the one they would listen to. However, Deuteronomy ends with the note that a prophet as great as Moses had yet to appear,²⁰⁰ and no prophet throughout the Old Testament came close to rivaling all of the works of Moses. Even Samuel, whose career as a prophet saw the creation of Israel as a kingdom that became a regional power, did not come close to the impact that Moses had on the Israelites. Generations of Israelites waited for the prophet who would usher in God's kingdom on earth, and it was fulfilled in Christ.

The gospel of John identifies Christ as the long-awaited prophet. In the first chapter of John, Jesus is identified as the "Word made flesh" and explicitly states that He is the prophet that is expected to be greater than Moses. In terms of His actual duties as a prophet, Christ delivers us from sin and grants us grace and salvation in exchange for our faith just as Moses led the faithful Israelites out of Egypt.²⁰¹ However, unlike Moses, Christ delivered us not from an oppressive regime but from everlasting and permanent death. He offered us a way to spend eternity with Him.

Priest

The role of the priest in the Old Testament was to serve as a mediator between God and the Israelites. The priests were set apart from the rest of the Israelites as holy – they anointed themselves with specific oils, and descended from

²⁰⁰ Deut. 18:15 (CSB); Deut. 34:10–12 (CSB)

²⁰¹ David Schrock, "How Is Jesus a Prophet Like Moses?" The Gospel Coalition, June 13, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/jesus-prophet-moses/>.

specific priestly lines. All priests were (or were supposed to be) descended from the line of Aaron. The priests also wore specific garments to further distinguish themselves as separate and be easily identifiable to the rest of the Israelites.²⁰²

One of the most important responsibilities of the priests of the Old Testament was performing the sacrifices. Various sacrifice rituals existed depending on the circumstances, but generally involved the blood of the animal and the meat, which was often burned. The priests performed these sacrifices to atone for both their sins, the sins of individuals, and the sins of Israel as a whole. Priests were often expected to be obedient to God and Mosaic law. There are several instances, such as Nadab and Abihu, where priests are killed as a result of their disloyalty or lack of care in their priestly duties. Priests were held to a higher standard than that of the Israelites because they were especially knowledgeable in the law and were not allowed to become unclean and had to undergo rituals to become clean again. Where prophets spread the word of God, priests taught His law. Priests were responsible for teaching Mosaic law to the successive generations of Israelites, including clean and unclean foods, what is holy and what is unholy, what to do if one becomes unclean or unholy, and what animals acceptable for sacrifice. Priests sought to enforce the covenants established by God and ensure that the Israelites remained as pure and clean as possible before Him so that they were worthy of His love and covenant. Priests also brought blessings to the Israelites

²⁰² Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2016), 60–63.

as long as they remained obedient and faithful.²⁰³

During the monarchical period of Israel, priests were closely involved with the kings. The king would ensure that the priests were performing their respective services, and the priests worked with the king to ensure that those services continued to be offered and expanded upon.²⁰⁴ After the exile, priests continued to play an important role in leadership and in a similar role to prophets, became a source of moral guidance and community amongst the Israelites and later Jewish population.

Although he did not come from the line of Aaron, Jesus served as the ultimate priest. He upheld Mosaic law in His own life and taught the word of God as He Himself was the word made flesh. He taught His disciples how to address sin, bestowed blessings, and protected the purity of faith and worship by accusing false or incorrect leaders of the Jewish faith and correcting those who failed to properly understand. However, Christ's most significant function as a priest was His sacrifice on the cross. In place of the usual animal sacrifice to atone for one's sins, He offered Himself up as a permanent sacrifice so that people no longer had to offer animal sacrifices and instead were able to receive forgiveness and salvation through their own repentance and continued faith and worship.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2016), 75–81.

²⁰⁴ "We Believe in Jesus: The Priest," Third Millennium video, 2:06:05, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/131>

²⁰⁵ Jonathan Gordon MacLeod Pratt, "Prophets, Priests, and Kings: A Contested Framework for Church Leadership," *The Reformed Theological Review* 79, no. 3 (2020): 194.

King

The majority of kings in the Near East (and perhaps a most of the world at the time) were absolute rulers. They often also fulfilled their respective role as a priest and had direct rule over everything. While not a god, kings were often viewed as divine or divinely powered. In contrast, Israelite kings recognized that they were not the highest power in the land as God was the true ruler. The establishment of Israel without a king also implies that God was the true king and that a human king was not truly necessary.²⁰⁶ Originally, Israel was not intended to be ruled by an earthly king, although there were leaders with significant influence over Israel (or parts of Israel) such as Joshua or the judges. However, the Israelites repeatedly asked for a king and eventually God relented and commanded Samuel to find a king.²⁰⁷ The Israelite king was to memorize Mosaic law and have a copy with them with the intention to remind him that he does not have true absolute authority and that ultimately, they were required to be obedient and submit to God and His will. In an attempt to ensure a reliance on and faith in God, the king was not allowed to have a large army. The king was also unable to have many wives, which served to restrict entangling foreign alliances that could lead to misplaced trust. Lastly, the king should not be wealthy as money often leads to evil and self-entitlement, risking the false belief that the king was greater

²⁰⁶Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2016), 110–112.

²⁰⁷1 Sam. 8:19–22 (CSB)

than any other Israelite or God Himself.²⁰⁸

Although the judges that came before the establishment of the king continued to expand Israel and perform God's will, the judges themselves were often corrupt and the priesthood had also become corrupt, often abusing their position for their own benefit. Although God is still against the establishment of a human king, He listens to the Israelites and establishes the office of the king.²⁰⁹ Although the office experienced phases of faithlessness and corruption, many kings valued the words of prophets and ensured that the priests were performing their duties faithfully and not in a corrupt or self-serving manner. However, many also ultimately sought security in their own power and influence and turned away from God, allowing the priesthood to become corrupt and ultimately resulting in the exile of the Israelites from the promised land.

Throughout the Old Testament is numerous claims that another king will rise over Israel to conquer the world and bring peace and justice. Jesus Christ is identified as this king throughout the New Testament. Although He did not physically conquer any lands or establish any seriously lasting peace in any region, He ushered in God's kingdom on earth and His sacrifice meant that all of humanity now had the opportunity to become a part of His kingdom. The saving knowledge of God's rule meant that His eternal reign would spread across the entire planet and that while His followers may not experience justice or peace in their earthly mortal life, they will be rewarded with

²⁰⁸ Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2016), 114–115.

²⁰⁹ Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2016), 118.

such in their eternal life at His side.²¹⁰

Conclusion

Jesus Christ represented all three major roles of the Old Testament: prophet, priest, and king. In being the ultimate prophet, priest, and king, Christ has forgiven us of our sin and provided salvation for those with faith without the need for future prophets, priests, or kings to mediate between man and God. The role of prophet in the Old Testament was primarily to spread whatever message God had given them. Although they were very clearly called on by God, a majority of prophets often expressed sadness at the prophecies they were commanded to speak and occasionally expressed outright resentment that they had been chosen by God. The most important role of the prophets however, was that their prophecies would be fulfilled one way or another. As their role changed throughout the Old Testament, so did their direct influence over the Israelites. However, they often maintained a high level of influence in the king's court and served as cultural beacons after the exile. Moses promised that a prophet would rise amongst them who would be the one that is their true leader, which was ultimately fulfilled in Christ after centuries of waiting and hoping that the next prophet would be Him. Priests taught Mosaic law and the word of God and ensured obedience among the Israelites while holding themselves to a higher standard of obedience in service of God. Christ fulfilled the office of priest by teaching the word of God, interceding on behalf of man, and sacrificing himself on the Cross to provide salvation and grace for all who

²¹⁰ Gavin Ortlund, "Resurrected as Messiah: the risen Christ as prophet, priest, and king," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 4 (2011): 756-761.

have faith in Him. Israel was not originally intended to be ruled by humans, but rather governed and ruled by God and His law. However, a king was ultimately appointed at the request of the Israelites, establishing the formal office of king and replacing the judges that came before. Although the office of the king in Israel ultimately fell to temptation just as the priests did, many Israelite kings prolonged the nation due to their efforts to keep Israel faithful and stop the worship of other gods. Although they may have been the earthly rulers of Israel, they were supposed to limit their authority to recognize God's ultimate authority and place as the true ruler of Israel. Christ is identified as the king to fulfill the promises of past kings and covenants and establish His kingdom across the world, granting justice and peace to His followers in the afterlife.

The Importance of God's Lordship Over Time

Introduction

One attribute of God is that he rules over time. There are multiple arguments over how this attribute is actually applied, however it is often easier to view this attribute as having God both outside of time while simultaneously responding to temporal events in successive orders, just life on Earth does. However, if He does experience time in successive order of events, it is likely at a different rate or speed than what we experience. It is important to know that God's perception of time is not the same as ours, just as our perception of time differs from that of a snake or a cat. As a result of God's awareness of all temporal events, He is unchanging. From what we understand, His opinions and views are not going to change since He has all possible information available. Knowing that God is ever-present throughout time can provide great comfort to Christians as it means that not only does He already know all of the flaws and mistakes that we will make and loves us anyway, but He also knows the plans for our future even if we cannot see a better tomorrow. God being lord over time also means that Christ's sacrifice applied to everyone from both the past and the future. Were this not the case, those who lived

before Christ would have fallen short of Mosaic law and simply be condemned and separated from God.

God's Perception of Time Differs from Our Own

Regardless of how God perceives time, it is certainly different than our own. This is confirmed in 2 Peter 3:8: "...With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."²¹¹ It is similarly mentioned in Psalm 90:4: "For in your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that passes by, like a few hours of the night."²¹² Humans are simply not capable of conducting their lives in the same manner of God. While there is a near infinite number of reasons, our perception of time is one of these – not only is finite for us, but it is also at a constant speed and we are unable to see the future and have only a limited knowledge of the past.²¹³ This also leaves room for debate concerning the creation of the Earth and man and whether or not it was a literal seven days or not. Some argue that Genesis 1 does not contradict scientific findings and that each day was actually the course of billions of years. Others may argue that the chapter should be taken literally and that the world was created in a week. Unfortunately, there is much more to this debate than just God's perception of time, as the genre and literary style must be considered.

Although God is holy and therefore separate from the life that

²¹¹ 1. 2 Pet. 3:8 (CSB)

²¹² 1. Ps. 90:4 (CSB)

²¹³ "What the Bible says about Time, God's Perspective of," Bible Tools, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/2368/Time-Gods-Perspective-of.htm>.

he created, there are some examples in nature that can help us understand how another being may perceive time differently than a human. For example, flies experience time in a much slower fashion than we do. This is how they are able to react quickly to being swatted and get out of the way even when they do not seem to be moving fast. Other animals may experience the flicker of a light bulb or television more frequently than we do. Although this may also be in part a result of their sensory organs (such as eyes), it still plays a role in how the creature experiences the passage of time.²¹⁴ It is important to note that while God likely experiences time at an accelerated rate when He “takes part” of it, there are specific occasions where He experiences time at our speed, specifically during cases of theophany. The best example of this would be in the life of Jesus Christ, who is God made flesh.²¹⁵ Although no scientific studies were conducted or claims made concerning Christ’s perception of time, it is reasonable to assume that His experience was the same as ours as a result of Him becoming man and facing humanly temptations to sin and commit immoral acts.

²¹⁴ “Time perception varies between animals,” University of Edinburgh, last modified April 5, 2016, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/2013/time-160913>.

²¹⁵ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 374.

The Importance of God Existing Throughout and Above All of Time

God's lordship over time has incredible ramifications and importance for the Christian faith. Nobody alive during the Old Testament had the opportunity to experience Christ's teachings or learn of His sacrifice on the cross. While the Law of Moses was intended to be a way for salvation for the Israelites, no one is able to perfectly fulfill the law.²¹⁶ Based on this, it would appear as though no one who died before Christ's sacrifice would be eligible for His grace and salvation. However, the author of Hebrews writes that Christ has sacrificed Himself once for all of the ages, otherwise He would have had to do it multiple times.²¹⁷ The ritual sacrifices of the Old Testament did not truly provide salvation, but rather imitated Christ's eventual sacrifice so that the people who came before Christ could practice their faith as God instructed and experience a version of His sacrifice.²¹⁸

An Unchanging God and His Temporal Omnipresence

If God were to only exist in the present just as humans, then it is fair to say that He can still see the future. He is also still omniscient and knows all things. Even if He exists above and outside of time, he is still aware of all events that have or will

²¹⁶ Rom. 3:20 (CSB)

²¹⁷ Heb. 9:24-26 (CSB)

²¹⁸ "Christ's Sacrifice: Once For All," Christ In Scripture, last modified March 24, 2021, <https://christinscripture.com/2021/03/24/christs-sacrifice-once-for-all/>.

happen within our own perception. Regardless of the reality of how His temporal omnipresence functions, it has a clear and direct effect on the Christian faith.

Christians are able to take comfort in the fact that God knows the future. He knows the plans He has for us and His knowledge of the future guarantees that they will succeed (not including His various other attributes that allow His will to be fact). Even though our current situation may be difficult or less than ideal, we must persevere and hold to our faith in Him that He will use such difficulties and pains to our benefit in the future (which He is already aware of).

Although there are a number of factors that explain why God is unchanging, one of them is his full and constant awareness of all events across time and space. His decisions and plans were, as far as we understand, decided long before the earth was formed. Although God's attitude towards may appear to change, it always coming from a place of love and benevolence – He has plans for us and they will be achieved one way or another. God being unchanging is also a comfort to Christians. Because He knows the past, present, and future, God already knows all of our problems – there is nothing for God to change His mind on because he already aware of what happens throughout time. This also means that He will not stop loving us or abandoning us. However, from our human perspective and awareness of the passage of time, it will feel as though God has left us when we sin unrepentantly or otherwise intentionally disobey Him.

One notable contradiction to God's unchanging character and His ultimate knowledge of all temporal events is the fact that He seems to have changed His mind multiple times in the Old Testament after repeatedly delaying Israel's (or another country) destruction as a result of a prophet or group of people

repenting and making an effort to change their ways. However, this is not God deciding against destruction. God is always aware of how events will play out, but mankind is not. In every case that God relented, He knew that someone would intercede and ask for forgiveness, another chance, or whatever impending event was about to occur. However, we as Christians are not able to see the future nor understand God's will or intentions for us. As such, we must always repent and make an effort to recognize and reorient ourselves when our actions may be contradicting God's will or the plans he has set for us.²¹⁹

Personal Application of God's Temporal Omnipotence

Knowing that God is aware of all things in time has brought me peace, frustration, and stress. On one hand, God has a plan and I need to be faithful during times of hardship – that is when faith is truly tested and matters the most. On the other hand, it is frustrating knowing that the plan is not yet in effect and I that I have to wait for it. This does allow me the opportunity to practice both my patience on a daily basis and making an effort to think about how grateful I am for what I do have and all of the others acts that God has performed in my life. Although not so much stressful as an adult, knowing that God knew the future was stressful growing up as it felt like I constant reminder that I was unable to get away with anything (and the reality is that I can't). For the most part, God being both ever-present and outside of time now brings me comfort knowing that even if I don't know what is happening,

²¹⁹ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 368–372.

everything has already been figured out.

Conclusion

God's perception of time likely differs from our own. When He subjects Himself (if he does) to the flow of time, it is likely still at a different speed, similar to how humans experience time differently than other animals. This is not to say that He is unable or unwilling to experience time at the same rate as humans do, but simply that He likely does not except in cases of theophany, such as Jesus or His communications to the prophets such as Moses. He is also unchanging. Because He is aware of all temporal events throughout time, there is no new data for Him to take into account. This also means that his opinions, plans, and views are unlikely to change or differ from how it was in the days of the Old or New Testaments. While it may not always seem this way due to the fact that He relented on destruction multiple times in the Old Testament, God is aware of how mankind will react and exactly who will attempt to intercede before He even makes his intentions known. God having control of time also means that Christ's sacrifice was applied once and for all to both those who came before and those who came after His death on the cross so that salvation ultimately became available to all even though the circumstances and opportunity for faith differed entirely.

Clarity of the Bible

Introduction

Biblical clarity is simply defined as God's word and the writing of the Bible to be understandable to the average person. This does not include every theological concept or doctrine, but rather the primary and essential teachings found through the Bible. Biblical clarity also does not prevent us from misinterpreting certain passages nor does it mean that we are able to understand the Bible without help from God or others. Biblical clarity also allows a greater number of people to follow Christ, which is why it is important to have faithful and genuine translations of the Bible. Clarity in the Bible also provides a degree of reassurance that as Christians we understand what is needed to experience God's grace and salvation.

Biblical Clarity in the Bible

Biblical clarity is found throughout both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, many of the verses where God speaks is relatively simplistic. For example, God wrote the ten commandments on the tablets. They are relatively simply with commands such as "do not murder" or "do not

steal.”²²⁰ These are simplistic statements that make it clear what is not permissible to God. In the New Testament, Jesus also makes it clear that the biblical texts are meant to be easily understood with his repeated references to “Haven’t you read”²²¹ intended call out the Pharisees and Sadducees for complicating or misunderstanding rather simple truths from the Old Testament.

However, it is important to note that biblical clarity is not the same thing as simplicity. The Bible has many theological concepts that are not directly expressed in any of the books and there are still many complex concepts found in the Bible that the average Christian may not be aware of or understand.²²² Even the Holy Trinity is not fully understood. While these concepts are of great theological significance and may help to explain other concepts, they do not seem to be ultimately required to be understood as they are often not even mentioned directly in the Bible.

Biblical clarity also does not mean that there will be one single interpretation – only that the base of the most important doctrines should line up, such as salvation, grace, and the forgiveness of our sins. It is also still possible for people to misunderstand or misinterpret certain passages in the Bible. This is why it is important to practice our faith within a Christian community so that our understanding, interpretations, and beliefs can be discussed with others who may be able to correct or clarify certain aspects that we may be incorrect about.

²²⁰ Exod. 20:13-17 (CSB)

²²¹ Matt 12:3 (CSB)

²²² Mark Thompson, “The Clarity of Scripture,” The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-clarity-of-scripture/>.

According to Frame, there are still ideas found in the Bible that are beyond our understanding. However, we should still be aware of our personal limitations and know when to put in more effort and seek help from those around us who may be more knowledgeable on certain subjects. Understanding the Bible is also not specific to our education or any wisdom. Praying for understanding is one method of clarity. Finally, there are also those who God does not want to understand certain parts of the Bible.²²³

Importance of Biblical Clarity

Biblical clarity is important as it allows the teachings of the Bible to be available to almost everyone, provided that they are able to put in the actual effort and time to thoroughly read the Bible. This maximizes the number of people who can follow Christ and receive salvation.²²⁴ Although there was a period where the Christian Bible was almost exclusively by priests to large groups of people, the teachings found in the Bible were also passed down orally before the modern composition of the Bible was completed.

Biblical clarity is also important to translators of the Bible. It is important that their translations (whether meant to be more readable or into a completely different language) is as faithful as possible to the original intention of the original texts and teachings. Although the original texts and oral traditions are

²²³ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 607.

²²⁴ "Glorious Doctrine: The Word of God," Hope Church, <https://hopechurchtw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/04-NOTES-Clarity-Interpretation.pdf>.

inspired by God, translations are not considered inspired²²⁵ and therefore are prone to interfering with God's intended clarity. This has led to various interpretations; however, most translations of the Bible are generally viewed as reliable and largely accurate. Failure to do so could lead to a translation making an otherwise straightforward biblical decree into a complex and convoluted message. Additionally, the ease of understanding the original message must also take into account personal bias. For example, someone who is working on a translation should not push any sort of agenda based on their beliefs, such as predestination or purgatory, but rather provide an honest copy of the original text and leave it up to the reader to decide how they interpret a passage for themselves.

God's Authority and Presence

The clarity of the Bible also reflects God's authority and presence. For example, being able to understand the essential teachings of the Bible mean that we have no excuse to not worship God. It also means that people who understand more about His requirements are likely expected to be all the more obedient to His commandments. This reflects God's authority because by giving us the means to understand the Bible, He has compelled us to obey Him or face condemnation.

The clarity of the Bible is also a reflection of God's presence and nearness to us through the Holy Spirit. It is only through His grace and support that we are able to understand anything in the Bible. Even learning to read at a young age can be

²²⁵ "Are the translations of the Bible inspired?" Compelling Truth, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/inspired-translation.html>.

viewed as a gift from God that could not have been achieved with His love. In a more literal and literary sense, God is also directly and indirectly present constantly throughout the Bible,²²⁶ reflecting his constant presence throughout all of the events that take place, especially in the Old Testament and the gospels. Without His presence, many prophets and kings would have failed. In a similar sense, His presence in the Biblical texts allows us to understand that He is still present with us today even if we do not directly see or hear Him.

Personal Application

On a personal level, biblical clarity provides a sense of comfort and encouragement that we are, at a minimum, aware of the basic fundamental requirements for salvation. For example, we know that we must recognize and accept Jesus Christ as a savior and that He died to forgive us of our sins. Understanding different parts of the Bible is also a show of God's love for us – He did not have to allow the stories of the Bible easily understood to the average person, but chose to do so because He loves us and wants to provide us with the opportunity to seek Him out, praise him, and glorify Him. In addition to prayer, He also wants us to be able to seek out answers in the Bible that will help us push through the hardships of life or when we are doubting our own faith.

Conclusion

Biblical clarity means that the word of God is understandable to everyone, although this does not mean that there aren't

²²⁶ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 610–612.

complex or difficult concepts found within the Bible or that people are unable to misunderstand or misinterpret verses and sometimes, we will need to ask for help. Biblical clarity also provides a larger number of people the opportunity to make the decision to follow Christ. It is important for translators of the Bible to keep this clarity in mind so that they do not detract or mistranslate the word of God. The clarity of the Bible also means that we are aware of how to obtain the salvation and grace that come from Christ's sacrifice and that He has made this information available to us because He loves us and wants us to be near to Him. The Bible's clarity also comes from God's authority and presence, both found in the literal text itself as well as His authority over us and presence among us today.

Assurance of Salvation

Introduction

Assurance is the theological concept that Christians are aware of their salvation through God's grace and Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The idea that we are assured of salvation comes through numerous verses in the Bible, primarily in the New Testament and Paul's letters. God makes it clear that those who are not obedient and faithful are punished. However, through an honest effort to be obedient, a reliance on God for strength, and repentance for our sins when we fail, we are able to rest assured that God's mercy and grace will grant us salvation. It is a necessity to combat the doubt and uncertainty that exists in all who have faith in Christ, which is present due to our sinful nature and temptation to sin and turn away from God. Because God does not break His oaths and will not lie to us, Christians can take comfort in His words through Scripture promising us that those who believe in Christ will be saved. Assurance also gives us a glimpse into God's nature and further reinforces the idea that he is loving and caring. God intentionally and unmistakably provides assurance in the New Testament so that we know we are saved and do not give into other temptations out of a fear that our faith is pointless or useless. At the same time, that assurance is only obtained through a genuine attempt

to have a relationship with God despite all of life's struggles that try to turn us away from Him. Assurance is only obtained through faith, and is never a tangible or direct statement. This is something that I struggle with myself, but I have learned to simply trust in God and that ultimately, I will only know if I am saved after death.

Assurance in the Bible

The assurance of God's promise is reinforced throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament. There is perhaps no clearer statement regarding His assurance than in the gospel of John: "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."²²⁷ The most common (if not the only) interpretation of this verse is simply that all who have faith in Christ can and will receive salvation. If one lives solely by this verse, they would likely be assured by this verse alone and have significantly less doubt about their faith and salvation. However, some doubt for many people is introduced within the same chapter, however: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."²²⁸ Verses like this one often put doubt into the minds of faithful Christians who become unsure whether or not they are truly obeying Christ and whether or not they are actually saved. Given that no one is perfect or able to live a life truly free of sin, it is a reasonable doubt for someone to have.

²²⁷ John 3:16 (CSB)

²²⁸ John 3:36 (CSB)

However, as long as Christians are making an honest and genuine effort to remain obedient to God, and repenting and asking for God's grace and forgiveness when they fail, Christians can rest assured that they are in fact saved. Due to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Christians are given an unlimited number of chances to obey God and receive salvation, though this should never be interpreted as Christians are allowed or encouraged to sin until they are ready to take their faith and relationship with God seriously. One of the Psalmists wrote that despite the failure of flesh and heart, God is their strength.²²⁹ It is this reliance on God, not our own abilities, that allow us to humble ourselves and receive the assurance that we are included among the saved. Furthermore, John wrote that Christ will cleanse us of our unrighteousness and is faithful to us if we confess our sins.²³⁰ It is in His grace that we can rest assured that we truly are saved and will experience eternal life with Him, even if we are ultimately unworthy of such a reward due to our inherently sinful nature and the doubt that we may experience throughout our lives.

Why Assurance is Important

In an ideal world, no one would need any assurance from God that they will experience salvation because they have complete and absolute trust and faith in Him. However, due to the sinful nature of humanity, this is near-impossible for the average person. God instead provides us with His assurance throughout the Bible, especially through Paul's letter. Due to the inerrancy

²²⁹ Ps. 73:26 (CSB)

²³⁰ 1 John 1:9 (CSB)

and inspiration of Scripture, we can trust Paul's writings in that God is able to save us and will not lie or break any promise He has made us. In denominations that adhere to predestination, those who permanently lose their faith never had true faith to be saved in the first place and were not among God's elect.²³¹ For those who truly study and believe in these words, they will find peace and comfort knowing that they truly are able to receive salvation as long as they remain faithful and obedient to God, and truly repent when they are not. For those whose faith is only surface level or for show, they are unlikely to be considered saved because it is likely that they are not truly obedient or take the confession of their sins very seriously.

Because of our sinful nature, assurance from Scripture is also a necessity. It is God's intention that we are assured and that we are given the opportunity to know him.²³² Unless humans are able to find some sort of guarantee on virtually anything, we are unlikely to invest much effort or energy on the matter. Unfortunately, that goes for faith as well. Often times we do not see God working in our lives unless we specifically look for it. This is especially true and often difficult in times of hardship and despair, where many will experience a test of their faith and belief in God. However, through the words of assurance in the Bible, we know that these difficulties are simply part of our faith and we must persevere through them in and maintain our faith in Him in order to receive salvation, which has been promised in exchange for such faith. He knows how each of

²³¹ Ray Galea, "Assurance," The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/assurance/>.

²³² John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 1003.

our stories will end and we must trust in Him that we will be rewarded for our efforts per His promises and covenants that our found in the Bible.

Assurance and Understanding God

Despite the fact that God reveals Himself to us and allows us to know Him in both our lives and through the Bible, the overwhelming majority of our knowledge of God's nature is minuscule and potentially even inaccurate (though not necessarily incorrect) depending on how one denomination interprets an aspect of God compared to another denomination. Thankfully, the assurance of our salvation provides a window into understanding a little more about God's nature, or at least from our human perspective. It shows how He is merciful and loving towards us, but still maintains the expectation that we must actively and faithfully seek Him out.

The verses that reinforce His assurance of our eternal salvation demonstrate His love and mercy towards us. God cares about us and wants us to be assured and to know Him. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement and an influential theologian, often struggled with his own faith. Despite being an ordained minister, he still had doubts. However, by putting his trust in God, he went to a theological reading and felt God's presence and warmth and truly understood what it meant to be loved by Christ and to be assured that he was saved.²³³

²³³ "Assurance of God's love," The Methodist Church, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/assurance-of-gods-love/>.

However, receiving a true assurance of faith also means that we must seek Him out in both times of prosperity and in times of hardship. When we rely upon Him during great challenges, we are demonstrating that we are obedient to Him and the teachings of Christ. It is often through these tests that we genuinely grow in our faith and relationship with Him, which in turn provides a further sense of assurance that He cares about us and desires a relationship with us. Through these difficulties, we understand that although God does love us, we will not receive salvation unless we persevere through various trials in life and actively resist temptations and ideologies that may make our earthly lives easier or more enjoyable but would ultimately condemn us and cut us off from God.²³⁴ God loves us deeply, but we must obey Him and put in the effort for a relationship with Him or we will face the consequences of eternal damnation.

Personal Impact of Assurance

My relationship with God has waxed and waned over the period of my childhood to adulthood. My faith and trust in Him have never been as strong as it has been over the past year. However, I still struggle with my faith. Aside from the existential dread of “what if God doesn’t exist,” I also struggle in whether or not I am truly saved. I struggle with thoughts of sinning on a daily basis, often questioning if I can commit a sinful act “just this once” – in direct disobedience with God. It is one thing to sin without considering the consequences until after

²³⁴ John Bloom, “How God Gives Assurance,” Desiring God, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-god-gives-assurance>.

the fact, but it is much more serious when I know that I am sinning with the mindset of “I’ll figure this out later.” Although I’d like to think that I have done a great job in resisting many temptations and staying faithful, these thoughts often leave me wondering whether I have been truly saved or if I’ve ever been truly repentant about my sins. Although all humans experience remorse and guilt, it can be difficult to know whether or not my guilt is the “correct” guilt or the kind of guilt that comes from simply being caught.

Anything short of God Himself speaking to me will not truly alleviate my doubt or concerns. I have learned what every Christian must learn: to trust in God. The way that I have learned to practice my faith is to simply strive to do better each day. I can always be more grateful, I can always pray more, and I can always live my life a little more like Christ. The assurance that I have is not of certainty, but of faith. I won’t truly know whether or not I am saved until after my death. The only path forward in my relationship with God is to simply place my trust in His word and promises no matter how terrifying it may be to simply go along with everything without a direct and personal “Yes, you are saved.” Even more than temptations and tests, maintaining my assurance that I am saved has easily been the most difficult part of relationship with God.

Conclusion

The theological concept of assurance is the belief that we know we have been saved by Christ’s death on the cross. It is reinforced numerous times throughout the New Testament, specifically in many of the epistles. It is gained through the legitimate efforts to have a relationship with God and obey his teachings, as well as asking for forgiveness when one falls short or stumbles in their faith. Assurance is important because

humanity is fallen in sin. Without any potential guarantee that our faith has any true value, it is probable that many people would not put much time into their faith and relationship with God, if there is any at all. Assurance is also important as it reinforces the idea that God does not lie to us and does not break any of His promises made to us. Assurance reminds us that while God is loving and cares about us enough to give us the knowledge that we are saved, we must still strive to make that effort to have a relationship with Him. I have struggled with assurance throughout my entire life and will likely have some degree of doubt for the remainder of my life. However, I have learned that I must simply trust and rely upon God that I will see Him after my death.

III

Reflections on Books

This section contains essays regarding personal reflections on a handful of the books that I read. There may be theological insights or lessons, but this section isn't necessarily made of a scholarly quality.

Reflection on Covenants: God's Way with His People

Introduction

Although somewhat unclear at times, *Covenants: God's Way with His People* helped provide context around the covenants that God has made with mankind. One of the most interesting concepts was at the very beginning of the book with the definition of covenants, their meaning, and how it is God who defines them. Robertson also highlights the fact that any covenant rituals such as baptism and circumcision are purely symbolic and it is up to the person to actually honor the covenant that they have made with God.

God Alone Defines His Covenants

Robertson speaks of an incident where a native tribe considered harming missionaries as they were accused of kidnapping one of their children. After the child was returned, the missionaries and the chief of the natives sprinkled blood on themselves from a white bird to indicate that a covenant had been formed

between them to not harm the other party.²³⁵ Although this section of the book did not speak about the consequences of covenant violations, the story inspired a thought – what if it was discovered that the missionaries had in fact stolen the child, or another child went missing? Would the tribe have every right to attack the missionaries? Most logic would indicate that such a response would be fair – the other party broke their deal. With God however, it is a little different. Humans do not get to set the terms of any of God’s covenants. God explains the conditions, blessings, curses, and all other related items to the covenant and we are either allowed to accept the covenant or ignore it,²³⁶ though it is unlikely that we can truly refuse it. Should we ignore it, we simply suffer the consequences of violating the covenant. While we can violate God’s covenants, he cannot. Any potential violations that He has made would not be considered a violation of the covenant, but rather punishment for our own violations. Instances where God seems cruel may simply be beyond our own understanding. Just as it is impossible for any single soldier to know every detail of an active battlefield, humanity cannot fully comprehend the workings of God beyond what He has chosen to reveal to us.

Rituals and Seals Are Symbolic

Robertson also mentions that signs (or rituals, seals, etc.) are only symbolic in nature. Individuals must be ready to show

²³⁵ O. Palmer Robertson. *Covenants: God’s Way with His People*. (Georgia: Great Commission Publications, Inc., 1987), 7.

²³⁶ O. Palmer Robertson. *Covenants: God’s Way with His People*. (Georgia: Great Commission Publications, Inc., 1987), 10–11.

their commitment to the meaning of the ritual in order for it to have any spiritual value.⁴² To say that you volunteer at a local charity is only fulfilled if you actually help, simply being there is not enough. Being baptized is intended to be a deeply spiritual and profound experience, but if one does not truly have their heart in it, it carries little meaning in terms of faith. Aside from personal spirituality, this is also important as rituals such as baptism and circumcision help identify one as a member of the community faithful to God, and not doing so prevents true membership.²³⁷ These rituals should only be completed by individuals who truly have faith in God and intend to follow the teachings of Christ.

Personal Application

I must be mindful of the covenants that God has established and do my best to follow their terms. I must also honor their meaning to the fullest. Having been baptized, it would have meant nothing if I was not truly repentant for my sins or did not genuinely accept Christ as my savior. As Peter put it, "... Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."²³⁸ Even today, I must remain repentant and acknowledge that I continue to sin, however unintentional those sins may be.

Conclusion

God alone defines how his covenants will be followed, re-

²³⁷ O. Palmer Robertson. *Covenants: God's Way with His People*. (Georgia: Great Commission Publications, Inc., 1987), 55.

²³⁸ Acts 2:38 (CSB)

ardless of whether we agree to the terms. We can choose to ignore them and face the consequences, but there is no way to simply avoid these covenants. God will not violate His covenants, but He will punish us if we choose to violate them. Rituals associated with these covenants, such as baptism and circumcision, help identify members of the community but are also only as valuable as we let them be. If we are not sorrowful for our sins, what purpose would our baptism serve in the eyes of God? As such, we must also continue to be mindful of these covenants that we have actively acknowledged and agreed to or else we will suffer the punishment for disobedience.

Reflection on God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible

Introduction

In *God's Big Picture*, Roberts explores the overarching story of the Bible and how they all connect to each other, namely how the story of the Old Testament sets up the events of the New Testament so that humans will eventually return to a perfect state of being with God, just as they were intended to be in the beginning chapters of Genesis in the garden of Eden. Roberts also discusses the ways in which people have knowingly turned away from God.

We Must Be Obedient

Roberts briefly discusses how an orchestra would not function well without a conductor and not at all without the score sheets to read from. He then compares this to humanity: we have chosen to ignore God's conducting and don't even acknowledge the music that we should be playing. Through Christ's death, we have a chance to try playing in the orchestra again.²³⁹

²³⁹ Vaughan Roberts. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 118.

This is true not only with society as a whole, but also on a deeply personal level. We actively disobey God on a daily basis. We all sin and often justify it. A common rationale is that a sin we are committing might not actually be a sin – maybe everyone else misunderstood the Bible or perhaps you could be doing worse things. We may claim that the sin of premarital sex doesn't really apply to the modern day because marriage is a completely different concept than it was even a few centuries ago. Perhaps there is a valid argument here, but is it worth risking being unrepentant to a sin that you are at least somewhat aware of? We can fight against God and try to make our own music amongst the chorus of instruments, but it will never match the score that He has written for us. Through Christ, we are offered a chance to rejoin the orchestra on the condition that we play the instruments and notes that God gives to us. We are not allowed to add our own notes or twists during the concert.

While Roberts was likely making a simple comparison between conducting an orchestra and the Fall of Man, the story of the Bible and Christ's sacrifice, it had a much more personal meaning to my faith. I'll often try to add my own ideas or notes but in reality, I am just fighting against what God has established for me. This is stated in Jeremiah 29:11 – “‘For I know the plans I have for you’ – this is the Lord’s declaration – ‘plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’”²⁴⁰ The only way to salvation and peace is by following the teachings of Christ and I must be mindful of the actions that I choose that may contradict Him or pull me away from my faith.

²⁴⁰Jer. 29:11 (CSB)

The Old Testament Predicts Jesus Christ

Roberts highlights throughout the book how much of the Old Testament predicts or foreshadows Christ, and later how Christ is an example of what man (or Adam) was intended to be. What stood out the most was Roberts' discussion of how Christ dying on the cross was a substitution for sin. Just as the Israelites sacrificed animals as substitutes to ask for forgiveness for their sins, Christ was substituted for all of our sins in a more permanent manner – we no longer need to find other substitutes or perform sacrifices. Christ was the lamb sacrificed for humanity, and through His sacrifice and genuine faith in Him, we are forgiven.²⁴¹ While this is a somewhat obvious and important fact about Christian belief, the reasoning behind sacrifices – substitutions for the sinners – is a way of viewing much of the Bible that is newer to me and helps explain some of the 'why' sacrifices were a practice in the first place and why praying for forgiveness was not enough on its own.

Conclusion

God has already planned out how the story (or music) will end. We can attempt to splinter off and create our own story, but ultimately the only way to succeed is by taking part in His story. His plans and intentions for the ending are made clear in the Bible: Through the covenants and promises He has made with mankind; He will bless those who are faithful to Him and they shall enjoy eternal life.

²⁴¹ 3. Vaughan Roberts. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 115–116.

Reflection on Knowing God

Introduction

J.I. Packer made several points that stood out in his book, *Knowing God* that could be applied to my own life and faith. The biggest impact probably took place in the first part of the book. Knowing about God is not the same as knowing God, and one who knows God should be proud and excited to proclaim their faith in Him. God also limits our knowledge of Him, and we can only understand what he lets us understand about him. God is unchanging, and my relationship with Him will only change because of my decisions – not because He has changed His mind or can no longer help me. These are all concepts that I must reflect on consistently and regularly in order to continue to grow in my personal faith as well as help others on their own journeys.

Risks of the Knowledge of God

Part One of *Knowing God* had several points that stood out to me, possibly more than the rest of the book. Packer asks what our ultimate aims and intentions are about having knowledge of God. He discusses how “...theological knowledge...is bound

to go bad on us. It will make us proud and conceited.”²⁴² This applies to me in a very personal way – I enjoy academia and scholarly learning almost as a hobby. Learning more about God, Christianity, and theology is incredible and fascinating to me, both in terms of growing in my faith and for the sake of learning. However, I can see how this pursuit of knowledge, left unchecked and without reflection, could lead me to become prideful and arrogant. I may view those with different ideas as incorrect, or equate those who know less as less faithful. In reality, faith is not about how much one knows about the ins and outs of the Bible or the religious history and doctrine that defines Christianity. Faith is simply the knowledge of God’s love through Christ and His sacrifice against sin, and reacting to such facts with trust, worship, and obedience to His teachings.²⁴³ Going beyond that may enrich one’s personal experience, but it will not make them better than another Christian.

It is also ignorant to assume that any knowledge about God actually means that we *know* God. As much as we may feel his love and support, he will always be a stranger to us.²⁴⁴ Theology may help one better understand why some things are the way that they are, such as pain and suffering, or simply how they can best go about practicing their faith, but no matter how much one studies, their knowledge and awareness will never bring them any closer to understanding the mysteries or intentions that surround God. According to Packer, one of the ways that one can examine whether or not they know God is if they show

²⁴² J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021),

²⁴³ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 20.

²⁴⁴ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 24.

great boldness for Him.²⁴⁵ This is absolutely something that I should apply to my life. Within my immediate social circles, I have no problem discussing my faith or the fact that I am working on a degree in theology, but to people I don't know very well I am much more hesitant to reveal my faith. Whether or not this is out of a fear of embarrassment of my faith or alienating them because of their own, I am not sure.

God Allows Us to Know Him

Packer discusses that what Person A knows about Person B is only an appearance. Person A only knows the person that Person B has allowed themselves to be seen as. God is no different. Our knowledge of and about God is only as much as He has allowed.²⁴⁶ We may come to personally know aspects of Him, but just as only someone knows their real selves, only God truly knows Himself. Parker also briefly asks what it's like to know God, is it "Shivers down the back? A dreamy, off-the ground, floating feeling?"²⁴⁷

These are both ideas that I need to keep in mind and regularly reflect on. There may not be any unique, distinctive emotion or sensation if I ever come to know God – it may simply be a comfortable, strong faith and sense of trust in Him. It is unlikely that there will be any sort of active recognition or "congratulations" for reaching any specific point in my faith. As such, it is also important for me to remember that I can only know God as he allows me to know Him. One example is

²⁴⁵ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 30.

²⁴⁶ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 35.

²⁴⁷ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 34.

the Trinity. In the literal sense, I understand that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all one being but separate. In practice, however, I can't really comprehend the concept. Whether this is something that is simply too complicated for my current level of understanding, or something that God does not allow anyone to understand, I am not sure. Although I intend to consistently try to learn more, I must also learn to be content with what God allows me to understand day-to-day. As God continues to open up to me, I must be willing and ready to accept his interactions. Part of this contentedness must also come from accepting that God loves and cares for me because of His sacrifice.²⁴⁸

God Is Unchanging

As people grow older and have new and different experiences in their lives, they change. Some people may experience a complete reversal of their belief or moral system, while others may continue to grow. Some people may have unnoticeable change, but ultimately no one at sixty is the same person that they were at age twenty. God, however, is unchanging. He does not grow wiser, stronger, nor do His preferences, interests, or love of Humanity change.²⁴⁹ This is perhaps best expressed in the first part of Exodus 3:14: "God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"²⁵⁰ and he will remain to be who He is. Although these may be relatively obvious facts, they are incredibly important facts to be aware of and reflect upon. Any change in my relationship

²⁴⁸J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 37.

²⁴⁹J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 77.

²⁵⁰Exod. 3:14 (CSB)

with God is a result of my own choices and actions. If I stop following His teachings and commandments, He cannot help me. If I outright reject Jesus and turn away from Christianity, my relationship with Him will be the absolute bare minimum, if I acknowledged him at all. But if I continue to grow in my faith and seek Him out during times of hardship, my relationship would likely grow stronger with Him. But in all of this, the relationship fluctuates as a result of me, not a result of God. If I do not seek out His help, it is unlikely that I will get it (although one cannot say this with absolute certainty). If I ever feel that God has ignored me in any sense, I should reflect on my past behavior and whether or not I have been truly relying on God or if I have strayed away from Him.

Applying to Ministry

I do not currently work in ministry. I am attending a theology program for my own growth, however the idea of being involved in ministry in some capacity is not one that I am entirely opposed to. However, any conversations concerning my faith or Christianity in general will certainly involve my reflections from *Knowing God*, as I am sure that much of what I have learned from Packer would be useful information to anyone interested in exploring or struggling with their faith.

Conclusion

Knowing God is not the same as knowing about God. To truly know God, one must embrace His love and instructions and apply them to their lives on a daily basis, striving to constantly do better each time they make a mistake. Knowing God means accepting Him into one's life. Knowing God (or knowing about Him) does not grant any special privilege over other people,

however. More knowledge of God does not necessarily mean a stronger faith in Him or a stricter following of His teachings. One must guard against such pride and arrogance or else they may alienate other Christians as well as any interested non-Christians. We only know God as much as He has allowed Himself to be revealed, and we must learn to be content with our own individual understanding of Him while simultaneously striving to know Him better each day. God is also unchanging and any change in my relationship with Him is a result of something I have done, and I should reflect on that relationship often.

IV

Misc. Writings

This section contains various compilations that did not quite fit in under my writings on the Bible or theology.

Outline of Isaiah

(Unless otherwise stated, quotes from Scripture are from the Christian Standard Bible and any support for the outline is found in chapters 6–9 of *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* by J. Daniel Hays. The omission of specific verses or chapters is not intended to imply that they are less important or not relevant to the overall story and book of Isaiah.)

Isaiah 1-6

I. Chapters 1-6

A. Isa. 1:2-6 – *Isaiah states that the people of Israel have rebelled against God and no longer know him. God has disciplined the Israelites repeatedly, but they fail to return to Him.*

a. This is a recurring theme throughout the Israelite's relationship with God starting in Exodus. God has given them many chances to repent, but they have either ignored Him or outright rejected Him despite the warnings of the prophets throughout Israel's history.

B. Isa. 1:7-9 – *God is going to destroy the Israelites and leave only a remnant.*

a. The existence of a remnant implies that God has not fully

abandoned His people yet.

C. Isa. 1:10-17 – *God is exhausted by the Israelites performing the rituals that He established.*

a. The rituals, festivals and sacrifices were established by God in order to demonstrate the Israelites' repentance when they sinned and to remember all that God had done for them. By the time of Isaiah, however, many of these rituals were done more out of habit and not from a place of genuine love and repentance towards God.

D. Isa. 1:18-21 – *God issues a final call for repentance, but immediately returns to listing out their sins.*

a. These verses seem almost sarcastic, as if Isaiah is calling on Israel to return to God while being well aware that they will not.

b. The reference to scarlet sins turning to snow white could be interpreted as a reference to Christ and His forgiveness of our sins.

E. Isa. 2:1-4 – *Isaiah offers some hope that there will be a time in the future where God and His people will live in harmony and peace.*

a. While the message was for all of Israel, the primary audience would have been the minority of Israelites who remained faithful to God. Although God has abandoned the Israelites, He hasn't abandoned those that are faithful to him.

F. Isa. 3-4 – *Isaiah 3 continues listing out the judgement against Israel, condemning the leaders and those in positions of authority. Isaiah 4 then returns briefly to the future restoration where God and His people will have a strong and faithful relationship again.*

a. This follows the theme found throughout much of the prophets, where restoration will follow after judgement and

punishment.

G. Isa. 5 – *Isaiah 5 builds on the judgement of Israel's leaders. Isaiah speaks of vineyard that was healthy and strong, but the grapes were worthless. The remainder of the chapter once again returns to the judgement of Israel.*

a. The vineyard is a reference to the nation of Israel. God expected to find righteousness and faith in the grown vineyard, but instead saw rotten fruit covered in unrepentant sin.

H. Isa. 6:1-4 – *Isaiah encounters God directly.*

a. Only a few others in the Bible have encountered God directly, including Moses and Ezekiel. This encounter suggests that Isaiah's message is not to be taken lightly and is truly a servant of the lord.

I. Isa. 6:8 – *Isaiah volunteers himself to serve as a prophet for God.*

a. This serves as a point of the Christian faith: Although we are likely to fail often, we must strive to give absolute obedience to God and without compromise.

b. This event contrasts Moses (Exod. 4:13) and Jonah (Jon. 1:3), who try to avoid the responsibility of serving God as a prophet.

J. Isa. 6:9-13 – *God commissions Isaiah to warn the Israelites and ask them to repent, although He makes it known to Isaiah that it will only serve to ensure their destruction.*

Discussion: The original meaning of Isaiah 1-6 depends on who the target audience originally was. To those who remained faithful to God, the message was that God would destroy those who went against Him but eventually restore the faithful Israelites as they were still His people and He had not abandoned them. To those who refused to listen to Isaiah, the message

was less of a genuine call for their repentance and more of a warning and condemnation of their actions. Although Isaiah literally called on them to repent, it only served to harden their hearts against him and God.

Although we are forgiven through our sins through Christ and will not be abandoned by God, we must remember that our relationship with God depends on us – if we are willfully disobedient, the relationship will be damaged. However, just as God promised to restore the Israelites, He will always return to us after we repent. We must also be mindful of our religious practices and make sure that their intention comes from a place of love and faith and not simply superstition or habit.

Isaiah 7-39

I. Chapters 7-11

A. Isa. 7:14 & 8:3-4 – *Isaiah states that a son will be born from a virgin shortly before the fall of Israel. This is then partially fulfilled by Isaiah's son in a symbolic capacity.*

a. Isaiah's son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz may serve as a typology of Christ.

B. Isa. 9:6-7 – *The child of virgin birth is revealed to be God and that He will reign over a vast dominion on David's throne.*

a. This is a much clearer and more direct reference to Christ. Coming from the line of David, Christ fulfills this portion of the prophecy and reigns over the Kingdom of God which has spread throughout the earth.

C. Isa. 9:8-10:34 – *Despite the promise of Christ, the immediate reality is still judgement upon Israel, however Isaiah once again emphasizes that a remnant will return.*

a. This concept still applies to us today. Even though God will

not abandon us and will help us, He will still punish us when we directly disobey Him.

D. Isa. 11 – This chapter expands upon Christ. He will be a righteous ruler. It also reinforces that he will descend from Jesse (David's father).

a. Many of Christ's actions in the gospels fit this chapter, however much of His reign is either in a spiritual aspect or has yet to be fully realized depending on how one interprets the passage.

II. Chapters 13-23 – *Isaiah condemns the nation surrounding Israel, although they too will join in the worship of God at a future age.*

i. This is noteworthy as the New Testament later states that the Gentiles are now part of God's kingdom (Acts 15:7-9).

III. Chapters 29-32

A. Isa. 29:13 – Isaiah again states that the religious ritualism is no longer effective. The Israelites are worshipping with their mouths and outward actions, but not with their hearts or intentions.

a. This is a very important issue today. Being a Christian is much more than simply going to church on Sunday. It involves imitating Christ's behavior and teachings to the best of our ability and is not simply a checklist of good deeds or thoughts.

B. Isa. 32 – This chapter establishes the qualities that the coming Messiah will have, as well as the eventual peace that He will bring.

a. This is an important statement to Christianity. While God may bring peace to us in our individual lives, we will also experience an even greater peace and prosperity upon His return.

IV. Chapters 37-39 – *Thanks to Hezekiah's faithfulness to God, the destruction of Israel is stalled and Israel survives Sennacherib's invasion.*

i. This is a reflection of God's grace. We are constantly given the opportunity to turn towards obedience and repent but if we do not or we fail to continue obedience, He will not support us and resume His punishment.

Discussion: Isaiah 7-39 continues the coming judgement upon Israel, but also introduces the concept of not only a future restoration but a Messiah. His reign will expand to the entire world and, as a descendant of David, He will continue the line of Davidic kings on the throne. However, instead of a worldly kingdom (at least in until His return), His kingdom reigns on a spiritual level and to those who are faithful and accept His grace. God's grace is also mentioned with King Hezekiah, who sought out Isaiah and God's help against the coming Assyrian invasion. Due to Hezekiah's attempt to restore the worship of God in Israel, He turns His hand away from Israel temporarily. The target audience for this message are the Israelites who remain faithful so that they have hope that things will improve, and if not in their lives, then their children's lives.

Isaiah's prophecies about the coming Messiah help comfort our doubts that He is not who He claimed to be. The story of Hezekiah's protection from Sennacherib also reminds us that God's grace is freely available to us as long as we are faithful and obedient. We must trust that God will be our savior even when it appears that defeat is certain. Even in times of hardship, God will improve our conditions if we are patient and trust in Him.

Isaiah 40-66

I. Chapters 41-53

A. Isa. 41:10 – *Chapter 41 focuses on God's love for His people. 41:10 directly states that God is still with His people and that He will help them.*

a. Despite the impending destruction of Israel, God makes it known that He is still with those who have continued to trust in Him and remain faithful. This theme is repeated in several more chapters.

B. Isa. 42:1-7 – *Isaiah further establishes the characteristics of the Messiah.*

a. Similar to Isaiah 32, these qualities are found in Jesus Christ, providing a sense of comfort and confirmation that He truly is the Son of God.

C. Isa. 43:18-19 – These two verses are a reference to the new covenant that will be established by the coming Messiah.

a. This is also referenced in Jer. 31:31-34 when Jeremiah mentions the new covenant.

D. Isa. 44:14-17 – *Isaiah tells a story of a man who cuts down a tree and uses the wood for his fire and other needs. From the same wood he makes an idol, which he then proclaims is his god.*

a. The absurdity that we could simply carve and create our own gods is intended to be somewhat humorous. However, it is a serious issue in today's world where money is often at the center of our world and not God.

E. Isa. 45:13 – *Isaiah proclaims that a future ruler, Cyrus the Great, will return the Israelites from exile and return them to their homeland.*

a. The fact that this prediction came true lends incredible credibility to both God's existence and authority as well as His

promise to keep His word.

F. Isa. 50:6-7 – *These verses are part of song concerning the Servant, or future Messiah where He lets his enemies are him willingly.*

a. Christ said that we should turn both cheeks to an enemy (Matt. 5:39), however His sacrifice on the cross demonstrated the power of this statement. He willingly went with the Romans and as a result the vast majority of the world has heard about Him and how He has forgiven our sins through His death.

G. Isa. 53:4-6 – *The coming Messiah will bear the sins of humanity and accept the punishment.*

a. This is exactly what Christ does when He dies on the cross, and he was likely pierced as well with nails. His sacrifice gave humanity unlimited access to God's grace and love in exchange for our obedience, love, trust, and faith in Him.

II. Chapters 57-62

A. Isa. 57:15 – *God makes it clear that although He lives in a holy place, He is also with those experiencing hardship.*

a. As long as we trust in Him and follow His statutes, He will not abandon us. He will see us through hardship – all we must do is be patient.

B. Isa. 60-62 – *These chapters reinforce the blessing and future restoration of the Israelites.*

a. These chapters would have been especially important to the faithful Israelites during Isaiah's time. Describing what their future restoration would look like gave them hope to persevere through hardship and continue to have faith in and trust the Lord.

Discussion: Much of Isaiah 40-66 reinforces the prophecy of a coming Messiah, as well as God's grace and forgiveness

of our sins. The chapters also make it clear that God is the only god. We can create our own “gods” out of the materials around us, but simply making an object does not make it any more a god than our beds. While this may be seen as a call for the majority of Israelites to renounce their false gods, the intended audience of this message was once again the Israelites who had remained faithful in God. As they were about to be scattered across foreign countries, Isaiah was likely reminding them to not fall into such foolish behaviors as their countrymen and the neighboring countries had. The description of the coming Messiah also would have inspired hope in the surviving Israelites just as it had in prior sections of the book of Isaiah.

Money is frequently idolized as the solution to all problems in the modern world. This is a dangerous line of thinking as not only does it place a man-made creation above God, but it gives people false hope that money will bring them happiness and safety. While being wealthy undeniably provides greater opportunities, money in itself does not guarantee personal satisfaction or happiness. It is difficult to resist the allure of money, which is where God’s grace and forgiveness come in. We are likely to unintentionally emphasize money over our faith, but as long as we recognize this shortcoming and do our best to place God at the center of our lives we will be forgiven and given as many chances as we need. Resisting the idolization of money and modern conveniences may be easy for some, but difficult for others. God understands this and under His new covenant we receive His grace for our errors.

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