



The Burning Bush

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THE BURNING BUSH

Theological Journal of the
FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

Edited for the Faculty

Rev Timothy Tow, MDiv, STM, DD

Principal, and Lecturer in Systematic Theology

Mrs Ivy Tow, BTh

Matron, and Lecturer in Greek

Rev Jeffrey Khoo, BTh, MDiv, STM, PhD

Academic Dean, and Lecturer in New Testament

Rev Koa Keng Woo, BTh

Lecturer in Bible Geography and Church Music

Rev Stephen Khoo, BTh, MDiv, MA

Lecturer in Biblical Studies

Rev Jack Sin, BTh, MDiv, ThM (c)

Lecturer in Church History

Mrs Jemima Khoo, BTh, MA, MRE

Lecturer in Christian Education

Rev Bob Phee, BA (Hons), BTh, MDiv, ThM, DMin

Registrar, and Lecturer in Apologetics

Rev Goh Seng Fong, MA, MDiv, DMin

Dean of Students, and Lecturer in Pastoral Ministry

Rev Quek Suan Yew, BArch, BTh, MDiv, STM

Lecturer in Old Testament

Rev Prabhudas Koshy, BSc, BTh, MDiv, ThM (c)

Lecturer in Hebrew

Rev Colin Wong, BTh, MDiv, ThM

Lecturer in Pastoral Ministry

Rev Charles Seet, BTh, MDiv

Lecturer in Biblical Studies

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Please direct all correspondence to:



The Editor, *The Burning Bush*

Far Eastern Bible College

9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063

Republic of Singapore

EDITORIAL

This issue of *The Burning Bush* is dedicated to the Rev Dr Timothy Tow—principal of Far Eastern Bible College—on his 50th year as founding pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, and 80th year of life.

This festschrift offers a thematic biographical sketch of Timothy Tow by his good friend and long-standing co-worker in Life Bible-Presbyterian Church—Eld Khoo Peng Kiat. A tribute is contributed by the Rev Koa Keng Woo of Muar Bible-Presbyterian Church (Malaysia) who was one of those who witnessed Rev Tow in action when he defended the faith against the modernism and ecumenism that had infiltrated the Malayan Presbyterian Synod in the 1950s. Rev Koa was so moved by his courageous stand for the Truth in those early days that he too was persuaded to take a separatist stand and become Bible-Presbyterian. A word of appreciation and testimony has come from afar, from Dr Arthur E Steele—president emeritus of Clearwater Christian College (Florida, USA), and fellow comrade with Rev Tow in the 20th century Reformation movement since the time they were classmates at Faith Theological Seminary in 1958. Dr Steele brings valuable insights to Rev Tow's labour of love in the founding and running of Far Eastern Bible College, which in turn reflect his own hardship and struggles when he established Clearwater Christian College. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps 126:5).

If there is a phrase that describes the ministry of the Rev Dr Timothy Tow, it must be this: *Christos Monos*, ie, Christ Only. He has a genuine love not only for Jesus Christ—the Living Word, but also the Holy Bible—His Written Word. He who loves Christ must also love His Word. This love he has for the Lord and His Word is clearly seen in the mottos he chose for Life Church and FEBC: "Holding forth the Word of life" (Phil 2:16), and "Holding fast the faithful Word" (Tit 1:9). As such, a series of Christ-centred studies are presented herein by his former students who have appreciated very much his Calvinistic and fundamentalistic biblical scholarship.

This volume would not be complete if we did not allow Rev Tow to have the final word. We close this volume with his classic sermon—“The Way to Success in the Christian Ministry”—preached to the graduating class of Faith Theological Seminary in 1979. This sermon clearly elucidates his philosophy of ministry, and is one sermon that deserves to be read again and again. For those who wish to know what else Rev Tow has written, a select bibliography of his writings is appended at the end. The works listed are obtainable from either the college library or the FEBC Bookroom.

It is with grateful and thankful hearts to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that we dedicate this special edition of *The Burning Bush* to our beloved pastor and teacher—Rev Dr Timothy Tow. We pray that the Lord will keep him in good health and strength for many more years of service until He returns. To God be the glory!

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF OUR BELOVED PASTOR—REV DR TIMOTHY TOW

Khoo Peng Kiat

His Childhood and Adulthood

Timothy Tow Siang Hui was born in the city of Swatow, Kwangtung Province, South China, in 1920. He was the second child in a family of five boys and three girls. He was the oldest among the boys. When he was born, his mother's holy desire was for him to become a pastor. In fact, it was she who had promised him to the Lord before he was born. His mother made a great offer that should he give his life to serve the Lord, she would send him to America to study. From his earliest childhood, he experienced the light and love of a godly family—godly parents and a grandfather who was a godly minister. His maternal grandfather—Tan Khai Lin (alias Tan Soo Chuan)—was the first convert of the English Presbyterian Mission to Swatow in 1859.

Rev Tow's father was a Western-trained doctor from the English Presbyterian Mission Hospital, Swatow. Seeking a livelihood for his family, he decided to emigrate to Malaya. The family first settled in Senai, Johor. As a boy, Rev Tow attended the Anglo-Chinese School, Singapore, where he excelled in his studies. He was top boy of the school when he sat for the Senior Cambridge Examinations in 1937, and thus had his name inscribed on the School's Honours Roll Board.

Later, the family moved to Kluang and then to Batu Pahat which was to be their “permanent” settlement from 1936, ten years after they had arrived from China. It was in Kluang that his father set up his medical practice, having been registered as an “Unregistered doctor” by the Chief Medical Officer, Johor. The Lord prospered his practice from Batu Pahat onwards.

His Courtship and Marriage

In Batu Pahat, the young Timothy fell in love, at first sight, with a beautiful girl by the name of Nancy Lan Yin who was the daughter of a pastor. She was a midwife by profession and worked at the Kandang Kerbau Hospital. After a period of courtship, they were married in 1940. Through this union, seven children—three boys and four girls—were subsequently born. They lived in a three-room Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) flat shared with his other siblings. Later, the family moved to a two-bedroom rented flat at 10A Kim Pong Road.

His Call

When Dr John Sung visited Singapore in 1935, he conducted Revival Meetings at the Telok Ayer Methodist Church where the Holy Spirit brought about a great revival. One of those who was revived was the gifted and brilliant young Timothy whose main ambition was to become a great lawyer. As the saying goes: “Man proposes; God disposes.” So he went to Nanking to study under China’s first theologian—Dr Chia Yu Ming—at the Spiritual Training Theological Seminary. After one year, he was led to study at Faith Seminary, USA, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity. It was at Faith that he imbibed the spirit of the 20th Century Reformation Movement started by Dr Carl McIntire. Upon his graduation, he was invited by the Life Church Session, Prinsep Street, to look into the needs of the increasing numbers of the English-educated children of Chinese-educated parents in the congregation. Session wrote to the Bible Presbyterian Church of USA with which he was closely associated, requesting that he be ordained for the ministry. By God’s providence, the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) was holding its 2nd Plenary Congress in August in Geneva, City of John Calvin. He was ordained as the Rev Timothy Tow by the hands of the Presbyters of the Philadelphia Presbytery and thus became the first English-speaking minister of the Life Presbyterian Church, Prinsep Street, Singapore, in 1950.

In August 1958, the Church delegated Rev Tow to attend the 4th Plenary Congress of the ICCC in Brazil. At that point of time, it was felt that it was a golden opportunity for Rev Tow to pursue a higher degree in Theology at Faith Seminary to better equip him for the teaching ministry. It was fully agreed by Session to grant him one year’s study leave at the end of which he graduated with a Master of Sacred Theology in May 1959.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In 1964 at the 5th Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches (FECCC) Conference in Taipei, Dr Carl McIntire—President of the ICCC—brought over the degree from the States together with the cap and gown to confer the degree of Doctor of Divinity on Rev Tow. In 1968 Rev Tow was elected President at the FECCC Conference in India. He held the post for 20 years and served with distinction.

His Crises

He entered Raffles College to pursue Science because he felt it was prestigious. However, he realised that Science was not his forte but language study. He faced his first big failure and so left after the first term. But God had a higher purpose in his life. His disappointment became God's appointment for him in the years ahead as he looked back over the years.

Since he loved language study, he found a way into the Singapore Government Interpreters' Training Institute. He took a two-year course and graduated in 1940; thereafter, he was posted to the Supreme Court. However, his heart grew restless because he wanted to be somebody in the world. As a result, he entered a very competitive examination during the Japanese occupation and he was among 12 students selected for training as legal officers. Determined as he was, and in the prime of life, he resigned from Government Service to pursue his legal study at Middle Temple.

But it was not to be, for God had a better plan for his life. What happened was that before he boarded the cargo boat that was to take him to his destination, news of his beloved mother's sudden demise reached him. This held him back only for a short season as he tried to rationalise with himself that he could serve the Lord full-time later on, when he was older. This was meant to salve his conscience. But again, it was not to be, for five weeks' after his mother's passing into glory, his seven month-old daughter was taken to hospital suffering from intussusception (a condition in which there is telescoping of the intestine, usually producing obstruction) for which she was operated on. But she did not survive the surgery. This was the turning point of his life. Instead of going to London, he decided to take up theology in Nanking, China, under the tutelage of Dr Chia Yu Ming.

A very critical stage of his life occurred when the Lord took away his beloved wife—Nancy, his lovely daughter—Le Anne, and his close aunt in the “twinkling of an eye” during a motor vehicle collision when they were

travelling to Cameron Highlands for the Easter Church Camp in 1965. But Rev Tow strongly believed that there are no accidents in God's plan. In writing of the tragic event he said, "As I look back to the bitter experience we were baptised with, there may be contributory causes here and there converging upon it. But I also know there is a great, yes, almighty force that operates in our lives all the time—the Hand of God. God's time for our loved ones was up ... 'as it is appointed' ..." (Heb 9:27).

About 15 months after his first wife Nancy's home-going, God provided Rev Tow with a help-mate in the person of Ivy Tan, now a lecturer in Greek at FEBC, and matron of the College. Through this second marriage, two children were born: a daughter and a son. "Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own ways?" (Prov 20:24).

As one can see, Rev Tow is a man not easily daunted or discouraged by severe trials or testings. In fact, he triumphed over them through the strength of Jesus Christ; and he marches on from victory to victory to become a prominent church planter and builder, a great preacher and the pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, the Mother Church of many B-P Churches, both local and abroad. Besides being the pastor of Life B-P Church for 50 years, he is also the illustrious principal and lecturer of the Far Eastern Bible College, which he founded in 1962. At that time, there were only three students in the College, but again he showed his true mettle and plodded on to build up the College to what it is today; an established college with a student body of a hundred students coming from 18 countries. The College offers courses ranging from the Certificate of Religious Knowledge to the Masters in Religious Education and Divinity. It has a consecrated, conservative and fundamental faculty.

His Conquests

Rev Tow has authored and translated more than thirty books. He has also composed many songs while he was in the Holy Land many years back and also in Singapore. One of his songs titled "Singapura" was awarded first prize by Dr Kirpal Singh in 1973 and published in the Straits Times. In the pipeline is his autobiography which, God-willing, should be ready when he reaches his 80th birthday in the year 2000 (the year Life Church celebrates her 50th [golden] anniversary). He has also made many wise sayings, and among his famous ones are "Self-help with God's help is the best help," "Do something good for Jesus every day; do something

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

good for Jesus wherever you go,” and as a corollary “even out of the way.”

His greatest conquest in the strength of Christ, and in terms of church planting, was the acquisition of Beulah House, which was formerly the Eye Hospital. This is a piece of property which has, in his own words, “marriage value” in that it is just across Life Church. It was acquired at a cost of 7.2 million dollars and had to be paid within six months! Since it is not his policy to get loans from a bank and pay high interest rates, God honoured him by moving the hearts of many members and friends to give interest-free loans and generous offerings towards the Building Fund. With God nothing is impossible! Presently, Beulah House is being used to accommodate people as part of the hospitality ministry of the church. It has brought many blessings to people to God’s glory and honour!

God has also given Rev Tow the great honour and privilege of building a B-P Church Youth Camp at Mersing, Johor Bahru. It is for the spiritual refreshment of B-P members and their families, and for the propagation of God’s Word. The campsite has a commanding view of the South China Sea with its salubrious balmy breezes wafting through it.

Rev Tow’s God-given genius is his strong belief in *decentralisation*. Hence B-P churches have been described as among the fastest-growing churches in Singapore in a book—*Growing Churches Singapore Style*—authored by Keith Hinton. Within 50 years, God has blessed Life Church with more than 56 branches: from a mustard seed to a full-grown tree! Indeed, we can echo the words of the Psalmist: “The LORD hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad” (Ps 126:3). The Lord has been a stone of help—“Ebenezer ... Hitherto hath the LORD helped us” (1 Sam 7:12b)—in the acquisition of the present Life Church in 1962, New Life Church (Woodlands) in 1983, Beulah House in 1990, and Mersing Youth Camp, 1999-2000. *To God be the glory!*

His Character

His stern demeanour belies his humility and heart of compassion and sense of humour. He has never turned down anyone who needs help in whatever form—in cash or in kind—or anyone who needs accommodation. There was one occasion when someone from Malaysia, a total stranger, approached him for help. Without hesitation, Rev Tow accommodated him in one of the rooms and handed him the keys to it. He even gave him some cash to spend and bought him a Bible. The next day,

the man left taking the room keys with him! What ingratitude! But Rev Tow was not ruffled at all by this incident. On another occasion, while he was picking up some litter in the church compound, someone mistook him for the gardener and asked for the principal of the College. In his “char kiak” (wooden Chinese clogs), he stood up and said, “I’m the one.”

His philosophy as regards money, which he learned from his grandfather, is, neither a borrower nor a lender be. Like John Calvin, money has no charm on him. He is always careful with the use of church funds and runs the church on a shoe-string budget. He is very meticulous in seeing to the proper accounting of every cent received in the church weekly. With such a trustworthy example of faithful stewardship in the pastor who himself gives sacrificially and hilariously, it is no wonder members of Life Church keep on giving and giving!

Having served with him in the Session for more than three decades, I have yet to hear him complain about his lot in life or about his small salary. He used to cycle in his very early days in the ministry but after some years, his sister provided him with a VW Beetle and later on, a VW Station-wagon which he used for many years. He owns no landed property and is always very happy with whatever he has. In fact, some years back, Session had to “force” him to accept a new Toyota car which they felt would serve him better. Possessing godly contentment, he is very thankful and grateful to live in the parsonage which he considers as his “palace.”

In serving God, there are no conditions and no retirement as far as Rev Tow is concerned. When he was 60, he said “Life begins at 60.” When he reached 70, he said “Life begins at 70.” It will not be long when he turns fourscore years sometime in the year 2000, God-willing, and you know what he will be saying!

I have been associated with Rev Tow since the early ’50s during which time I have found him to be a man of simple tastes. I have never heard him complain about life, about food, about anything! It is a joy to bring him out for meals because everything tastes good to him, the simpler the better. He seems to enjoy hawker food more than restaurant food, dresses simply and loves to put on the “char kiak” at home. He would also always bring a pair whenever he travels abroad. No matter how busy he is, he will always make time for people who need help, especially in the area of visitation and witnessing. At a personal level, he has helped me in

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

witnessing to dialect-speaking people as he is gifted in languages and dialects, a great asset to the ministry.

He officiated the Holy Matrimony between my wife and me at Life Church (*Say Mia Tng*), Prinsep Street, in 1960. Before our wedding, I sought his advice whether I should set up a tarpaulin tent for the outdoor wedding dinner in case it rained. He told me to walk by faith. That was a lesson of faith I learned from him, a man who himself walks by faith. Initially, my faith was an inexperienced faith. It later developed into an experienced faith, and now it is a faith needing no experience.

His Contending for the Faith

He is very zealous in contending for “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3b). He takes the Separatist Stand of the ICCC headed by Dr Carl McIntire with whom he has been associated since the late '40s. He said, “Reformation is an ever on-going business. Reformation into the 21st Century is our watchword.”

In this day and age of increasing apostasy, we praise and thank God that He has raised a remnant to strongly defend the faith. Among the stalwarts is Rev Tow whose watchword is, “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa 59:19b). He is all out for holding “forth the Word of life,” which is the Word of God. Amen.

Conclusion

I am very grateful to God for providing us with such a dedicated pastor whose life has been a great blessing to me personally as well as to many others. Indeed, may his life be an inspiration and challenge to our present and future leaders that they may be stirred up to carry on the B-P Torch, God-willing, through the new Millennium!

*Eld Khoo Peng Kiat is an elder of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church,
and a member of the Far Eastern Bible College Board of Directors.*

A MODEL FOR ME TO FOLLOW

Koa Keng Woo

It was in the year 1955 when I first saw the Rev Timothy Tow. He was then a young man. Together with elders K C Quek and C T Hsu, he championed for the separation of the Singapore and Malayan Synod of the Presbyterian Church from the World Council of Churches (WCC). I was then a deacon of the Trinity Presbyterian Church, and was deeply impressed by these people who truthfully stood for the faith.

I came into personal contact with Rev Tow only in the mid-sixties. One morning, he came to Trinity Presbyterian Church for the morning service. Trinity Presbyterian Church had just started an English service, and was (and is and will be forever) in favour of separating from the ecumenical movement of the WCC. So, my mother-in-law—the late Mdm Lim Siew Guat—seeing Rev Tow, quickly took the opportunity of requesting him to assist us regularly. For many years, this man of God kept his appointment once a month (not missing a single time) until the English service became the Muar English service when they had their own preachers. He was a man who would never refuse to work for the Lord. Many times, he would travel far north to Pokok Assam, Perak, as well as Mentakab, Pahang, in his Volkswagon Beetle to preach the gospel, and would never give up.

His humility has set a very good example for me to follow (but I can never be like him). Although he was well-trained in the legal service, I have never heard from him a word about his achievement. Theologically trained in Nanking for a year, and subsequently in Faith Seminary, USA, I really admire him for giving up his legal career and training, all for the Lord.

During his many visits to Muar, we had very good fellowship together. As I was in charge of a poultry farm, he would constantly exhort me with love telling me, “You better be a fisher of men than a farmer of chickens.” His word touched me very much, but I was reluctant to leave the chicken business for the Lord. God worked in a different way. Not long

A MODEL FOR ME TO FOLLOW

after, feed price went up tremendously. We were forced to stop operating the farm. It was then that I heeded the call to join the Far Eastern Bible College to equip myself for the Lord's service.

I have found Rev Tow to be a person who loves God and man. Whenever one is in trouble or has problems, one can count on him. He is always sympathetic and ready to give his wise advice lovingly. I have been trying to learn from his studiousness, industry, humility, courage to contend for the faith, and his love for God and others. I doubt I can achieve this, but he will always be a model for me to follow.

Rev Koa Keng Woo is pastor of Muar Bible-Presbyterian Church, and lecturer in Bible Geography and Church Music at the Far Eastern Bible College.



PEARLS OF GREAT WISDOM

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

TIMOTHY TOW

THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, far from being a collection of sayings of the Hebrew people, are a crystallisation of the wisdom God has given him. They are divinely inspired and take their place among other books of the Bible. Hence they are justly called "Pearls of Great Wisdom."

By his God-given wisdom, Solomon, with one stroke of his psychological sword, solved the case of the contending mothers. None of today's learned judges could have done that. Thus, wisdom is the principal thing. It is the key to all life's intricate problems. It is far above the price of rubies. It shines brighter than diamonds.

Pearls of Great Wisdom: A Study of the Book of Proverbs

Timothy Tow

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ALL IN THE LORD'S PROVIDENCE

Arthur E Steele

In 1958 I was a third-year student at Faith Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. I was then 38 years old and so was Timothy Tow. Timothy Tow had already graduated from the Seminary in 1948 when it was located in Wilmington, Delaware. The Lord directed him to return to Faith Seminary in 1958 for graduate work for further preparation for the pastoral, teaching, and administrative ministry the Lord had given him. True as that was, I knew that the Lord had sent him also to minister to me during that particularly critical time in my ministry.

Timothy Tow started in law. I started out in engineering. When I was near death as a little boy, my parents prayed and promised to dedicate me to the Lord's service if the Lord restored my health. Timothy Tow is also the object of his mother's prayer of dedication.

Back in those days, while a student at seminary seated alongside younger students, most freshly out of college, I wondered what right I had at age 36 to be in the same company as those young men and women who so obviously seemed called to the Lord's service. The companionship I developed when Timothy Tow arrived was of a great help to me in stabilising my own commitment to the Lord. We talked often. My wife and I brought him to our home in Philadelphia for dinner and fellowship with our family. Our fellowship was precious and more valuable than any could ever know.

In 1961, I had the privilege of visiting Singapore with the General Secretary of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. We were en route as observers to the 1961 General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi, India. Again, this visit in Singapore was in the providence of the Lord. Timothy Tow expressed his heart's desire with a sense of urgency during that visit. His heart's desire was to spread the Gospel in the Far East. He saw the need for preachers and missionaries to carry the Gospel to the wide-open field in that part of the world. He

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expressed his burden and desire to the General Secretary of the mission board who promised to help by providing interim faculty for a proposed training college in Singapore. I was there only as a visitor, but I assure you, I was an observer and taking it all in, again in the Lord's providence.

Later on during the years, Timothy Tow often used the expression "Accelerated Missions." It was evident to me in our early contacts, that there were two themes that were so evident in his conversations, his preaching, and, in his writings. First, he knew the doctrine of the Lord's premillennial return to this earth. He knew the Word and he preached the Word. The doctrine of the Lord's return motivated him so clearly. Second, he was and is a student of the times, realising that the events taking place in the world point to the Lord's return. He had and still has a special sense concerning that choice piece of real estate—the Promised Land, even the state of Israel. He and his family lived there when he studied there. He has taken many tours to that land which means so much to him. His conviction concerning the Word of God is settled and unmoveable. For nearly 400 years, God has used His Word mightily in the English speaking world. The Authorised Version preserved God's Word and still does.

Over the next 27 years from 1961 to 1988, my contacts with Timothy Tow in person were almost non-existent. However, we kept in touch in spirit. I continued to receive the weekly reports from his church with the accounts of his church ministry and its outreach. Of particular interest was the beginning of the Far Eastern Bible College, which enrolled its first class on September 17, 1962. Clearwater Christian College began four years later with our opening date also September 17. Our first class was small and could not fill one row in the classroom. I can state that I did not receive a great deal of encouragement from very many friends in those beginning days. I thought of Timothy Tow who also started with a very small enrolment, but he kept going. How faithful the Lord is. Both FEBC and CCC have continued and have grown with graduates in many parts of the world.

For me, 1987 seemed like a year in the desert. I had retired at the end of 1986. The full schedule of speaking engagements, such as conferences, summer camps, commencements, and pulpit supply, seemed to evaporate, again, all in the Lord's providence. It was important for the school and church groups to hear from the new president the Lord called to Clearwater. I was 67 years old, again the same age as Timothy Tow.

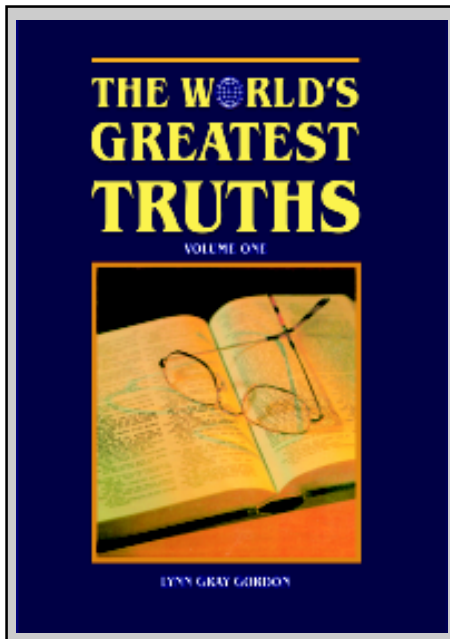
With my speaking engagements quickly coming to a halt in 1987, I prepared myself for the “retired life” which is so evident in this part of Florida. I was not exactly looking forward to that lifestyle. When Timothy Tow heard of my retirement, he wrote me a timely letter, again in the providence of the Lord. After a lonely year in 1987, I was ready to receive it. It was an invitation to come and teach at the Far Eastern Bible College in the fall of 1988. Timothy Tow knew of the course on Modern Religious Issues, which I had taught for so many years at Clearwater. He renamed the course Contemporary Theology, and put me on the schedule. When my wife and I arrived in Singapore with a royal welcome, we knew the Lord had called us to this special ministry. How gracious He is. After our arrival, Timothy Tow asked me to speak at the Christian workers conference to be held in Malaysia to the north. I told him I had not held many weeklong meetings, but did have one series on Elijah the Prophet. Without any hesitation, he stated, “You will speak on Elijah the Prophet of fire and I will speak on Elisha the Prophet of water.” We had a tremendous time of fellowship at the conference and fell in love with those dear Chinese people and the many others in those Asian countries. Timothy Tow, who is such an able writer, asked me to write out my messages so they could be published, together with his messages, in a book which he entitled *Prophets of Fire and Water*. The Lord has given Timothy a great burden to write but He has also given him a unique ability to write. He also opened the door for me to preach in at least 20 of the many Bible-Presbyterian churches, which are the outreach of the Singapore Life Bible-Presbyterian Church that he pastors. We returned to Singapore to teach and preach in 1989 and 1990. Again, this was in the providence of God because in 1991 our health prevented us from returning. Our contact with Timothy Tow and his influence in our lives continues, however.

The Lord gave Timothy Tow the ability and great desire to write books on practical subjects for pastors and Christian workers. These books reflected a richness of his understanding of the Bible and its doctrine. For me, his books are not only a postgraduate work in theology, but also cover so many subjects that I felt should have been covered in seminary. I want to note that his books are the right size. Big books end up becoming reference books which are referred to occasionally, but the manageable size of these books by Timothy Tow can be read in one sitting. They are refreshing and inspirational, and I find, referred to many times.

ALL IN THE LORD'S PROVIDENCE

Timothy Tow and I approach age 80 this year 2000. We are one year closer to being with the Lord. When my teaching and preaching schedule seems a bit heavy, I often think of Timothy Tow and his schedule and his zeal. I read each message that he continues to publish in his weekly church bulletins. I will always be grateful to the Lord, as Paul said to Timothy, "that he counted me faithful putting me into the ministry" (1 Tim 1:12). I am also grateful to the Lord for His faithful servants who have been such an encouragement to me along the way. I would like to add that the wife the Lord gave me would say Amen to all that I have said. It is important to add that during our memorable and precious days in Singapore, my wife Dolores and I have especially enjoyed the many times of fellowship with Timothy and his dear wife Ivy. We were privileged to have their daughter Jemima stay in our home when she attended Clearwater Christian College. We were further honoured when our home in Clearwater, Florida, became the headquarters for the Tows when Jemima and Jeffrey Khoo were married. The Lord is good.

Dr Arthur Steele is president emeritus of Clearwater Christian College, Florida, USA.

	<p>This book, <i>The World's Greatest Truths</i>, was originally prepared and used by Dr Lynn Gray Gordon, who, as an army chaplain during the Korean War, taught the Bible to soldiers who were seeking a deeper insight to the Scriptures. The notes have been used in various situations. They have been the basis for Bible courses in a Christian college, new churches organised by the writer, and as a continuing series of messages on several radio stations.</p> <p><i>The World's Greatest Truths, Volume I</i> Lynn Gray Gordon</p> <p>ISBN 981-04-1976-7 216 pages</p> <p>FEBC Bookroom Phone: (65) 2549188 E-mail: febcbkrm@singnet.com.sg</p>
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GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF ABEL'S OFFERING AND REJECTION OF CAIN'S (GEN 4:1-7)

Quek Suan Yew

INTRODUCTION

Why did God accept Abel's offering and reject Cain's? Scholars hold to different views on the meaning of Genesis 4:1-7.¹ The basic issues involved are: (1) the meaning of the word *מִנְחָה*; (2) the question of whether Cain brought the first-fruits of the ground as did Abel in Genesis 4:3-4 or did not; (3) the significance of the statements *וְאֶל-הֶבֶל וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ* and *וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ* with respect to the Lord's approval of Abel, and rejection of Cain; and (4) the comments of the New Testament on Genesis 4:1-7. The purpose of this paper is to determine the reason why God accepted Abel and His offering and not Cain and his.¹

PRESENTATION OF VIEWS

Introduction

There are two main interpretations of Genesis 4:1-7. The first view is that Abel offered a sin-offering which required the shedding of blood, whereas Cain did not. Abel was accepted because he followed God's instructions, and Cain was rejected because he did not. The second view says that both Abel and Cain offered a gift offering which did not require the shedding of blood. Abel was accepted because he offered his gift with a correct attitude, but Cain was rejected because his heart was not right with God. In his summary, G H Davies breaks up the two views into three major components:

The preference may be due to (a) a different disposition of spirit in the brothers; (b) the material of the offering, flesh and fat not fruit; (c) the method of the offering—the first-fruits by presentation only [the text does not say first-fruit, only fruit], the firstling, by sacrifice, that is, by death, and presentation. This means only a blood ritual was acceptable.²

GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF ABEL'S OFFERING

The arguments for and against these two views are presented as follows:

In Favour of Blood Sacrifice

The Issue of Faith

The one definitive statement describing the acceptance of Abel's offering is found in Hebrews 11:4 which says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." Hobbs made this observation,

Though being dead, yet "he continues to speak" (λαλεῖ). Certainly he keeps on speaking to the future generations as to the validity of faith. May it not also include speaking to the present problem? The best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself.³

The clause, πίστει πλείονα θυσίαν ἢ Ἀβελ παρὰ Κάϊν προσήνεγκε, states that Abel by faith offered a more excellent sacrifice than (παρὰ) Cain. A T Robertson suggested that it should be read as "more sacrifice" (comparative of πολὺς, 'much').⁴ But in this context, it cannot refer to quantity but quality. Abel's "better sacrifice" testified of his righteousness.⁵ Arndt and Gingrich argued in the light of Hebrews 11:4 that the Old Testament concept of righteousness has to do with "not violating the sovereignty of God, and keeping his laws."⁶

The Object of Faith

What or who is the object of Abel's faith? Hobbs argued that it was faith in God's sovereignty and His laws.⁷ God is able to act independently. He does not need the advice or consent of others. This is also in keeping with His benevolent will and purpose.⁸

The first instance of such an act by God is found in His command to Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Adam and Eve both disobeyed God and because of their sin they realised their nakedness for the first time (Gen 3:7). In their effort to cover themselves, they made aprons out of fig leaves, the fruit of the ground. Hobbs made this observation,

Since their awareness of nakedness followed their sin, there is between them a direct relationship of cause and effect. Therefore there is reason to see in their aprons an effort to cover their sin.⁹

But God remedied this by clothing them with coats of skin (Gen 3:21). This implies the death of an animal—a blood sacrifice—in order to cover their sin.¹⁰

The Nature of the Offering

The Scripture is not exactly clear on whether the offering was or was not a sin-offering. However, verses 7 and 21 of Genesis 3 up to this point give no hint of any kind of offering except that of a blood sacrifice. And it is quite possible that Adam and Eve related their Edenic experience to their two sons. They must have had a knowledge of a blood sacrifice for the writer of Hebrews to say that Abel did it “by faith.” In other words, Abel obeyed the Lord’s commandment.

Genesis 4:4 says that Abel brought both the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof. This, according to the book of Leviticus, refers to a sin-offering where the entire offering and its fat are offered to God.¹¹ This was probably known by Abel (long before the LORD revealed it to Moses), and he obeyed God, and righteousness was imputed to him.¹² Barnhouse commented, that “God demanded the fruit ... But the blood must come first.”¹³

If Abel had the knowledge, then Cain too must have had the same knowledge. Why did not Cain act according to knowledge? Genesis 4 seems to present Cain as a proud man. He probably thought, “I am a successful farmer, and if the fruit of the ground is good enough for me then it ought to be good enough for God.”¹⁴ The tragic result was one of divine rejection of both Cain and his offering.

Conclusion

The book of Genesis is by nature a book of beginnings. It tells of the beginnings of both the spiritual and material things. It presents the beginning of mankind, his Fall, God’s *protevangelion* (Gen 3:15). The “coats of skin” speaks of the sacrifice for the sins of man as depicted by Abel’s offering. Hobbs summed up his presentation thus,

Flowing out of eternity and depicted in the accepted sacrifice of Abel is the saving purpose of the eternal God. The author of Hebrews voiced eternal truth when he wrote that “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). Like Cain and his offering, God rejects all else.¹⁵

In Favour of Non-blood Sacrifice

The Nature of Their Occupations

Genesis 4:2b mentions their respective occupations. Abel kept sheep while Cain planted crops. There is no suggestion that one occupation was better than the other.¹⁶ As Keil and Delitzsch pointed out, both occupations were legitimate.¹⁷ Even the chiastic order of their names in Genesis 4:1-5 (Cain, Abel-Abel, Cain-Cain, Abel-Abel, Cain)¹⁸ suggests no superiority or inferiority. This mention of what they worked as seeks only to provide the background to the offerings of Cain and Abel. They simply brought sacrifices that corresponded with their respective occupations.¹⁹

The Nature of Their Offerings

The Hebrew word for “offering” used in both instances is מִנְחָה (Gen 4:3-5). It is a word used in the general sense to mean “gift, present, or offering.”²⁰ Some scholars say that this word is used in the same manner according to the context of Genesis 4:1-7.²¹ However, the important clause is וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה (“Cain brought of the fruit of the ground”) in verses 3 and 4 where we have וַהֲבִיל הֶבִיא אֱבֶדְהָא מִבְּכֹרֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֲלִבָּהּ (“And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof”). Notice that the additional phrase, “of the fat thereof,” points to the nature of Abel’s offering. This phrase draws attention to the difference between the two sacrifices.²² As regards the reason for the rejection of Cain’s offering, there are three different views:

- (1) Cain did nothing wrong, since his sacrifice was of the same quality as Abel’s.²³ Thus the rejection lies in the sovereign will of God.
- (2) Cain’s offering was rejected because of his sinful attitude. It could be due to his pride of being first-born that resulted in his failure to bring an acceptable offering.²⁴
- (3) No reason is given for God’s rejection or acceptance because the concern of the text is on Cain’s response to God’s rejection and not on the reason for the rejection.²⁵

The clue that swings the arguments in favour of (2) is that the reason for Cain’s rejection is found in the phrases, “Abel and his offering,” (v 4b) and “Cain and his offering” (v 5a). The Lord looked favourably on the former and not the latter. The significant clue is that there is an intimate relationship between the person and his gift. This implies that the factor

involved in both cases, whether in rejection or acceptance, had to do with the attitude of the person.²⁶

The Reaction of Cain

Cain's reaction was that of deep anger, and his countenance fell (vv 5-6). Heck claims that Genesis 4:7 tells us that God had told Cain that the reason for his dissatisfaction lies in himself. The problem lies with Cain's attitude.²⁷ Heck explains,

... while the reaction need not imply Cain's improper attitude at the time of the sacrifice, it is likely that the context of the entire Cain and Abel story points in this direction. One of the most important messages of this chapter is that sin, if unconfessed and unforgiven, can lead to greater and greater sin.²⁸

The New Testament Evidence

There are two passages from the New Testament which support the view expressed above. Hebrews 11:4 points to Abel's attitude, which was one of faith, that made his offering acceptable to God. This faith made his sacrifice better than that of Cain's. The other passage is 1 John 3:12 where the evil action of Cain described here refers to the offering of his sacrifice. The implication is that Cain had a fundamental sin problem which rendered his sacrifice unacceptable.²⁹

Conclusion

The picture painted by the New Testament corresponds with the conclusions drawn from Genesis 4:1-7. Cain's sacrifice was rejected by God because of his sinful attitude. This attitude is reflected in the seemingly poor quality of his sacrifice. Unlike his brother who brought his best offering by faith, Cain did not bring his best crop because he did not offer it to God with the attitude of faith.³⁰ So, it does not appear that the offering required had to be a blood sacrifice.

Summary

Both the views presented have their strengths and weaknesses. They both claim harmony with Scripture. Yet both views cannot be right since there are significant differences between the two. If Hobbs' view is correct, then Cain's offering was rejected because he did not offer a blood sacrifice, a reflection of his faithlessness and pride. On the other hand, if Heck is correct, then the real problem lies with Cain's attitude as seen in a

non-firstfruit offering. It has nothing to do with whether the offering requires a blood sacrifice or not.

The rest of this paper shall endeavour to resolve some of the issues involved, and hopefully come to a conclusion that will be in harmony with the rest of Scripture.

EXEGETICAL STUDY OF GENESIS 4:1-7

Introductory Section (4:1-2)

Translation

¹ וַהֲאָדָם יָדַע אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה:
² וַתִּסֶּף לָלֶדֶת אֶת־אָבֶל אֶת־הָקָל וַיְהִי־קָל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה:

¹ And Adam knew his wife and she conceived and bore Cain and she said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.”

² And again she gave birth to his brother Abel. And it came to pass Abel was a shepherd of sheep and Cain was one who served the land.

Man's First Son

Genesis 4 begins the section which describes the first act of man after they had been cast out of the garden. Their first act was to procreate, thus obeying the command set forth by the Lord in Genesis 1:28. It is interesting to note that this command was given before the Fall. Perhaps this was as an act of obedience by Adam and Eve, reflecting their state of repentance. They were sorry for their sin and now desired to obey God. In any case, Eve gave birth to a son, and named him Cain (קַיִן). The name is from the root word קָנָה which means “to get or to acquire.”³¹ Eve said of Cain, “I have gotten a man from the LORD.” The important phrase to note here is אֶת־יְהוָה. אֶת can either be the sign of the direct object or the preposition “with.” The Targum has the preposition “from;”³² the Greek Septuagint has it as διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ;³³ the Latin Vulgate has *per Deum*.³⁴ If the interpretation of אֶת is taken as a preposition then it has the meaning “with” or “with the help of” as in Genesis 49:25a, Judges 8:7b, and Esther 9:29. This would point to Eve’s gratefulness to God, giving thanks to Him for raising up a posterity through her, though she deserves only perpetual barrenness because of her sin. If אֶת is taken to mean “from,” then the

translation would be, “I have obtained a man from the LORD.” Calvin wrote,

To me ... this seems to be the genuine sense, that while Eve congratulates herself on the birth of a son, she offers him to God, as the first-fruits of his race. Therefore, I think it ought to be translated, ‘I have obtained a man from the LORD,’ which approaches more nearly the Hebrew phrase. Moreover, she calls a new-born infant a man, because she saw the human race renewed, which both she and her husband had ruined by their own fault.³⁵

Whether אִם is rendered “with” or “from,” it is clear that Eve was thinking of the Conqueror of the serpent who had been divinely promised to her (Gen 3:15). The fact that she was mistaken does not in any way reduce the faith she had in God that this could be the fulfilment of that promise in Genesis 3:15. The view that אִם ought to be taken as the sign of the definite direct object, and thus translated, “I have obtained a man, the LORD,” should be rejected. Such a rendering is unacceptable because אִם, being the sign of the definite object, would make the LORD as the definite object in apposition to the indefinite אִישׁ, “a man.” This is grammatically impossible. It is also theologically inconceivable that Eve thought of herself as having given birth to the LORD. Obviously her seed came forth from Adam, a man. There was nothing supernatural about the conception.³⁶

Genesis 4:2 is a description of the birth of Abel, Cain’s brother. There is no record of Eve making any significant statement about his name or his birth. Abel (הַבֶּל) means “vapour,” “breath,” or figuratively speaking, “vanity.”³⁷ It is not possible to determine any definite significance for the name since Eve made no additional comment on it. But one may surmise the providential hand of God in the name given to Abel. For his name, meaning “vapour,” symbolises the temporal nature of man after his Fall.

The nature of both their occupations is acceptable to God. It cannot be construed that a keeper of sheep is nobler than that of a tiller of the ground. Both are honest and respectable occupations acceptable to God and one is not at liberty to read into the text a meaning that is not there.³⁸

Conclusion

The name which Eve gave to Cain seems to indicate that she thought that Cain was the Redeemer promised in Genesis 3:15. The fact that she was mistaken does not make the link between Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 4 any less significant. Since Genesis 3:15 is the *protevangelion*, Genesis

4:1-2 may be said to be the first example of man's expression of the hope of salvation as promised by God. Therefore, can Genesis 4:3-7 not be the first example that the propitiation of man's sin has to be in accordance to God's way? This probable link sets the stage for the ensuing portrayal of the two brothers and their respective offerings.

The Nature of Their Offerings (4:3-5)

Translation

³ וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה
⁴ וַהֲבִיל הִבִּיא גַם־הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֶלְבֵהֶן וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה אֶל־הַבֶּל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ:
⁵ וְאֶל־קַיִן וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיִּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָנָיו:

³ And it came to pass at the end of that time Cain brought in from the fruit of the ground an offering to the LORD.

⁴ But Abel brought in also from the fat of the first-fruits of his sheep and the LORD gazed with favour towards Abel and to his offering.

⁵ But unto Cain and to his offering He gazed with no favour. And Cain burned with anger exceedingly and his countenance fell.

The chiasm in verses 3-5 is significant. It takes on the pattern of A-B-B-A, with verses 4 and 5 beginning with the ו disjunctive, emphasising the great contrast between the two brothers and their respective offerings.

A וַיָּבֵא קַיִן
 B וַהֲבִיל הִבִּיא
 B הֶבֶל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ
 A קַיִן וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ

Word Study of מִנְחָה

The meaning of מִנְחָה is crucial to the understanding of the reasons for God accepting Abel and his offering and rejecting Cain and his.³⁹ For if the word מִנְחָה can only mean “a gift or present” as suggested by Heck,⁴⁰ then God could not have rejected Cain and his offering because it was not a sin offering. But if מִנְחָה refers to a sin-offering, then God rejected Cain and his offering because he did not bring a blood sacrifice required for the cleansing of sin.

The following is a tabulation of the occurrence of the word מִנְחָה based on Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz zum Hebraischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958), 830-1.

Bible	Noun	Bible	Noun
Genesis	12	Ezekiel	15
Exodus	3	Hosea	1
Leviticus	36	Joel	3
Numbers	61	Amos	2
Joshua	2	Zephaniah	1
Judges	7	Malachi	7
1 Samuel	6	Psalms	6
2 Samuel	2	Daniel	2
1 Kings	6	Ezra	2
2 Kings	8	Nehemiah	3
Isaiah	8	1 Chronicles	5
Jeremiah	4	2 Chronicles	6
Total	155	Total	53

The total number of occurrences is 208. The following is a tabulation of their occurrences according to their usages:

As a gift (man to man): Gen 32:14,19,21,22—Jacob presented gifts to Esau; Gen 33:10—Jacob's gift to Esau; Gen 43:11,15,25,26—gifts to Joseph by his brothers; Judg 3:15,17,18—Ehud's gift to Eglon; 1 Sam 10:27—sons of Belial did not bring gifts to Saul; 2 Sam 8:2,6—gifts brought to David; 1 Kgs 5:1—gifts brought to Solomon; 1 Kgs 10:25—gifts for Solomon; 2 Kgs 8:8,9—Hazeal's gift to Elisha; 2 Kgs 17:3,4—Hoshea's gifts to the Assyrians; 2 Kgs 20:12—king of Babylon's gift to Hezekiah; Isa 39:1—king of Babylon's gift to Hezekiah; Ezek 46:17—man give gift to his servant; Hos 10:6—idols as captured gifts for Assyrians; Ps 45:13—the gifts of the daughters of Tyre; 1 Chr 18:2—Moabites brought gifts to David; 1 Chr 18:6—Syrians brought gifts to David; 1 Chr 21:23—Ornan

GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF ABEL'S OFFERING

brought gifts to David (meal offering); 2 Chr 9:24—brought gifts to Solomon; 2 Chr 17:5—Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat; 2 Chr 17:11—Philistines brought gifts to Jehoshaphat; 2 Chr 26:8—Ammonites brought gifts to Uzziah.

As a gift (man to God, non-blood): Exod 30:9—one of many kinds of gifts; Exod 40:29—one of many kinds of gifts; Lev 2:1, 3-11,13-15—a gift offering to God and partially burnt up; Lev 6:13,14,16—whole burnt offering; Lev 7:9,10,37—a meal offering; Lev 14:20—one of many kinds of offering; Num 7:13,19,25,31,37,43,49,55,61,67,73,79,87—a meal offering; Num 15:4,6,9—a meal offering that accompanies a blood offering; Num 18:9—one of many kinds of offerings; Josh 22:23,29—one of many kinds of offering; Judg 13:19,23—Manoah's offering; 1 Kgs 8:64—one of many offerings; 2 Kgs 16:13,15—one of many offerings; Isa 43:23—one of many kinds of offering; Ezek 42:13—one of many offerings; Ezek 44:29—one of many kinds of offering; Ezek 45:15,17,24—one of many kinds of offering; Ezek 46:11,15,20—one of many kinds of offering; Joel 1:9,13—one of many kinds of offering; Joel 2:14—one of many offerings; Amos 5:22,25—one of many kinds of offering; Neh 10:34—one of many kinds of offering; Neh 13:5,9—one of many kinds of offering; 1 Chr 23:29—one of many kinds of offering; 2 Chr 7:7—one of many kinds of offering; Isa 57:6—one of many offerings; Jer 14:12—one of many offerings; Jer 17:26—one of many offerings; Jer 33:18—one of many offerings; Ps 72:10—Gentiles bring gifts to God.

As a consecration (man to God, blood involved): Exod 29:41—to describe the daily morning and evening offerings on the altar; Lev 6:7,8—as a burnt offering (may or may not involve blood); Num 4:16—for daily offering (may or may not involve blood); 2 Kgs 3:20—a daily offering (may or may not involve blood).

As a consecration (man to God, no blood involved): Lev 9:4,17—part of Aaron's offering for himself; Num 6:15,17—Nazarite vow offering; Num 8:8—Levite consecration.

As a cleansing offering (man to God, non-blood): Lev 14:10,21,31—by the leper to the LORD.

As a sin offering (man to God, non-blood): Lev 5:13—a poor man's sin offering; Num 15:24—a part of the sin offering.

As a thanksgiving offering (man to God): Lev 23:13,16,18,37—upon entering the promise land; Num 28:5,8,9,12,13,20,26,28,31—for a regular

offering; Num 29:3,6,9,11,14,16,18,19,21,22,24,25,27,28,30,31,33,34, 37,38,39—for a regular offering.

As a “test” offering (man to God): Num 5:15,18,25,26—law of jealousy

As a worship offering (man to God): Ezek 46:5,7,14—worship offering to God.

As an all encompassing term (man to God): Lev 10:12—offering for priests to eat (included the sin offering cf, vv 16f.); Num 16:15—Moses told God not to accept their offering; Judg 6:18—Gideon’s offering to the Angel of the LORD; 1 Sam 2:17—men despised the offering of God; 1 Sam 2:29—the Lord reprimanding Eli for dishonouring the offerings; 1 Sam 3:14—Eli and his sons’ sin cannot be purged by offerings; 1 Sam 26:19—David told Saul to offer to God an offering; Isa 1:13—God told the people not to bring any more offerings; Isa 19:21—describing Egypt bringing offerings to God; Isa 66:3,20—general offerings brought to the LORD; Mal 1:10-13—offerings of Gentiles to the LORD; Mal 2:12, 13 - offerings of Israel rejected; Mal 3:3,4—offerings by cleansed people; Ps 20:4—asking God to remember all the offerings; Ps 40:7—God did not desire offerings; Ps 96:8—bring an offering to God; Ps 141:2—as an evening offering; Dan 9:21,27—as an evening offering; Ezra 9:4,5—as an evening sacrifice; Jer 41:5—offering brought to the LORD; Zeph 3:10—offerings to God by the people; 1 Chr 16:29—bring an offering to God; 2 Chr 32:23—many brought gifts to the LORD.

As a “challenge” offering (man to God): 1 Kgs 18:29—Baal prophets tried to offer an offering; 1 Kgs 18:36—Elijah offered an offering.

Observations on the usages of מִנְחָה

The usage of מִנְחָה centres around the basic concept of “an offering.”⁴¹ Within this basic concept, there exist different shades of nuances depending upon the persons involved in the offering and the kind of offering described in the context. It can refer to a specific kind of offering like a meal offering as opposed to a sin or a burnt offering as seen from the tabulation above. This kind of offering does not involve any blood. At the same time there are instances where מִנְחָה is used as an all encompassing term to include a sin, burnt, and meal offering, where a blood sacrifice is required. Thus it cannot be dogmatically said that מִנְחָה can only mean a bloodless gift offering.⁴² Heck though arguing against a blood sacrifice in Genesis 4 concedes that מִנְחָה can refer to a blood

sacrifice, and thus to a sin-offering sacrifice as one of the acceptable interpretations of Genesis 4:1-7.⁴³ Hence, the immediate context has to determine the actual usage of the word.

The immediate context contains many “firsts.” There is the first creative act of God, the creation of man, the Fall of man, the first covering of shame (with fig leaves), the first gospel message (Gen 3:15), the first clothing of man by God (with coats of skins),⁴⁴ the punishment of man, and in Genesis 4, the first instance of the destructive effects of sin upon the first children of fallen man. Genesis 4:1-8 records the first offering, first acceptance and rejection of that offering, first case of anger, and the first murder. These firsts, coupled with Genesis 3:15, and the coats of skins (Gen 3:21) open up the possibility of מִנְחָה in Genesis 4:3-5 being the first sin-offering of man.⁴⁵ Calvin highlights this possibility when he wrote,

... מִנְחָה is here placed, which properly signifies a *gift*, and therefore is extended generally to every kind of oblation; yet we may infer, for two reasons, that the command respecting sacrifice was given to the fathers from the beginning; first, for the purpose of making the exercise of piety common to all, ... and secondly, for the purpose of admonishing them of the necessity of some expiation in order to [bring about] their reconciliation with God. When each offers something of his property, there is a solemn giving of thanks, as if he would testify by his present act that he owes to God whatever he possesses. But the sacrifice of cattle and the effusion of blood contains something further, namely, that the offerer should have death before his eyes; and should, nevertheless, believe in God as propitious to him.⁴⁶

The Offering of Cain

Genesis 4:3 says, “Cain brought of the fruit of the ground” (וַיִּבְרֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה). Some scholars suggest that it does not mean the “best fruit” but merely a general reference to “some fruits.”⁴⁷ Others insist that Cain brought the choicest fruits. The reason given is that since Genesis 4:4 records clearly that Abel brought the best of his flock, it is assumed that Cain too did the same.⁴⁸ Another support for this interpretation is that the Hebrew word מִנְחָה used in Genesis 4:3 is the same word used in Genesis 4:4b-5a. But there are rabbinical writings that disagree with this third interpretation. They say that Cain brought flax seed as his offering to the Lord.⁴⁹ The implications of these views will be discussed later.

There are four ways of viewing God’s rejection of Cain’s offering. (1)

If the issue involved is one of a sin-offering which requires a blood sacrifice, then what Cain offered reflects man's best efforts as insufficient before the Lord for the remission of sin, even when offered with all sincerity. Man has sinned against God and his good attitude alone cannot save him. Salvation can only be obtained through God's way, not man's. (2) If Cain had not offered his best, and *זֶבַח עֹלָה* is understood as a sin-offering, then his offering was rejected because of his bad attitude presuming that he could approach God with what he thought was right or convenient. (3) If *זֶבַח עֹלָה* is not seen as a sin-offering requiring a blood sacrifice, then the rejection of Cain's offering even when he had given his best would reflect the teaching that outward formality, though correct, is insufficient if the offering is done with the wrong attitude. (4) If Cain had not offered his best, and *זֶבַח עֹלָה* does not refer to a sin-offering, then the rejection would be due to a bad attitude reflected by a bad sacrifice.

It must be noted that it was not only Cain's offering that the Scripture talks about; God linked Cain's offering to Cain himself. The offering is closely tied to Cain who was mentioned first (Gen 4:5). There are two ways of looking at this. The first is that it shows the determining factor in worship is the attitude of the person. Leupold wrote concerning Cain and his offering,

... Him, or his heart, God weighs. If he is not found wanting, the gift is acceptable. If he fails to please the Almighty, his gift is reprobate. This fact is so important that it alone is stated. The writer regards it as quite unimportant to record how the divine favor or disfavor was expressed.⁵⁰

Leupold's observation is, however, correct only if *זֶבַח עֹלָה* is not regarded as a sin-offering.

The second interpretation emphasises the gift and the giver as inseparably linked together so that for one to be acceptable to God, both have to be right. In other words the attitude of the person (ie, by faith), and the gift or offering have to be in accordance with God's Word. This is the tension seen throughout the Old Testament in the dealings of God with His people. At one point of time, prior to the Babylonian captivity, the Jews thought that right sacrifices alone were sufficient to please God (see Mic 6:1-8). At another point, after the Babylonian captivity, they thought that sacrifices were not important to God, so they offered the lame and the sick to the Lord (Mal 1:1-14). Both attitude and sacrifice are important because a person's outward action invariably reflects his inward faith.

Another additional clue is found in Cain's response to the whole situation. Genesis 4:5b states that he "became extremely angry and his countenance fell or altered." Leupold made two observations concerning Cain's angry response.⁵¹ The first is that Cain's reprehensible state of heart was revealed by God's rejection of his offering. The rejection should be seen as God's gracious warning to Cain because it reflected the unholy state of his angry heart. Cain's anger was an intense anger described by the statement, וַיִּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד, literally "and it burned for Cain exceedingly." Although the verb omits the natural subject אֵף and uses הָרָה instead, it conveys the idea of anger caused by "a burning sensation in the throat from rage and pain."⁵²

The second observation is the display of this intense anger of Cain by his fallen countenance. Literally פָּנָיו means "his face."⁵³ The intensity of Cain's inward anger is seen in his facial expression.⁵⁴ Calvin describes how Cain felt, "that not only was he [Cain] seized with a sudden vehement anger, but that, from a lingering sadness, he cherished a feeling so malignant that he was wasting with envy."⁵⁵

This response of Cain definitely points to an attitude problem. But the question is, did the attitude problem come after the rejection or was it the cause of the rejection? Some like Skinner and Westermann think that Cain's response was only human and thus not blameable.⁵⁶ There are others who say that the exceedingly angry response of Cain already reflects a wrong frame of mind.⁵⁷ This bad attitude of Cain may have contributed to God's rejection of his offering. But the context does not describe the nature of the "attitude" nor does it equate this "attitude" with an "initial anger." Thus, from the context, his bad attitude may be construed as the cause of the rejection, supported by the chiasm mentioned above and the ו disjunctive of Genesis 4:5a. But one need not necessarily equate Cain's bad attitude with his subsequent anger. His great anger could have come after his offering was rejected.

The Offering of Abel

The Scripture clearly states that Abel brought the best of his flock as an offering to the Lord—וַהֲבִיל חֶבִיא נִסְחָיוּ מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֲלִבָּהֶן (Gen 4:4a). The quality of Abel's offering is emphasised by the use of the phrase "even of their fat ones (וּמִחֲלִבָּהֶן)." The significance of וּמִחֲלִבָּהֶן is in the comparison of animals with animals. Therefore only the best animals could

qualify as the “fat ones.”⁵⁸ The use of ו in this instance joins the phrase to what immediately precedes it to add or emphasise in this context the nature of the firstling of the flock.⁵⁹ Thus only the best of Abel’s flock is indicated in the context.⁶⁰

The Lord had “respect unto Abel and to his offering,” וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ וְיֵשַׁע יְהוָה אֶל־הַבֶּל (Gen 4:4b). The word שָׁעָה means “to gaze,” “to regard” or “to behold.”⁶¹ This verb is used in both cases to describe how God viewed both the person and the offering. Noting the arguments that have been described above with reference to the inclusion of how God viewed both the individual and the offering, Abel and his offering found acceptance before God. The reason for the acceptance of Abel and his offering is stated in Hebrews 11:4. This New Testament reference will be dealt with later on. In the meantime, based upon the similarity of the verb used to describe God’s rejection of Cain and his offering, and the acceptance of Abel and his offering, the solution to the rejection of the former may be found in the solution of the latter.

How did Cain know that his offering was rejected by God? Some suggest that fire came down to consume Abel’s offering, and Cain’s offering was left untouched.⁶² Others say that smoke rose up into the heavens from Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s,⁶³ or that there was a visible sign in the sacrifice itself,⁶⁴ or that Abel prospered afterward but Cain did not.⁶⁵ How God indicated His approval or disapproval is difficult to determine with certainty. What is important is that Cain knew for certain that his offering was rejected. Whether Abel was aware of Cain’s rejection by God is not stated in Genesis 4:1-7. But one can see the clear and definite depravity of man’s heart so soon after the Fall. It was thoroughly ugly, for it caused a man to take the life of his own brother.

Conclusion

Up to this point we see a strong link between the events of Genesis 1-3 and Genesis 4. Furthermore the Hebrew word for offering, מִנְחָה, need not simply mean a gift offering. It is a general term to mean any kind of offering. The immediate context is the key to determining what type of offering is meant. Genesis 4:3-5a suggests an intrinsic bond between the offerer and the offering. They cannot be separated. God does not just view the offering apart from the offerer. The same verb, “to gaze” (שָׁעָה), is used to describe the manner in which God regarded both the offerings. The reason for God’s rejection of Cain’s offering may be found in the reason

behind God's acceptance of Abel's offering. Also the cause of the rejection might be due to Cain's "bad attitude" rather than his intense anger that came after the rejection.

God's Admonition and Warning to Cain (4:6-7)

Translation

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ:
הֲלוֹא אִם-תֵּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ:

⁶ And the LORD said to Cain, "Why should you burn with anger and why is your face fallen?

⁷ "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lying down at the entrance and it is longing to devour you but you must rule it."

The Interpretation of אִם-תֵּיטִיב

The warning from the Lord in Genesis 4:7 came after Genesis 4:6 where Cain's angry disposition recorded in Genesis 4:5b was exactly restated by God. These words in Genesis 4:5b were from the Holy Spirit, and recorded by Moses.⁶⁶ There is no reason to say that these were Adam's words and that he participated in rebuking Cain. Genesis 4:6 is probably a confirmation of Cain's sinful disposition and the Lord used it to begin His conversation of warning with Cain.⁶⁷

The meaning of יֵטֵב is "to be good, well, glad, or pleasing."⁶⁸ But in its hiphil stem it takes on the causative idea of "to make good or do good or deal well or to do thoroughly."⁶⁹ It can mean "to do well or right" in the ethical sense.⁷⁰ The verb implies the act of "doing." It does not suggest merely an attitude of the heart. Cain's action is emphasised here. Also, the Lord's question introduced by the interrogative הֲ expects an affirmative answer.⁷¹ The question then when rephrased would be, "It is true Cain, is it not, that if your offering and your motive were right, you too would have been honoured like Abel?"⁷² This word יֵטֵב is also used in 2 Kings 10:30, with an additional qualifying phrase that might connote the same meaning as in Genesis 4:7, "And the LORD said unto Jehu, because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes" Thus יֵטֵב may be understood as "to do that which is right in the sight of God."⁷³

The Interpretation of נָשָׂא

נָשָׂא is the feminine noun for the verb נָשָׂא. It has four basic meanings: “exaltation or dignity,” “swelling,” “uprising,” and “acceptance or forgiveness or uplifting of countenance.”⁷⁴ The verb means “to lift,” “to carry,” or “to take.”⁷⁵ There are three main ways of understanding נָשָׂא. The first is that it refers to the lifting up of a person’s reputation, ie, Cain’s lost of his right as first-born would be restored.⁷⁶ This view seems untenable since the Scripture no where says that the acceptance of Abel and his offering meant for Cain the loss of his primogeniture. The second view is that it refers to the acceptance of the sacrifice, ie, if Cain had done that which was right before God, Cain and his sacrifice would have been accepted or lifted up.⁷⁷ The third view is that the lifting up refers to the countenance of Cain, ie, in accordance with the preceding verses (Gen 4:5b-6), Cain was downcast; so if God is here said to lift up something, then it is natural to think of it as having to do with Cain’s countenance.⁷⁸

Both the second and third views are possible. If one sees the context as a whole, then the second view provides a more complete understanding of the term נָשָׂא. But if one emphasises the immediate context more, then the third view has a stronger case. The determination of which is the more acceptable view is outside the purview of this paper. Focusing on the purpose of this paper, both views, when seen in relation to the understanding of אֵם-תִּיטִּיב (do right in the sight of God), have the same implication. The implication is that either way the focus is on Cain not having done well, and that the Lord is now warning him to beware. This is substantiated by Genesis 4:7b where Cain is warned that sin is “lying down at the entrance and is longing to devour him but he must rule it.”⁷⁹ The issue here has shifted to the sin of Cain and how he can save the situation. Abel and his offering, in this sense, has been left out of the picture. But Abel’s action is referred to indirectly by the use of the word יָטַב. It may be inferred that if Cain had done what Abel did, then he too would be accepted. Cain could not have seen the heart of Abel, only his offering. Thus in his mind he might have understood God’s use of יָטַב as a reference only to Abel’s “good work.”

Conclusion

This section of our study points out two things. The first is that Cain and his offering were rejected because he had not done well, ie, did not do

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right in the sight of God. The second is that Cain was given the opportunity to do what he did not do the first time to be accepted by God. It was not something irreversible. However, it still does not answer the question of whether God accepted or rejected the brothers' respective offerings because of a blood requirement. The final section will deal with passages from the New Testament. They are Hebrews 11:4 and 1 John 3:12

Summary

There appears to be a strong link between Genesis 3:15 and 4:1-7. This link is emphasised by the fact that the Hebrew word **תְּנוּנָה** does not necessarily mean a gift offering. In fact when it is used in the general sense like in Genesis 4:1-7, it describes an all encompassing offering. This means a blood sacrifice is allowable. The offerer and the offering have to be viewed as one whole. God does not look at the external but the internal as well. The same Hebrew word, **שָׁעָה**, is used by Moses to describe both offerings. This means that if one can determine the reason for God accepting Abel's sacrifice, then the absence of that "reason" is the cause for God rejecting Cain's offering. The anger of Cain was not the cause of the rejection because it came after the rejection and not before. Cain was rejected because he did not do what was right in the sight of God. This is in contrast to the word "faith" used by the writer of the book of Hebrews to describe the acceptance of Abel's offering. An examination of the relationship of these conclusions to the New Testament witnesses will be the intent of the next section.

RELATED NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

Hebrews 11:4

The Significance of Abel's Faith

Hebrews 11:4 begins with **πίστει πλείονα θυσίαν ἢ Ἀβελ παρὰ Κάιν προσήνεγκε τῷ Θεῷ**, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain," which sheds light onto the Old Testament passage of Genesis 4:1-7. In this verse the reason for God accepting Abel and his offering is made known to the reader. Conversely the reason for the rejection of Cain and his offering can also be known. The *crux interpretum* is found in the meaning and understanding of the word "faith" used in this context.

The biblical definition of that aspect of faith (**πίστις**), which is

pertinent to the understanding of its usage in Hebrews, is given by the writer of the epistle in 11:1. It is defined as “the substance (ὕπόστασις) of things hoped for, the evidence (ἔλεγχος) of things not seen.”⁸⁰ A contemporary translation is offered by Morris, “Now faith is being sure of what we hoped for and certain of what we do not see.”⁸¹ The noun ὑπόστασις, is made up of στήκω “to stand,” and ὑπο “under,” literally, “that which stands under.” Thus it speaks of the ground on which a person builds a hope, a foundation.⁸² This word has already appeared twice in the epistle. In Hebrews 1:3, Christ was stated to be the very image of God’s ὑπόστασις, used in the objective sense of “substance” or “real essence;” and 3:14 where the believers are said to be Christ’s associates if they hold fast the beginning of their ὑπόστασις (used in the subjective sense of “confidence” or “assurance”) firm to the end. In the present context it is more natural to take it in the latter sense.⁸³ The thrust then would be that there are realities in which one has no material evidence though they are not the less real for that. Faith gives one that certainty. If it is taken in the objective sense then it would convey the idea that things which have no reality in themselves are made real.⁸⁴ This latter meaning does not suit the immediate context of Hebrews 11:1. BAGD says that in its context it should mean a “realisation.”⁸⁵ However, the Bible speaks of faith not simply as a realisation but as a confidence on an object that is absolutely true and real though yet unseen or unrealised.

This is supported by the next noun, ἔλεγχος, which means “proof” or “inner conviction.”⁸⁶ Louw and Nida explain it as “the evidence, normally based on argument or discussion, as to the truth or reality of something—‘proof, verification, evidence for.’” Thus they render the translation as “a proof of the things we cannot see, or evidence that what we cannot see really exists.”⁸⁷ The basis of faith is not on faith itself.⁸⁸ It rests on somebody or on something outside of faith itself. There needs to be something external that produces faith in a person. It just does not come on its own. And the justification of one’s faith is based upon this external ground. Truth alone justifies a person’s belief and trust.⁸⁹ Thus the better translation is, “conviction of the things not seen.”

The words ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος are synonymous. Both have their own objective genitives (these genitives are neuter plural participles). Both “confidence” and “conviction” are subjective. They complement the subject “faith.” But all three rely on something objective. Confidence is inspired in the individual, conviction is brought about in the person, and

faith is produced in that person.⁹⁰ And the person's faith rests on the Word of God (Matt 5:18; Luke 16:17; 1 Pet 1:25). The person's faith is false only if its basis is false. Thus the implication is that for faith to exist in a person he has to be given some kind of information as the basis for his faith. Faith *per se* cannot rest on itself. Thus in the case of Abel, his faith as seen in Hebrews 11:4 was based on prior information. Kent rightly says,

... the offering of Abel is explained **by faith**, and biblical faith is always based upon God's revelation. Thus it must be assumed that Abel's response was in direct obedience to the kind of offering God wanted. This fact is reinforced by the statement that God's approving testimony was given **on the basis of his gifts**. This demands that the character of the gift cannot be disassociated from the heart of the offerer. Abel's offering proved something about Abel's heart that was not demonstrated by Cain's gift.⁹¹

This revelation or knowledge Abel received from his parents Adam and Eve. The content of the instruction has to be determined from Genesis 1-3, and it has to be related to the clause, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb 11:4a). For when Abel exercised his faith on that basis, it rendered him and his offering acceptable before God (Gen 4:4).

The Significance of Abel's Offering

It was by means of faith that Abel presented to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Lenski was correct to observe that it was Abel's faith that made his offering superior to Cain's. However, his conclusion that this is the only reason, and had nothing to do with the type of offering made is shortsighted.⁹² What was the evidence of faith? Kent suggests correctly that the evidence was Abel's gifts (μαρτυροῦντος ἐπὶ τοῖς δώροις αὐτοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ). The emphasis is on both the faith of the individual as reflected by his good and acceptable works. Whitcomb astutely comments,

If Cain had offered a blood sacrifice to God, but had not done so in true faith, it probably would not have been accepted by God (Isa. 1:11-17). But if God had indeed commanded Adam and his sons to bring animal sacrifice (which seems to be implied by the context), then the only proper response of true faith would be obedience to God's commands. This is still true today (Jn. 14:21, Jas. 2:18).⁹³

The emphasis of Scripture has always been on the teaching that true faith must be reflected by good works.

Therefore one may conclude from Hebrews 11:4 that Abel's sacrifice was preferred over his brother's because his was sanctified by faith. Abel's faith led him to offer a sacrifice acceptable to God.⁹⁴

1 John 3:12

The Context

The author of this epistle was the apostle John.⁹⁵ The epistle was addressed to the church at large, with special reference to the church at Ephesus and the other churches of Asia.⁹⁶ The emphasis of the immediate context is found in 2:28 where believers are called to abide in Christ. And if they are to abide in Christ then they must practise righteousness since Christ is righteous. This is opposed to those lawless ones who sin continually (3:4). The difference between the children of God and the children of the devil is obvious. Anyone who does not practise righteousness is not of God. Unrighteousness is seen when one hates his brother, like Cain.

The Works of Cain and Abel

1 John 3:12 reveals the reason behind Cain's murder of Abel. It was "because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous (ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ποιητὰ ἦν, τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια)." Stott puts it this way, "it was not because Abel was wicked, but the reverse: because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."⁹⁷ This reveals the wickedness of Cain. Abel's life on the other hand displayed the righteousness of God. This is seen in his obedience to the commandments of God, which John calls righteous (1 John 3:12b). The only biblical record of Abel's "righteous" work is found in Genesis 4:4. John's citation of Cain and Abel teaches us that wicked people will not kill us because they hate us as individuals, but like Cain, they kill because of our works of righteousness.

Summary

Hebrews 11:4 emphasises the importance and necessity of faith in the life of the individual. Good works are futile if they are not done out of faith. 1 John 3:12 emphasises the good works of the person who says that he has faith. Abel's faith is seen in His righteous act, and Cain's faithlessness is seen in his fierce anger which led to murder.

Both these New Testament writers cited the example of Cain and

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Abel to accomplish their own theological purposes. The writer of Hebrews sought to highlight the faith of Abel, and Cain's lack of it. John sought to highlight the righteous deed of Abel which is an evidence of true faith. The important point is this: For a person to exercise faith, prior instruction must have been given. Adam and Eve must have instructed Cain and Abel on the right way to approach God, ie, through a sin-offering which involves the shedding of blood. That is why Cain stands guilty before God for disobeying His Word. By offering a bloodless gift, he revealed his sinful pride and utter lack of faith.

CONCLUSION

An exegetical study of those three passages leads this writer to conclude that God accepted Abel and his offering because he obeyed God by offering a firstling of his flock, and the fat as well, for a sin offering as instructed by God. Cain and his offering, on the other hand, were rejected because he did not believe in the commands of God to offer a blood sacrifice for the remission of his sin. This faithlessness is reflected by his bloodless offering. He disobediently offered a bloodless sacrifice—the crops from the work of his hands—wrongly thinking that what was good enough for him must be good enough for God.

Cain's actions mirror the depravity and self-centredness of fallen man. He believed that his humanistic way was sufficient to cause him to be accepted by a holy and just God. He was wrong. In contrast, Abel's faith and blood sacrifice mirror the grace and mercy of God who has provided a perfect sin offering in Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God—who shed His blood for the remission of sin. Faith alone saves, not works.

NOTES

¹ The method adopted in this paper is the historical-grammatical method with a priority on the New Testament's use of the Old. The meaning of the Old Testament is subjected to the infallible commentary of the New Testament. By means of the analogy of faith, every portion of Scripture is to be understood in the light of its harmonious whole. This writer regards the Bible as divinely inspired, inerrant, and infallible. See T Longman, III. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, vol 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 13-68, for a critical discussion on the various approaches to interpretation. Regarding the relationship of the Old Testament to the New, Longman correctly considers God as the ultimate author of Scripture since the intent of the author includes both the human and the divine. But it does not mean that the intention of God is found fully in the human. For the application in the New Testament of an Old Testament text frequently exceeds the obvious meaning intended by the human author (65).

² G H Davies, *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), 144.

³ H H Hobbs, “Was Cain’s Offering Rejected by God Because It was Not a Blood Sacrifice?—Yes,” *The Genesis Debate*, ed R Youngblood (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 134. The arguments presented by Hobbs are representative of the view in favor of an affirmative answer. Thus his position will be used to demonstrate the validity of the “blood sacrifice” view.

⁴ A T Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), 5: 419. See also BAGD, 695.

⁵ Hobbs, 135.

⁶ BAGD, 194.

⁷ Hobbs, 135.

⁸ Ibid, 136.

⁹ Hobbs, 136.

¹⁰ Ibid, 137.

¹¹ See Exodus 29:13, 22; Leviticus 4:8, 9.

¹² Hobbs, 139-40.

¹³ D G Barnhouse, *Genesis*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 30-31.

¹⁴ Hobbs, 141-142. Hobbs argued that it is not necessary to hold that Cain brought inferior products. The absence of “firstlings” implies that he simply brought the good but not necessarily the best. In reply to some who say that as a farmer he had no flock to bring but brought what he had, Hobbs’ retort is that Cain could very well have purchased one from his brother. He simply did not do it.

¹⁵ Hobbs, 143.

¹⁶ U Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part I: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1978), 203; F Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, vol 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 179; D Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 74; C F Keil, and F Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, nd), 109; H C Leupold, 192; H M Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 135; C Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 294.

¹⁷ Keil and Delitzsch, 109.

¹⁸ Westermann, 294.

¹⁹ J D Heck, “Was Cain’s Offering Rejected by God Because It was Not a Blood Sacrifice?—No,” *The Genesis Debate*, ed R Youngblood (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 132-133.

²⁰ Some of the other examples in the Old Testament with the same uses are Numbers 16:15; Judges 6:18; 1 Samuel 2:17. Later under Mosaic Law both grain and blood offerings were acceptable. Cf Heck, 134. Heck comments that it is not surprising that the same was true at the time of Cain and Abel.

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²¹ Westermann, 295; Leupold, 194; Delitzsch, 180; G C Aalders, *Genesis*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co, 1981), 120; Kidner, 75; J Skinner, *Genesis*, 2d ed (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 103-4.

²² Heck, 135.

²³ J Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 33n 36; W Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 56; G von Rad, *Genesis*, 2d ed (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 104; B Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 95; Westermann, 296.

²⁴ Heck, 137.

²⁵ R Davidson, *Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1973), 52; A J Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links Between Genesis 4:1-16 and Genesis 2-3," *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 23 (1980): 300. The non-record of the reasons for the acceptance and rejection by God may itself be the emphasis. Such a literary device is not uncommon in the Hebrew Old Testament. For example the word אלהים is not found in the entire book of Esther; yet God's providential hand is seen throughout every event.

²⁶ M Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, vol 1, ed J Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia, 1958), 257; Leupold, 196; E Konig, *Die Genesis* (Gutersloh: C Berstelmann, 1919), 276.

²⁷ Ibid, 140-1.

²⁸ Heck, 139-40. Heck thus concludes that "Cain's sinful attitude led to an inferior quality of sacrifice, which in turn led to anger rather than repentance after the Lord's rejection of the sacrifice. This then led to murder." It is important to note at this juncture that the concept of defiance is seen throughout Genesis 1-11.

²⁹ Heck, 142.

³⁰ Ibid, 143.

³¹ BDB, 888. Cf Stigers, 86. Stigers says that "Cain" does not come from the root קין meaning "smith." The reason is that it does not fit the context for Eve to talk about "smithing." On the other hand, the verb קנה is used in the sense of "fashioning or shaping" in Genesis 14:19, 22. This understanding is also preferred in the Ugaritic (see U Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961], 200-1), where the Hebrew verb עשה and קנה have similar meanings (Cf Ps 139:13; Prov 8:22 usage of קנה; and Gen 12:5 *et al* use עשה). Thus קין is from the old Canaanite root (קנה) which has the meaning of "create or make." For a full discussion on the refutation of Stade's view that קין refers to a nomadic tribe (D B Stade, *Beitrag zur Pentateuchkritik*," ZAW 14 [1894]: 250-318), see Stigers, 85-86.

³² J W Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1986), 42.

³³ Alfred Rahlfs, ed, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935), 1:5.

³⁴ *Biblia Sacra Latina Vulgatae* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited, nd), 3.

³⁵ J Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol 1, trans J King (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1948), 190-1.

³⁶ Leupold, 190. Cf Luther, for a full discussion in favour of the view that מִנְחָה should mean the sign of the definite object. Also see J Smith, *Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*, vol 1, 3d ed (London: Holdsworth & Ball, 1837), 228. Cf Westermann, 291, eight other views are presented briefly for perusal.

³⁷ BDB, 210.

³⁸ A ben Isaiah, and B Sharfman, *The Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary on Genesis* (Brooklyn: S S & R, 1949), 38. It was suggested by Rashi that Abel withdrew from tilling the ground after God cursed it because of Adam's sin. Calvin, 192, comments otherwise, "Both followed a kind of life in itself holy and laudable. For the cultivation of the earth was commanded by God; and the labor of feeding sheep was not less honorable than useful; in short, the whole rustic life was innocent and simple, and most of all accommodated to the true order of nature. ... both exercised themselves in labors approved by God, ..."

³⁹ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, sv "Sacrifice," by C Brown. The Torah has a rich and precise vocabulary to represent the sacraments offered to the LORD on the altar. Each of its terms denotes a physical object representing a spiritual truth explaining the believer's communion and approach to God.

⁴⁰ Heck, 134. Cf TWOT, sv "מִנְחָה," by G L Carr. Carr states that the root meaning of מִנְחָה is divided. Some say that it comes from the root word מָנַח meaning "to lead or guide," and others say it is derived from מָנַח which means "to lend someone something" for a period of time and then return the original property to the owner. Thus the free gift is the fruit. Snaith found no occurrence of the word in the Ugaritic, but UT 19: no 1500 tentatively identifies at least one occurrence of מִנְחָה in a tribute list (Text 137:38) and another in the Anat/Baal Cycle in a parallel construction with "tribute" (from N H Snaith, "Sacrifices in the Old Testament," VT 7 [1957]: 308-17).

⁴¹ Carr, 514. He observes that the word is used in secular contexts of gifts to superior persons, particularly kings, to convey the attitude of homage and submission to that person. A biblical example which reflects this usage is 1 Samuel 10:27 where the Israelites who despised Saul did not wish to bring gifts to him, ie, did not wish to acknowledge him as king.

⁴² B K Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," WTJ 48 (1986): 365-69. Waltke divided the offerings basically into two types: Involuntary—sin and guilt offerings which involved shedding of blood; and voluntary—burnt, meal, fellowship, and freewill offerings can involve both shedding of blood or non-blood items. Quoting Waltke, "The unusual element in the story from a lexical viewpoint is not that Cain's offering is bloodless but that Abel's is bloody! In any case, by using מִנְחָה, Moses virtually excludes the possibility that God did not look on Cain's offering because it was bloodless." Waltke's categorisation of the offerings is too general and does not do justice to the many varied usages of the word מִנְחָה. He has inadvertently omitted the all encompassing usage of the term. Waltke's observation about the unusual "bloody" offering of Abel prior to the institution of the sacrificial system is correct if מִנְחָה is understood only as a non-blood offering.

⁴³ Heck, 134.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 138. Heck suggests that "it is possible that God used the skins of the first casualties in the animal world as a result of the fall." But he adds in the next sentence, "However, even if it be granted that God or man may have slain animals in order to make skins, there is no hint that such a slaying involved a sacrifice to God." Heck realises the silence of Scripture at this juncture and he is right to suggest that it is inconclusive to

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categorically state otherwise. But this in no way negates the possibility of surmising that the coats of skins are made by God for Adam and Eve as an indication of the necessity for a blood sacrifice for the remission of sin. Bearing in mind that Adam and Eve tried to clothe themselves with figs, which symbolised the fruit of the ground. Cf Tayler Lewis, *Genesis*, Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 255.

⁴⁵ Hebrews 9:22 states that "without shedding of blood is no remission." Yet in Leviticus 5:13, God allowed a poor man to offer an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. The explanation is that this is an exception to the rule. The poor man has to offer something that belongs to him in order to redeem himself. It is a provision for the poor because the general rule for sin-offering remains the same as stated in Hebrews 9:22 (cf Lev 5 for a list of options for sin-offering). The question then is, "Was Cain poor, or was he rich enough to buy a sheep from his brother Abel?" The answer is obvious. He was a successful farmer.

⁴⁶ Calvin, 194. Cf Leupold, 194. argues against Calvin's view when he says that מִנְחָה is used in the broadest sense, covering any type of gift man may bring, and has no reference to a sin-offering. Consequently the merit of the one over the other does not lie in the fact that it was a bloody offering.

⁴⁷ Heck, 133-4. Cf Leupold, 195. He says that מִן before פֶּרִי is the "מִן partitive." "Fruits of the field" are the natural offering of the agriculturist and are as acceptable as any kind, if brought in the right spirit.

⁴⁸ O Procksch, *Die Genesis*, 2d and 3d ed (Leipzig: A Diecherische, 1924), 46; J Skinner, *Genesis*, 2d ed (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 104. Cassuto, 205, states Gunkel's comments: "according to the context, obviously the *choicest* thereof;" and most modern commentators take a similar view.

⁴⁹ The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan reads, "It came to pass after some time that, on the fourteenth of Nisan, that Cain brought of the produce of the land, of the seed of the flax, an offering of first fruits to the Lord." Cf Cassuto, 205; ben Isaiah and Sharfman, 38; and Brueggemann, 132, 137.

⁵⁰ Leupold, 196-7.

⁵¹ Ibid, 198. Leupold thinks that the falling of Cain's glance meant that he did not want to look God in the eye (if God appeared to him in some visible way). This is an unfounded as well as an unscriptural idea on Leupold's part. Others are more far-fetched. The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan (4:2) says that Cain was conceived via Sammael (ie, Satan) and Abel was conceived via Adam. See J Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 132; E Levine, "Syriac Version of Genesis 4:1-16," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976): 73.

⁵² BDB, 354. The degree of Cain's anger is intensified by the use of the adverb נֶאֱדָר which means "exceedingly."

⁵³ Ibid, 815. It is translated as "... face fallen (in displeasure)."

⁵⁴ This point may be supported by verse 6b where God used the same verbs in exactly the same sequence to describe Cain's inner intense anger which was expressed by his outward facial expression.

⁵⁵ Calvin, 198.

⁵⁶ Skinner, 106; and Westermann, 297-8. Westermann's response is expected

considering his position that it was nobody's fault that brought about Cain's rejection. He describes it this way, "When it is narrated that God regarded the sacrifice of one brother and not the other, then it is saying that one experienced commendation from God and the other rejection. When such an experience had is traced back to a divine action, then this is a sign that it is something immutable. It is fated by God to be so. God's disregard for Cain's sacrifice does not go back to Cain's bad attitude nor to a sacrifice that was not right nor to an incorrect way of offering the sacrifice. It is saying something about the immutable; it happens so." The fatalism in Westermann's view reflects an unjust and arbitrary God who delights and rejects at will without purpose or reason. Such a description of God is not found in the Bible. Cf Pss 89:14—God is just; Rev 4:8—God is holy; Ps 117:2—God is truth.

⁵⁷ S R Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (New York: E S Gorham, 1904), 64-5; and Dillman according to Westermann, 297-8. Cf Heck, 139. Heck suggests that "based upon human experience, anger and a downward face can be the result of an earlier sin or an unjust accusation from another person." This is conjecture on Heck's part and there is no way to verify its certainty.

⁵⁸ Stigers, 87. He says that "some have construed this to be the fat upon the kidneys and other organs, referring to Leviticus 2 where the plural is used. However, this reference does not finally decide whether various fatty parts of the offering are indicated. There can be little significance to the mere reference to fatty parts, since they are present in all cattle, whether sheep, goats, or bovine animals."

⁵⁹ Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, § 154 n 1 (b).

⁶⁰ Examples of the "best" concept is seen in Genesis 45:18—the fat of the land; Deuteronomy 32:14—the fat of the kidneys of wheat; Ezekiel 34:3; 39:19—idiomatic for the best things.

⁶¹ BDB, 1043. It has the idea of gazing with favour or disfavour as the case may be. Nelson says רָאָה denotes "to see, observe, perceive, get acquainted with, gain understanding, examine, look after (see to), choose, discover." see Nelson's *Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*, in *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 357-9.

⁶² For example ben Isaiah and Sharfman, 38; and Luther, 252.

⁶³ Ewald, Strack according to Skinner, 104-5; and Bertholet according to Westermann, 297.

⁶⁴ Von Rad, 105; and Gunkel according to Cassuto, 207.

⁶⁵ Calvin, 197; Brock-Utne, Cassuto, Ehrlich according to Westermann, 297.

⁶⁶ Calvin, 198-9. Calvin may have assumed too much when he said that God revealed to Adam in a supernatural manner the disposition of Cain after his offering was rejected. And that Genesis 4:6 is God's personal observation. Cf Leupold, 199, says, "there is really nothing in the text to indicate Adam's participation in the admonition."

⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that God consistently used an interrogative technique in these early chapters of Genesis in His confrontation with sinful man. Eg Genesis 3:9-13; 4:1-10a.

⁶⁸ BDB, 405-6.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

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⁷⁰ BDB, 406. The noun מִנְחָה occurs 30 times in Genesis and 11 times in the first three chapters. It is a *leitwort* in these first chapters.

⁷¹ Waltke, and O'Connor, 684. These are called "polar questions," known in English as the 'yes-no' questions. It is a rhetorical question requiring assent rather than reply.

⁷² R C Snyder, "Genesis 4:7, Divine Admonition or Divine Acceptance?," unpublished BD thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1949, 20.

⁷³ See Snyder, 20. Cf R Jamieson, A R Fausset, and D Brown, *Critical and Experimental Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1945), 69-70. They argued that had Cain been sinless then a thank-offering would have sufficed but instead as a sinner a sin-offering was needed. The question was rephrased as "If thou were innocent and sinless ...?"

⁷⁴ BDB, 673.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 669.

⁷⁶ G Bush, *Bush's Notes on Genesis* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co, 1848), 98.

⁷⁷ This is the view held by Calvin, 200-1; Luther, 25; Leupold, 200. Leupold's understanding is representative. He says, "As long as you do right you are acceptable, but rather in the sense warranted by the connection, of a warning and a searching question: Have you forfeited your acceptability by doing ill?"

⁷⁸ Supporters of this view are Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon*, 783; Lewis, 256. Delitzsch, 112. For a more thorough interaction with the three views, see Snyder, 22-5.

⁷⁹ The thrust of Genesis 4:7b describes further the nature of the sin into which Cain has fallen. Since it does not contribute to the purpose of the paper, Genesis 4:7b will not be dealt with any further. For a more thorough study of Genesis 4:7b see Snyder, 26-48.

⁸⁰ J Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans J Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1948), 260-261. Calvin noted correctly that it would be erroneous to think that an exact definition of faith is given here. For the author does not speak here of the whole of what faith is but selects that part of it which is suitable to his purpose. Cf Lenski, 374-6. He concurs with Calvin when he says that "the writer presents only what faith is and not how, by what agent, or by what means it comes into existence."

⁸¹ L Morris, "Hebrews," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed FE Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 12:113.

⁸² K S Wuest, *Hebrews in the Greek New Testament*, vol 9 (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1947), 193.

⁸³ F F Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1964), 278.

⁸⁴ Bruce, 113.

⁸⁵ BAGD 847. J H Moulton, and G Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: 1930) 659f. They say that it has been used as a legal term. It stands for "the whole body of documents bearing on the ownership of a person's property, deposited in archives, and forming the evidence of ownership." Thus the translation, "Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for." If this evidence is adopted then the meaning is comparable to what Paul said in Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; and Eph 1:14, where Paul was referring to the

Holy Spirit as the “firstfruits” or “earnest” of the coming inheritance of the believers. There is no evidence in the context to require such an interpretation.

⁸⁶ BAGD 249.

⁸⁷ LN, sv “ἐλεγχος,” 1:72.8.

⁸⁸ F Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol 2, trans T L Kingsbury (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, reprint 1978), 211-3. He states it as “Faith is its own certification, its own proof or evidence of divine realities.”

⁸⁹ A lie or falsehood cannot do that except if is disguised as “truth.” For example, Satan dressed up his lies as “truth” to deceive Eve (Gen 3:1-5). Lenski, 375.

⁹⁰ Lenski, 374.

⁹¹ H A Kent, Jr, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1972), 219.

⁹² Lenski, 383. Lenski also said that it has nothing to do with the nature of the offerings (Abel offered firstlings and Cain did not offer first fruits).

⁹³ J C Whitcomb, *The Book of Genesis*, unpublished lecture notes, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana, USA, Fall 1989, 11.

⁹⁴ Calvin, 267.

⁹⁵ J R W Stott, *The Epistles of John*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, reprinted 1987), 13-41. For a thorough and complete argument in favour of John the apostle as the author of the three epistles (1- 3 John) see 13-41.

⁹⁶ A Plummer, *The Epistles of St John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprinted 1980), xlii.

⁹⁷ Stott, 140.

Rev Quek Suan Yew is pastor of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Pandan Gardens), and lecturer in Old Testament at Far Eastern Bible College.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROPHET LIKE MOSES (DEUT 18:15)

Jeffrey Khoo

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

Eusebius, “the father of Church History,” described Jesus as “the holy High Priest of all men, the only King of all creation, and the Father’s only supreme Prophet of prophets.”¹ It is customary in the Christian world to refer to the office of Jesus as “prophet, priest, and king.”² The threefold office of Jesus is attested by the very title given to him, namely, “Christ.” The Greek Χρίστος is the equivalent of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ which means “the Anointed One.”³ In the Old Testament, there were only three groups of people that were anointed: (1) the prophet (Ps 105: 15, 1 Kgs 19: 16), (2) the priest (Exo 40: 13, Lev 4:3,5,16, 6:22, Zech 4:14), and (3) the king (1 Sam 10:1, 15:1, 16:13). It is indicated in the New Testament that Jesus, as Messiah, fulfilled all three roles.⁴

This paper will consider the first aspect of Christ’s threefold office, namely, the prophetic. It is the hope of this writer that a study of the Gospels and Acts will yield answers to the questions: (1) Was Jesus regarded as the Prophet “like Moses” predicted in Deut 18:15,18? And if so (2) was the prophecy exclusively fulfilled in Him?

Method of Study

The study will be exegetically oriented. The historical-grammatical-canonical method of interpretation will be adopted. The intent of the human author is not the final level of exegetical procedure; meaning is not ascertained only from the amount of prior information available to the text under consideration.⁵ It is the contention of this writer that the best commentary of Scripture is the Scripture itself. The well-worn couplets illustrate this point: “The New is in the Old contained and the Old is by the New explained,” and “The New is in the Old concealed and the Old is by

the New revealed.” The Westminster divines say that “the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself, when there is question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one), it may be searched *by other places that speak more clearly*” (italics mine).⁶ This is what was known as the “analogy of Scripture.” Divine intent is ascertained by both antecedent *and subsequent* revelation.

This paper will examine the prediction and fulfilment texts in an attempt to discover whether Deut 18:15 is a messianic text, and in what way the prophecy was fulfilled.

Presuppositions of Writer

This writer regards the 66 books of canonical Scripture to be the verbally and plenarily inspired Word of God (Matt 5:16-17, 2 Tim 3:16). Although the Bible is primarily a salvation textbook, it is absolutely inerrant when it addresses matters pertaining to science, history, and geography.

It is also assumed that since Scripture is a product of divine inspiration, predictive prophecies and their fulfilments are not *vaticinia ex eventu* (ie “prophecies after the event”).

The book of Deuteronomy is written by Moses prior to 1450 BC and not by Hilkiah during the reign of Hezekiah in 621 BC as suggested by higher critics.⁷

Definition of “Prophet”

A prophet is defined as “a spokesman of deity” or “one who proclaims a divine message.”⁸ His ministry was essentially two-fold: (1) foretelling and (2) forthtelling. The Scriptural teaching concerning the office of a prophet indicates that the prophet functioned as the mouthpiece or a spokesman of God (Deut 18:18, Jer 1:9, Gal 1:11-12). The revelation he speaks may consist of reminders of past events (especially with reference to God’s covenant faithfulness), exhortations for the present (often pleas for repentance), and predictions on the future (which entail threats and promises). The predictive element is therefore not the sum total of the prophetic ministry. The proclamation of God’s soteriological agenda is the primary responsibility of the prophet. His message is absolutely authoritative and demands unquestioning obedience.

AN EXEGESIS OF THE PREDICTION TEXT

The prediction of the coming of a Prophet like Moses is found in Deut 18:15. It is the purpose of this section to discover the intent of Deut 18:15.

A Translation of The Text

נְבִיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאַחֶיךָ כָּמֹנִי יָקִים לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמָעוּן:

(Deut 18:15, Hebrew OT)

προφήτην ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου ὡς ἐμὲ ἀναστήσει σοι κύριος ὁ θεός σου, αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε (Deut 18:15, LXX).

A Prophet, from your midst, out of your brothers, like me, will Yahweh your God raise up for you; to him you shall listen (Deut 18:15).

Introductory Matters

The book of Deuteronomy was written by Moses himself under divine inspiration. Literally, the name of the book, derived from the LXX, means “the second (giving of the) law.” It consists of the parting instructions of Moses in view of Israel’s impending entrance into the promised land. Those instructions contain (1) a synopsis of the wilderness wanderings of Israel which sought to warn the people against the sin of rebellion (Deut 1-3), and (2) the land covenant which reiterated the Lord’s covenant promises to His people and the moral and religious obligations required of them.⁹

Moses had been the leader of the people of Israel for the past 40 years. It was through him that God spoke to His people. God communicated to him “mouth to mouth” (Num 12:6-8). Among all the other prophets of Israel, Moses was the prophet *par excellence* because God spoke to him directly and plainly. Moses was about to die, but the Lord was not going to leave the people leaderless. The Lord had made provisions for (1) a king (Deut 17:14-20), (2) a priesthood (Deut 18:1-8), and (3) a prophet (Deut 18:15-19).

A Lexical Study of נְבִיא

The Etymology of נְבִיא

The word נְבִיא has an uncertain etymology. There are four theories on how the word was derived:¹⁰ (1) from the Arabic root, *naba’a* “to announce,” hence “spokesman;” (2) from the Hebrew root נָבָא meaning

“to bubble up,” “to pour forth words,” hence “to prophesy;” (3) from an Akkadian root *nabu*, “to call,” hence one who has received a divine calling or commission; and (4) from an unknown semitic root. There are scholars who prefer to see נָבִיא as coming from נָבַא. This is because the verb can be taken in the active voice (though the passive is not impossible), hence arguing for ecstatic speaking or behaviour.¹¹

Since it is difficult to determine the meaning of נָבִיא from philological grounds alone, we have to study how it has been used in the various contexts of the Old Testament in order to ascertain precise word usage.¹²

The Use of נָבִיא in the Old Testament

The word נָבִיא is used 307 times in the Old Testament.¹³ It generally means “spokesman,” “speaker,” or “prophet.”¹⁴ The Old Testament uses it in basically two ways: to refer to either (1) a true prophet (Gen 20:7, Deut 34:10, Hos 12:13), or (2) a false prophet (Deut 18:20, Isa 28:7, Jer 2:26).

The Israelite prophets can be further subdivided into (1) lone prophets (1 Kgs 18:22, 2 Kgs 3:11), (2) temple prophets (Ezek 2:5 cf 1:3, Jer 1:5 cf 1:1), and (3) court prophets (2 Sam 7:2, 2 Chr 29:25). When נָבִיא is used in the plural it normally refers to prophets as an official class of people, viz, (1) an organised band of prophets (הַקָּהָל הַנְּבִיאִים, 1 Sam 10:5,10), (2) students of a prophetic school (בְּנֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים, 2 Kgs 2:3,5,7,15, 4:1,38), (3) the ancient prophets (הַנְּבִיאִים הָרִאשֹׁנִים, Zech 1:4, 7:7,12), (4) a divinely appointed group of servants (עֲבָדֵי הַנְּבִיאִים, 2 Kgs 9:7, 17:13,23), (5) pagan prophets (נְבִיאֵי הַבַּעַל, 1 Kgs 18:19,20,25, 19:1, 2 Kgs 3:13).

The term נָבִיא can also be attached with the feminine suffix to denote a female prophet. It is used only six times in the Masoretic Text (Exod 15:20, Judg 4:4, 2 Kgs 22:14, Isa 8:3, Neh 6:14, and 2 Chron 34:22).¹⁵ The prophetesses of the Old Testament are Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Isaiah’s wife, and Noadiah.

Several observations can be made concerning the Old Testament prophetic ministry through the above word study. Generally, a prophet, in the Old Testament, is a religious figure, a representative of God. This can be claimed by both true and false ones. All true prophets belong to Yahweh. False prophets can arise from among the heathen nations as well as from within Israel.

Specifically, there are two essential features which characterise a

genuine prophet of Yahweh: (1) The prophet is a person who is specially called of God to perform the task of declaring His Word. He is God's representative spokesman. Most of the named prophets functioned alone though groups of them were not uncommon. (2) The message he gives is not self-concocted but received by divine revelation, be it through a vision, a dream, an angelic messenger, or a voice. The revelation received can either be exhortations or predictions, or both.

The Use of נָבִיא in Deuteronomy

The word נָבִיא is used 10 times in Deuteronomy (13:2,4,6; 18:15,18,20(2x),22(2x); 34:10).¹⁶ In the other books of the Pentateuch, the word is used only four other times (Gen 20:7, Exod 7:1, Num 11:20, 12:6).¹⁷

Although the prophetic ministry became prominent only in the period of the monarchy, its formal institution had an early beginning. The prophetic ministry was to be a legitimate, God-ordained ministry. Just like the other official positions of leadership (ie king, and priest), the prophetic office has its own stipulations as well. All the above references in Deuteronomy concerning the prophetic office are Mosaic instructions on discerning between true and false prophets. Since anybody can profess to be a prophet, the people were instructed to test a prophet before his office and ministry were to be accepted. Three characteristics of a true prophet are listed. A true prophet (1) is one who receives divine revelation (Deut 13:1, 18:20), (2) is able to perform sign-miracles (Deut 13:1b-2a), and (3) teaches the people to obey the commandments of Yahweh (Deut 13:2b-5, 18:20-22). The prophetic ministry is fundamentally word-oriented. Thus, the last criterion is the most important. Even if a prophet has a vision or dream, is able to perform wondrous signs, but directs the people to other gods; he is a false prophet. And the penalty for false prophesying is death.

The use of נָבִיא in Deuteronomy 18:15

How is the word נָבִיא used here? Is it referring to (1) a prophetic *individual*, or (2) a prophetic *institution*? The main English versions seem to reflect these two views: some translators capitalise the letter “P” while others do not. The KJV and TLB render it, “a Prophet,” while the RSV, NEB, NASB, and NIV translate it as “a prophet.” The former may be an indication that the translators deem the נָבִיא as prophetically referring to Jesus Christ, while the latter, of any succeeding prophet or prophets (ie a

prophetical order, though not necessarily denying messianism).¹⁸

Generally, many scholars do not consider this to be an either/or but a both/and interpretation. Some view the נְבִיא of Deut 18:15 as referring primarily to the Old Testament order of prophets, and secondarily to the Messiah,¹⁹ while others interpret it as referring primarily to Christ, and secondarily to the prophetical line.²⁰ This necessitates the question: Is Deut 18:15 predicting the coming of an individual prophet or a line of prophets?

A Syntactical Study of Deuteronomy 18:15

The Anarthrous נְבִיא

In Hebrew, the articular noun “directs attention to the referent’s *identity*, while the indefinite noun focuses on the class to which the referent belongs.”²¹ Since נְבִיא is used here without the article, it may be argued that Yahweh was not referring to a *particular* prophet (ie an individual) but *any* prophet (ie a class) who would arise after Moses. If this is the function of the anarthrous נְבִיא here, then the noun נְבִיא has to be seen in a *collective* rather than an *exclusive* sense.²² If this is accepted, then the word נְבִיא here would primarily refer to the prophetical order in general rather than the Messiah-Prophet in particular.²³

However, this is not the only way the anarthrous נְבִיא can be understood. It is important to note that the non-use of the article indicates “the class to which *the referent belongs*” not to “the class” *per se*. In other words, this individual to come will belong to the class of servants called prophets. Further, if the word was intended to be seen in the collective sense, it would have been expressed with the interchanging of the singular and the plural.²⁴ Throughout the passage, the noun נְבִיא is found in the singular.²⁵ If Moses had wanted to convey the fact that he was speaking of the prophetic institution, he could easily have used the plural נְבִיאים. It is thus preferable to understand the נְבִיא here as referring to a particular person whose identity is hitherto unspecified.²⁶

Advocates of the collective view seem to have a strong contextual argument. The context of Deut 18:15 seeks to distinguish between Canaanite and Israelite prophets. The people were taught to discern between true and false prophecy. Moses was telling the Israelites to look for their own set of prophets. Hence, the implication is to anticipate a prophetical line of Yahweh’s spokesmen. It should be noted that the

information contained in Deut 18:9-14, and 20-22 is not new. This passage is thus not a formal introduction or inauguration of the prophetic institution because the prophetic institution has already been announced to Moses and Israel in Exod 7:1 with its stipulations in Deut 13. Deut 18:9-14, 20-22 reiterates and restates the stipulations of chapter 13. The nation of Israel already had prophets in their midst. It would thus be superfluous for Moses to introduce the prophetic institution here. Deut 18:15-19 is first mentioned here probably because the soon departure of Moses occasioned the need to predict the advent of the Moses-like Prophet.

It is the contention of this writer that the **נָבִי** of Deut 18:15 is a special person. The lack of the definite article is significant. The article “is always omitted when a person or thing is to be represented as indefinite (or indefinable) or as yet unknown.”²⁷ It should be noted that when Moses discussed the distinction between true and false prophets in verses 20-22, he used the definite article with **נָבִי** which occurs four times. The display of inconsistency with regard to the use of the definite article within Deut 18:15-22 may be indicative of Moses’ attempt to draw a distinction between the Prophet of verses 15 and 18, with the prophets of verses 20 and 22.

Could Moses be referring to the Messiah here? Although the identity of this special prophetic individual is not explicitly stated, the possibility that this text could be taken messianically should not be easily dismissed. It is important to note that it is not uncommon for prophets to predict both immediate and future events in different sections of the same passage. This is especially the case in messianic prophecies (cf 2 Sam 7:12-16, Isa 7:14-15). Since, the predictive text of verses 15-19 is new, there is a subtle possibility that something exceptional is intended. It is possible that Deut 18:9-14, and 20-22 is addressing the contemporary historical situation, while Deut 18:15-19 is predicting the coming of the Messianic Prophet.

מִקְרָבָךְ מֵאַחֶיךָ כָּמֹנִי The Descriptive words

The **נָבִי** is qualified by the phrase **מִקְרָבָךְ מֵאַחֶיךָ כָּמֹנִי**. The order of description flows from the general to the specific. He will be (1) from their midst, (2) an Israelite,²⁸ and (3) like Moses. The first two are self-explanatory. It is **כָּמֹנִי**, “like me,” which needs elaboration.

It is possible to understand **כָּמֹנִי** as qualifying **מֵאַחֶיךָ** (ie “he is from one of your brethren, like me”). But this makes **כָּמֹנִי** superfluous. It is thus

preferable to read כְּמֹשֶׁה as qualifying נָבִיא.

It should be noted that כְּמֹשֶׁה does not mean “like in every aspect.” In what way then will the prophet be like Moses? The context seems to limit כְּמֹשֶׁה to mean likeness in terms of (1) mediator, and (2) revealer. First, the nature of this similarity is presented in verses 16-17 where it is taught that Moses was the mediator between God and the people. At Sinai, the nation of Israel, terrified by the theophanic manifestation, pleaded, “Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not” (Deut 18:16). This cry revealed the nation’s awareness of its sinfulness, and unworthiness to come before the presence of the Lord, which received the divine commendation, “They have well spoken that which they have spoken” (Deut 18:17). Therefore, God appointed Moses as a mediator. Moses was a representative both of the people and of God. Whatever Yahweh wanted Israel to know, He would tell Moses, “Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel” (Exod 19:3). And Israel would respond not directly but through Moses, “And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD” (Exod 19:8).

Second, the נָבִיא will not only be like Moses in terms of a mediator but also revealer. God says, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (v 18).

Who is this Moses-like prophet? Deut 34:10-12 tells us that,
there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.²⁹

The natural reading of this text would lead one to conclude that none of the prophets of Israel were of the same standing as Moses. Furthermore, in Num 12:1-8 the true prophets were contrasted in such a manner as to give the impression that Moses was far superior to them. It is important to realise that all the prophets who succeeded Moses were not mediators of such revelation as the Sinaitic. The later prophets based their ministry upon and within the boundaries of the Mosaic Law (Deut 4:2). They were *enforcers* rather than *fulfillers* of the Law (cf Matt 5:17-18).

The Verb יָקִים

The word יָקִים is found in the hiphil imperfect, third masculine singular from the root קָם “to stand up.” Since the hiphil is a causative stem, the verb can be translated “bring to the scene.”³⁰ The subject of the verb is יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, “Yahweh, your God.” The Hebrew imperfect “indicates incomplete action or state.”³¹ Most of the time, it is used to indicate “an action in the *future*—from the standpoint of the speaker, or from any other point.”³² As the covenant Lord, God Himself will send the נָבִיא to Israel sometime in the future.³³ This coming prophet is given to Israel for her benefit and well-being.³⁴

The Sentence Structure

It is significant to note the unusual sentence construction of Deut 18:15.³⁵ The normal word order in Hebrew is verb-subject-object. Hence, verse 15 should read, יָקִים יְהוָה נָבִיא. But this is not the case, the text is found in this order: object-verb-subject, נָבִיא יָקִים יְהוָה. The object may precede the verb when the author wishes to *emphasise* it.³⁶ It may be because of this reason that some English translators capitalise the initial letter of the word “prophet,” indicating that he is one special personage.

It is interesting to note that no such irregular word order exists with reference to the institution of the king (Deut 17:14), and priest (Deut 18:1). The author’s description of those two groups are very straightforward. No unusual word order is evident. However, when the reader comes to the description of the prophet in Deut 18:15, the word order suddenly departs from the normal. This is probably done because the author intends to draw special attention to the subject he is presently discussing. Employing such a syntactical irregularity is probably the best way to draw the reader’s attention to this special person—the Prophet like Moses.

Synopsis/Analysis

The נָבִיא in the Old Testament is one who is divinely ordained to receive revelation from and speak on behalf of God. There are two ways to view the Prophet like Moses of Deut 18:15: As referring to (1) a prophetic order, or (2) an unidentified individual.

On the bases of (1) the word נָבִיא being written in the singular, (2) the likening of the prophet to Moses as a unique revealer and mediator, (3) the indication that it is still yet to be fulfilled, (4) the unusual grammatical

structure of the text, and (5) the testimonies of Num 12:6-8, and Deut 34:10, it is the writer's conclusion that the Prophet like Moses refers to a special individual hitherto unspecified.³⁷

AN EXEGESIS OF THE FULFILMENT TEXTS

We have ascertained that the Prophet like Moses predicted in Deut 18:15 does not refer to a prophetic *institution*, but a prophetic *individual*. The question we need to ask is: Who is this person? The New Testament sheds much light on the identity of the Moses-like Prophet of Deut 18:15.

This chapter will attempt an exegesis of various texts specifically from the book of Acts, and the Gospels of Luke and John, which relate to Jesus' office and ministry as *a* prophet, and *the* prophet.³⁸

A Lexical Study of προφήτης

The New Testament translates the Hebrew נָבִיא of Deut 18:15 as προφήτης. It is appropriate, at this juncture, to determine how προφήτης is used in the New Testament.

The Greek noun προφήτης occurs 135 times in the New Testament.³⁹ It is used 25 times in the Gospels and Acts with reference to Jesus.⁴⁰ It is used (1) four times in Matthew (13:57, 16:14, 21:11,46), (2) four times in Mark (6:4,15, 8:28), (3) six times in Luke (7:16,39, 9:8,19, 13:33, 24:19), (4) eight times in John (4:19, 6:14, 7:40,52, 9:17), and (5) three times in Acts (3:22,23, 7:37). In the above instances, Jesus is referred to as a prophet in two ways: (1) one of the Old Testament prophets (eg Matt 16:14, Luke 14:24), and (2) the Messiah-prophet (eg John 6:14, 7:40, Acts 3:23, 7:37).

The word προφήτης is a noun made up of the stem φη, meaning "to say," or "to proclaim," which always has a religious connotation, and the prefix προ a temporal adverb denoting "before," or "in advance."⁴¹ Hence, a προφήτης is defined as "one who proclaims (foretelling and forthtelling) inspired utterances on behalf of God" (parenthesis mine).⁴² It is used in the following ways in the New Testament: of (1) prophets and prophetic personalities in the Old Testament like Isaiah and Jeremiah, (2) John the baptiser (Matt 14:5,21,26), (3) Jesus, (4) men who have been sent on a special mission to proclaim the divine message (eg Rev 11:10), (5) Christians, who are endowed with the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 14:29,32,37), and (6) a pagan prophet (Tit 1:12).⁴³

A prophet during the time of Jesus functioned very much like a

prophet in the Old Testament. John the baptiser's ministry was characterised by (1) preaching (often with the appeal to repent), (2) predicting (in heralding the Messiah's coming), and (3) an unusual physical appearance.⁴⁴ He is the last of the Old Testament series of prophets, being "the prophet of the Highest" (Matt 11:13, Luke 1:76). It is interesting to note that the only other person called a prophet during the time of Jesus was Jesus Himself. He seemed to be One who stood between the Old Testament prophetic order and the New. The Old ended and the New began with Him. It is no wonder that the author of Hebrews regarded Jesus as the Prophet of prophets, the greater Moses. For Moses was a *prophet-servant*, but Jesus, the *Prophet-Son* (Heb 3:1-6).

The Quotations

Deut 18:15 is only quoted twice in the New Testament, once by Peter (Acts 3:22), and the other time by Stephen (Acts 7:37). This is indicated by the use of the fulfilment formula belonging to the λέγω group.⁴⁵

The Lucan Texts

Acts 3:22

Μωσῆς μὲν γὰρ πρὸς τοῦ πατέρας εἶπεν, "Ὅτι Προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ· αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

For Moses indeed said to the fathers, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up for you, from your brothers, like me; him shall you hear according to all things whatsoever he shall say to you."

The Apostle Peter, in his sermon to the crowd at Solomon's porch, fiercely rebuked the people for rejecting the Messiah (Acts 3:12-16). The Jews could not plead ignorance. They had no excuse whatsoever not to know about their Messiah because God through His prophets had foretold His coming, and all prophecies concerning Him must find fulfilment (Acts 3:17-26). Peter emphasised the Messianic content of the Old Testament. He said, "Jesus Christ ... was preached before you, ... whom God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began; ... Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3:20,21,24). The opening of the Old Testament Scripture was exactly what Jesus did in an attempt to prove His person and ministry. To the Emmaus disciples He said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have

spoken” (Luke 24:25). “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). It is not unreasonable to assume that the two disciples shared the teachings of Jesus with the rest of the eleven. Jesus Himself explained the Old Testament messianic prophecies to the apostles in His post-resurrection appearances (Luke 24:44-45).

Luke gives us to understand the origin of the Apostles’ interpretation of the Old Testament. This is evident in Peter who in an attempt to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised Messiah from the Old Testament cited Deut 18:15 as one proof text. Acts 3:22 is essentially derived from Deut 18:15,19. It should be noted that the Deuteronomic text is not quoted *verbatim*. The differences are slight: (1) There is one word change. The singular pronouns are changed to the plural throughout the passage. This is understandable since the plural allows for a more direct address to the crowd. (2) There is an insertion—πρὸς ὑμᾶς, meaning “to you.” By including the prepositional phrase, Peter intended a specific and pointed application of the text to the people. And (3) there is an inversion. The phrase ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν is relegated to the second part of the sentence. Peter is stressing Jesus’ divine appointment rather than His relational ties. The changes are homiletically motivated. The differences, in no way, affect the meaning of the text.⁴⁶

The promised Moses-like Prophet found its fulfilment in Christ. After demonstrating that “all the prophets” foretold of Christ’s advent (Acts 3:18,21), Peter went on to assert that even Moses, Israel’s prophet *par excellence*, had looked forward to the day of Christ. Although Peter did not explicitly link the Prophet like Moses to Jesus, his intention is evident from his train of thought and also from verse 26, where the word ἀναστήσας, “raised up,” points back to the same expression, ἀναστήσει, “shall raise up,” in verse 22.⁴⁷ Peter referred to Christ as τοῦ προφήτου ἐκείνου, “that prophet,” whom Moses mentioned (Acts 3:23).⁴⁸ The demonstrative ἐκείνου reveals that Peter did not understand the singular נָבִיִּי of Deut 18:15 in the collective sense.⁴⁹ When Peter read Deut 18:15, he was thinking of a prophetic individual, and not a prophetic institution. Jesus is the Moses-like Prophet.

Acts 7:37

οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Μωϋσῆς ὁ εἰπὼν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, Προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ, αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε.

This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, "A Prophet shall the Lord raise up for you, from your brothers, like me, Him you shall hear."

Stephen is emphatic in his address to the Sanhedrin. In his excellent synopsis of the history of Israel, Stephen demonstrated from the Pentateuch that the origin of Israel rested upon the providence of God. God, out of His own free will, chose Abraham, and through him, created a nation for Himself by a series of divinely ordered events involving Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon.

It is important to note that Moses received the most extensive treatment from Stephen (Acts 7:20-44). Stephen was attempting to draw a direct parallel between Moses and Jesus. Like Peter, Stephen quoted Deut 18:15. Stephen's quotation follows exactly that of Peter's except for two omissions: (1) the word κύριος, and (2) the last prepositional clause, κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς.⁵⁰ Stephen told the Pharisees and the Sadducees that this Moses whom he has been talking about, and whom the Israelites regarded as their first and greatest prophet, was the one who gave them a divine prophecy which promised the coming of the Prophet. The pronoun ὑμῖν is thrown forward in the text so as to emphasise the role of the audience as recipients of this promised Prophet like Moses. In citing Deut 18:15, Stephen was issuing an indictment against the Sanhedrin. In the same way the Israelites disobeyed Moses in the wilderness, so did the Jews who rejected the greater Moses and crucified Him (Acts 7:52).

The connection between Moses and Jesus is clear in Stephen's defence.⁵¹ The very person whom the Israelites had refused was the person God chose to be their redeemer. They had rejected Moses the first time, but when he came the second time they had no choice but to accept him (Acts 7:35-36). The parallel between the Jews' previous rejection of Christ and present obligation to receive Him is too obvious to require further elaboration.⁵² Like Moses, Jesus is (1) a deliverer, (2) a worker of miracles, and (3) a bearer of new revelation (Acts 7:35-37 cf 52). Bock correctly observes that what makes Jesus a Prophet like Moses is that "he combines *all* these elements into *one* person as Moses did."⁵³ Moreover, Moses was a national leader who, as a prophet, acted very much like a

king (Acts 7:27,35). It may be said that the Moses-like Prophet is not only (1) a revealer, and (2) a mediator, but also (3) a ruler. Other than Moses, it is only Jesus who can profess to have fulfilled all three roles—Prophet, Priest, and King.⁵⁴

Synopsis/Analysis

Deut 18:15 is only quoted twice in the New Testament (Acts 3:22, and 7:37). Peter and Stephen, in their sermons to the Jews, cited the text to prove that Jesus is the promised Prophet foretold by Moses. The realisation of the prophecy is confirmed by the use of the fulfilment formula. In the light of Stephen's speech, the Moses-like Prophet is not only Prophet, He is also Priest, and King.

The Allusions

There are two types of allusions to Deut 18:15 in the Gospels of Luke and John. They are (1) apparent allusions (Luke 4:24 [Matt 13:57, Mark 6:4, John 4:44], 7:16, 9:19 [Matt 16:14, Mark 6:15, 8:28, Luke 9:8], 13:33, 24:19 [Matt 21:11]; John 1:45, 4:19, 9:17), and (2) intended allusions (John 1:21, 6:14, 7:40).

The apparent allusions are those references which at face value seem to direct our attention to Deut 18:15 because they refer to Jesus as a prophet. All the verses listed below from Luke and John refer to Jesus as "a prophet." The word προφήτης is written without the definite article. An exegetical investigation of each of the following verses is therefore necessary to ascertain how the word προφήτης has been used, and whether they indicate that Jesus is the Prophet like Moses.

The Apparent Allusions

The Lucan Texts

Luke 4:24

εἶπε δέ, Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς προφήτης δεκτός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ.

And he said, "Truly I say to you that no prophet is welcome in his home town."

Having successfully resisted the devil's temptations in the wilderness, Jesus returns to His native village full of the power of the Holy Spirit. His entrance into the synagogue in Nazareth to announce that He is the

fulfilment of the messianic prophecy of Isa 61:1-2a marks the beginning of His public ministry.

Jesus associated Himself with the prophets on the basis of the Isaianic prophecy which He has just read. The Old Testament text predicted that the ministry of the coming Messiah was going to be a prophetic one. When the Anointed One comes, He will (1) “preach the gospel to the poor,” (2) “preach deliverance to the captives,” and (3) “preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” The prophetic ministry is primarily a *kerygmatic* ministry: it is characterised by *preaching*.

It has been posited that Jesus did not see Himself as a prophet here.⁵⁵ This is an unreasonable conclusion. Jesus was obviously accepted by his native town as “Joseph’s son” (Luke 4:22). What the people could not accept was the fact that He called Himself a prophet, and more than a prophet, the anointed Prophet on the basis of Isaianic text. Jesus applied the Isaianic text to Himself in confirmation of the truth that the Messiah will come in the capacity of a prophet. The key word of the passage is “preach” which occurs three times in verses 18 and 19. The fact that Jesus saw Himself as a prophet who has been rejected by His own people is supported by His citation of the prophet Elijah as an example of such rejection (Luke 4:25-27).

In using the proverb, Jesus identified Himself as a prophet. But as a prophet, Jesus was not accepted in his own village because He refused to give in to the people’s cynical and skeptical demand for a miracle (Luke 4:23).

Luke 7: 16

ἔλαβε δὲ φόβος ἅπαντας, καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν Θεὸν, λέγοντες, ὅτι Προφήτης μέγας ἐγήγερται ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ὅτι Ἐπεσκέψατο ὁ Θεὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ.

And fear seized all (of them), and they glorified God saying “A great prophet has been raised up among us,” and “God has visited His people.”

Jesus had just raised the widow’s son back to life in the city of Nain. This marvellous and miraculous act caused the people to react in deep awe and praise, and to exclaim that Jesus is a great prophet raised up by God.

This miracle of healing a widow’s son recalls the raising of the son of the widow of Zarephath by the prophet Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:8-24. There are several similarities between the two events: (1) Jesus went into a town

(Nain), as did Elijah (Zarephath, 1 Kgs 17:10); (2) Jesus encountered a widow bereaved of her son at the city gate (cf 1 Kgs 17:10); and (3) Jesus raised the widow's son to life (cf 1 Kgs 17:22). There also appears to be an allusion to 1 Kgs 17:23 in Luke 7:15.

It has been argued that the above parallels might indicate that Jesus is the *eschatological prophet*, or *Elias redivivus*.⁵⁶ This is unlikely since (1) the *Elias redivivus* has been identified as John the baptiser by Jesus Himself (Mal 4:5; cf, Matt 11:14, 17:12), (2) there is no fulfilment formula which explicitly connects Jesus to Elijah, and (3) the verb ἐγείρω means "to arise," rather than "to resurrect" a former prophet.⁵⁷

It has been suggested that Jesus is referred to as the Messianic prophet here.⁵⁸ It is argued that Jesus is not simply called ὁ προφήτης, but προφήτης μέγας, thereby placing him above all other prophets. It should be noted that John the baptiser has been called "great" also (Luke 1:15). Thus, the "use of the term μέγας need not necessarily place Jesus on a level above that of John the Baptist ..., but does indicate that he is a prophet who can do things beyond the capacity of most prophets."⁵⁹

Can the phrase, "a great prophet" here be descriptive of Jesus as the Prophet *like Moses*? According to Hahn, the lack of the definite article here does not militate against such a view.⁶⁰ Cullmann, however, thinks otherwise.⁶¹ The anarthrous προφήτης μέγας by itself does not explicitly direct the reader to identify Jesus as the Prophet like Moses, but it is equally difficult to exclude such a possibility.⁶²

Luke 9: 19

Οἱ δὲ ἀποκριθέντες εἶπον, Ἰωάννην τὸν βαπτιστὴν· ἄλλοι δὲ, Ἡλίαν, ἄλλοι δὲ ὅτι προφήτης τις τῶν ἀρχαίων ἀνέστη.

And the ones who answered said, "John the baptiser," and others "Elijah," and others (say) that a certain prophet of the old has risen.

This verse should be read not only in the light of Peter's confession of Christ (Luke 9:20), but also in the context of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17).

The awe-inspiring ministry of the Lord Jesus has aroused tremendous curiosity. Many of the people were trying to ascertain who Jesus really was. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, himself asked, "who is this, of whom I hear such things?" (Luke 9:9). Jesus was quite aware that the general populace was inquiring as to who He was. In an attempt to test His

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROPHET LIKE MOSES

disciples to see how much insight they had gained concerning His person, Jesus asked, “Whom say the people that I am?” (Luke 9:18). The disciples reported that the people considered Him to be John the baptiser, Elijah, or one of the prophets of old (cf Luke 9:7-8). The people knew that John the baptiser had already been executed by Herod. It is quite clear that the impact of John’s ministry was still keenly felt. John was considered a powerful prophet (cf Luke 20:1-8). It was only natural for them to think that “John was risen from the dead” (Luke 9:7). There were others who suggested that Jesus was *Elijah redivivus*. The Jews, apparently, were aware of the prophecy that Elijah would appear before the coming of the Lord (Mal 4:5). So they thought that Jesus, with His ability to perform such great miracles similar to those of Elijah (Luke 8:40-56 cf 1 Kgs 17:8-24), fulfilled that prophecy. Yet, there were those who thought that Jesus was one of the prophets who had come to life, or at least a prophet who was similar to the ones of the Old Testament (Mark 6:15). The above three answers by the general populace are indicative of the shallow understanding the people had concerning who Jesus actually was. They could see that Jesus was a prophet, but they were unable to see that He was Messiah.

The correct answer was given by Peter who replied Jesus by saying that He is, “The Christ of God.” It is significant to note that Jesus asked the question of His identity after He had performed the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17). The supernatural multiplication of the bread could well be an allusion to the miraculous supply of desert manna under the ministry of Moses. John gives us Jesus’ commentary on His great miracle:

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world ... And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life.⁶³

It is thus not unreasonable to assume that the miraculous feeding of the five thousand was a subtle clue to the disciples of Jesus’ true identity. Peter did not reject the popular opinion of the crowd at large regarding Jesus’ identity in his answer. He certainly saw Jesus as a prophet. But, to Peter, Jesus was more than a prophet, He was the Christ, the Anointed One, and in this context the Messianic Prophet “like Moses.” It is possible that Jesus’ exposition of the miraculous feeding could have caused Peter to

link the prophecy of Deut 18:15 to Jesus (cf Acts 3:22). However, since Peter did not use the specific term προφήτης here, one cannot be absolutely certain that Peter was drawing such a conclusion. He could have had a string of messianic prophecies in mind when he confessed that Jesus is the Christ; but Deut 18:15 seems to be the most direct here.

Luke 13:33

πλὴν δεῖ με σήμερον καὶ αὔριον καὶ τῇ ἐχομένῃ πορεύεσθαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἐνδέχεται προφήτην ἀπολέσθαι ἔξω Ἱερουσαλήμ.

In any case, it is necessary for me to travel today and tomorrow and the coming (day), because it is not possible for a prophet to perish outside Jerusalem.

In speaking of His impending death,⁶⁴ Jesus identified Himself as a prophet. Like many of the prophets in the Old Testament, Jesus says that he will die in Jerusalem.⁶⁵ In the Old Testament, we read of the slaying of the prophet Uriah in Jerusalem by King Jehoiakim (Jer 26:20-23); of Zechariah who was stoned in the temple at the command of Joash (2 Chron 24:21); of Jezebel who murdered a great number of Jehovah's prophets (1 Kgs 18:4,13); and of Micaiah who was imprisoned by Ahab (1 Kgs 22:27). Further, there are indicting statements which accuse Jerusalem of such terrible crimes against the Lord's messengers. In Jer 2:30, the Lord said, "your own sword hath devoured your prophets." In Acts 7:52, Stephen asked, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" Stephen went on to say that the same crime has been committed by the Sanhedrin who put to death the Lord Jesus Christ. Jerusalem in the days of Jesus was thus no different from Jerusalem in the days of the monarchy. Inasmuch as the Jews of old had persecuted and killed their prophets, so will they do to Jesus who came as a prophet.

Luke 24:19

καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Ποῖα; Οἱ δὲ εἶπον αὐτῷ, Τὰ περὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου, ὃς ἐγένετο ἀνὴρ προφήτης δυνατὸς ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἐναντίον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ.

And he said to them, "What things?" And the men said to him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet powerful in works and word before God and all the people."

This dialogue between the Lord and the Emmaus disciples took place after the resurrection. The disciples were perplexed over the crucifixion of

the Lord and the disappearance of His body as reported by the women and Peter who visited the tomb that Easter morning (Luke 24:1-12, 19-20). They were confused because they had expected their Messiah to be a military and political revolutionary. They had expected Him to deliver them from the bondage of Rome (Luke 24:21).

As they were discussing the events of the day, Jesus came by and walked with them, but they were supernaturally prevented from recognising Him (Luke 24:16). In the course of the conversation, Jesus asked them what they were discussing. They replied that they were talking about Jesus of Nazareth, and described Him as “a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” This shows that the Emmaus disciples regarded Jesus as a prophet on the basis of (1) the miracles which He performed,⁶⁶ and (2) the message which He proclaimed. They considered Jesus a prophet because He proved Himself to be one through His action and speech.⁶⁷

The Emmaus disciples called Jesus “a prophet.” The Greek text has it as ἀνὴρ προφήτης, rather than simply the anarthrous προφήτης. The word ἀνὴρ is used as a sign of respect, and need not be translated.⁶⁸ Is the word προφήτης used in the messianic sense here? Lenski says that προφήτης,

is a broad word, which is quite properly applied to Jesus as the Messiah. It is not restrictive as making Jesus only another one of the great prophets whom the Jews knew, a sort of second to the Baptist; for Deut. 18:15-19 made “prophet” a title for the promised Messiah, and the Jews used this word with reference to him. The fact that the title is meant in this exalted sense is clear from the addition: “powerful in work in the presence of God and of all the people.”⁶⁹

The descriptive phrase that Jesus is mighty in both speech and action is also used with reference to Moses in Acts 7:22. This is no mere coincidence since Luke is the author of the Gospel as well as Acts. Furthermore, it is significant to note that Jesus is considered the Moses-like Prophet of Deut 18:15 in Acts 7:32. Through indirect means, Luke might be linking Jesus to Moses. Just as Moses ministered powerfully in word and deed, so did Jesus—the greater Moses.

In order to help the disciples understand who the Messiah is and what He must do, Jesus opened the book of Moses and the prophets, and explained to them the things concerning Himself. His thesis is stated in verses 26 and 27: the Messiah ought “to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory.”⁷⁰ Although, we cannot be perfectly certain that Deut

18:15 was chosen by Jesus for exposition, we dare not exclude it either for one of the most direct prophecies concerning the Messiah is Deut 18:15. According to Plummer, the phrase ἀπὸ Μωυσέως indicate that,

Such prophecies as Gen. iii.15, xxii.18; Num. xxiv.17; *Deut viii.15*, and such types as the scape-goat, the manna, the brazen serpent, and the sacrifices, are specially meant (*italics mine*).⁷¹

Deut 18:15 should thus be included in the prophecies concerning the humiliation and glorification of the Messiah.

The Johannine Texts

John 1:45

εὕρισκει Φίλιππος τὸν Ναθαναὴλ, καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, "Ὁν ἔγραψε Μωυσῆς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ καὶ οἱ προφῆται εὐρήκαμεν, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἀπὸ Ναζαρέθ.

Philip found Nathaniel and told him, "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets (also) wrote about. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth."⁷²

John the baptiser's work of heralding the Messiah ended when he introduced and directed his disciples to the Lord by saying, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). This identified Jesus' primary ministry. The first thing the Lord did was to gather a special group of disciples. One of the disciples Jesus found was Philip. Apparently, Philip had some knowledge of Jesus and was able to identify Him as the one of "whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write" (cf John 6:45). Philip's stress here was not on the finding but on what was found.⁷³ Attention was thus focused on the person whom Philip had found. He was the long-awaited Messiah promised in the whole of Old Testament Scripture.⁷⁴ In saying that Jesus was the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Philip might be alluding to a great truth, "*for Moses and the Prophets (ie, the entire Old Testament) can never be understood unless the Christ is seen in them.*"⁷⁵

The question which needs to be answered now is which part of the Law of Moses was Philip thinking of? There are three clearly predictive texts on the person of the Messiah in the Pentateuch, namely, Gen 3:15, 49:10, and Deut 18:15. The first speaks of the Messiah as Seed, the second as Lawgiver, and the third as Prophet. Philip might well have had all three in mind, but the most explicit text which is directly related to

Moses is arguably Deut 18:15.⁷⁶

Although Philip did not explicitly indicate which text he was referring to when he mentioned Moses, it is possible that the “one described in the Mosaic Law” identifies Jesus as the Moses-like Prophet of Deut 18:15.⁷⁷

John 4:19

λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ γυνή, Κύριε, θεωρῶ ὅτι προφήτης εἶ σύ.

The woman says to him, “Lord, I see that you are a prophet.”

The Samaritans had a concept of the Messiah based on the Pentateuch alone. They only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament. The other books of the Old Testament were rejected probably because of their emphasis on the major importance of Jerusalem as the centre of worship, and the relation of the Holy City to the Messiah.⁷⁸

Our concern, at this point, is with the clause, προφήτης εἶ σύ. What did the Samaritan woman mean when she said, “you are a [the?] prophet”? Was she using the word in the broad sense of a supernaturally empowered messenger from God, or referring to the strict sense of *the* messianic Prophet like Moses? The anarthrous προφήτης may be construed to mean simply a prophet among prophets, rather than a special prophet. A natural reading of the text seems to indicate that the woman was calling Jesus a prophet because he could reveal the secrets of her life (John 4:18). Although this is a reasonable conclusion, her mention of the Messiah in verse 25, seems to point to the fact that when she called Jesus a prophet, she might have had the suspicion that He could be the Prophet like Moses.⁷⁹

In the light of Samaritan theology⁸⁰ it is possible that the Samaritan woman was alluding to Deut 18:15-19 when she told Jesus, “you are a prophet.”⁸¹ On the basis of Deut 18:18, the Samaritans were looking forward to the coming of *Ta'eb* who would resolve all legal questions (John 4:25), and restore proper worship (cf John 4:20).⁸² It is significant that the Samaritan woman called Jesus “a prophet.” Bruce explains,

Now the Samaritans did not recognize the canon of post-Mosaic prophecy which forms the second division of the Jewish Bible. In their belief, the statement of Deut. 34:10, ‘there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses’, remained absolute and valid until the rise of the second Moses, the Taheb or great prophet of the new age, to whom they looked forward. Between the first and second Moses no prophet could be expected. If therefore the woman meant the term ‘prophet’ seriously, she

was already on the brink of the great discovery about the stranger's identity at which she was shortly to arrive: a man who could tell her all that she ever did could be no less than the Coming One himself.⁸³

It has been argued that the indefinite προφήτης indicates that the Samaritan woman did not intend to mean *the* (messianic) Prophet.⁸⁴ However, if an analogy may be drawn from the Qumran text, 1QS 9,11 reads, 'd bw' nby' wmschy' hrwn wysr'l which is translated by Brownlee as "until the coming of a Prophet and the anointed ones of Aaron and Israel."⁸⁵ Note that the word *nby'* (נְבִי') is without the article. Nevertheless, Brownlee says that the prophet here "*is doubtless the Messiah*, whose followers ("anointed ones"), will consist of two classes: priests (ie, those of "Aaron"), and laity (ie, those of "Israel")."⁸⁶ It may be recalled that the נְבִי' and the προφήτης in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint respectively also lack the article. The "prophet" in the Samaritan Pentateuch itself is anarthrous: יְקִים לָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ תְשַׁמְּיִן נְבִיא מְקַרֵּב אַחֶיךָ כְּרִאֲמוֹנֵינוּ. In the Johannine passage, the Samaritan woman shows herself to be familiar with her scriptures, and could well be alluding to the *Ta'eb*, addressing Him more accurately as προφήτης rather than ὁ προφήτης.

The Samaritans believed that there is only one prophet, Moses. There will be no intervening prophet until the advent of the Moses-like Prophet, the Messiah. If the Samaritan woman knew her theology, she would not have addressed Jesus as προφήτης unless she had intended, in some inquiring way, to link Jesus to the Messianic Prophet like Moses.

John 9:17

λέγουσι τῷ τυφλῷ πάλιν, Σὺ τί λέγεις περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἠνοιξέ σου τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, ὅτι Προφήτης ἐστίν.

Then they said to the blind man again, "What do you say concerning him, because he opened your eyes;" and he said, "He is a prophet."

This dialogue between the blind man and the Pharisees is found in the episode of Jesus' healing of the blind man (John 9:1-38). The Lord had just miraculously given sight to the blind man by applying His clay-mixed spittle to his eyes, and ordering him to wash them with the water from the pool of Siloam. The people were amazed that the blind man could now see. He was brought to the Pharisees, and underwent an inquisition.

The Pharisees refused to see Jesus as a man of God, but the blind

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man considered Him a prophet. What went through the mind of the blind man when he called Jesus a prophet? The Old Testament records instances of God's prophets performing spectacular healing miracles, for example, Elisha (2 Kgs 2:19-22, 4:18-44, 5:1-14). Perhaps the similarity between his own healing to that of leprous Naaman when Elisha told him to wash himself in the Jordan prompted him to think of Jesus as a prophet—one who, like Elisha, was bestowed with divine power.

It is also possible that the blind man thought of Jesus as a prophet in the same way the Samaritan woman did (John 4:19). He could have considered Jesus as the Prophet like Moses. Beasley-Murray argues,

The answer of the formerly blind man to what he thought of the one who had healed him is to be compared with the declaration of the woman of Samaria: "He is a prophet" (cf. 4:19). His eyes were opening wider! Not all prophets performed signs, and not all miracle workers were prophets, but no Jew could forget that Moses was the greatest of all prophets and that his miracles in the Exodus were the greatest of all wonders (Deut 34:10-12). It was this, linked with the promise of Deut 18:15,18, that led to the belief that the prophet of the end time, who was associated with and even identified with the Messiah, would perform miracles like those of Moses at the Exodus.⁸⁷

It is thus no wonder that the blind man was quick to confess and believe that Jesus is the Messiah—the Son of God (John 9:35-38). In so doing, the blind man proved to be a true disciple of Moses over against the Pharisees who claimed to be Moses' disciples (John 9:28), and yet could not see that Jesus was the One of whom Moses spoke in Deut 18:15.

Synopsis/Analysis

Deut 18:15 predicted the coming of a Prophet like Moses. Was Jesus that Prophet? Do the above texts which refer to Jesus as *a prophet* tell us that He is *the Prophet*?

An examination of the above Lucan and Johannine texts has revealed that (1) Jesus saw Himself as a prophet (Luke 4:24, Luke 13:33), (2) the Jews (save those from his hometown) saw Jesus as a prophet (Luke 7:16, 9:19), and that (3) Jesus could well be the Moses-like Prophet (Luke 24:19; John 1:45, 4:19, 9:17).

The Intended Allusions

Are there any texts which allude to Deut 18:15 with more specificity? The answer is in the affirmative. The intended allusions are all found in John's Gospel. These allusions are more pointed because they employ the definite article with the word προφήτης. The specific designation ὁ προφήτης occurs three times in the Fourth Gospel (John 1:21, 6:14, 7:40).

The Johannine Texts

John 1:21,25

καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν, Τί οὖν; Ἡλίας εἶ σύ; καὶ λέγει, Οὐκ εἰμί.
Ὁ προφήτης εἶ σύ; καὶ ἀπεκρίθη, Οὔ. ... καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν,
καὶ εἶπον αὐτῷ, Τί οὖν βαπτίζεις, εἰ σὺ οὐκ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς, οὔτε
Ἡλίας, οὔτε ὁ προφήτης;

And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. ... And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? (KJV)

The theological intent of the Gospel of John is primarily soteriological. The purpose of the Gospel is clearly spelled out in John 20:31, "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Toward this end, John presented Jesus as the Messiah, the embodiment and fulfilment of Old Testament messianic prophecies. This is supported by the fact that it is only in John's Gospel that the term "Messiah" is preserved in its transliterated form (1:41, 4:25). It is significant that one of the covenant promises which the Apostle intimates Jesus to have fulfilled is the promise of the Deuteronomic Prophet like Moses.

The context of John 1:21 is tied to the unique prologue of the Gospel (1:1-18). Jesus is introduced as the λόγος, "the Word." This New Testament designation of Christ occurs only in John 1:1,14; 1 John 1:1; and Rev 19:13. The word λόγος "is a title for Jesus in the Gospel of John as a reference to the content of God's revelation and as a verbal echo of the use of the verbs meaning 'to speak' in Gen 1 and in many utterances of the prophets."⁸⁸ In other words, Christ is the "Revelation of God." The Old Testament prophets' piecemeal revelations have found their full expression in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The author to the Hebrews makes this clear, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake

in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1-2). It is in the light of such messianic prophetism that John 1:21 ought to be read.

It is interesting to note that Moses and Jesus are mentioned together in John 1:17, “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Both figures have one thing in common: Moses was the inaugurator of the Mosaic covenant, while Jesus the New.⁸⁹ Jesus may be considered as the Prophet like Moses in the sense that He, like Moses, stood at the beginning of the most important period of Israel’s national and revelational history.

After a period of prophetic silence since Malachi, John the baptiser appeared. In a prophetic fashion, he announced the coming of the Messiah. The people were so awestruck by his ministry that they enquired if he was the Christ, Elijah, or the prophet. To all the questions, John answered in the negative. He himself was not the Christ, but the herald of the Christ. John declared, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23 cf Isa 40:3). He denied that he was Elijah in the sense that he was not Elijah *reincarnate*.⁹⁰

It is the last question that this writer seeks to explore. To whom were the Jews referring to when they asked, “Art thou that prophet?” It is important to note that the noun προφήτης is written with the definite article. The Greek definite article is primarily used as a *pointer* (ie “to point out an object or draw attention to it”).⁹¹ The article also has a demonstrative force; hence ὁ προφήτης may be translated “that prophet” (so KJV)⁹². The article here may be considered an *article par excellence*.⁹³ This use of the article seeks “to point out a substantive which is in a sense, ‘in a class by itself.’”⁹⁴ In other words, that individual is the only one who is deserving of the designation. If this is the case, then John 1:21 tells us that the Jews at that time were expecting the coming of a certain eschatological figure, a Prophet like Moses. The Jews had asked whether he claimed to be the Messiah, and then if he claimed to be Elijah. To both questions John answered in the negative. When they asked, “Are you the prophet?” John did not have to ask, “Which prophet?” He knew immediately that they meant the Prophet of whom Moses spoke in Deut 18:15, and to this question the answer was also “No.”⁹⁵

It is thus reasonable to conclude that the Jews considered the Moses-like Prophet of Deut 18:15 as an individual, rather than an institution. Can this prophet be referring to Christ?⁹⁶ Bruce answered,

These words of Moses were early understood to point to *one particular prophet*, a second Moses, who would exercise the full mediatorial function that Moses had exercised ... and our Evangelist leaves his readers in no doubt that the promise was fulfilled in Jesus.⁹⁷

John 6:14

οἱ οὖν ἄνθρωποι ἰδόντες ὃ ἐποίησε σημεῖον ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἔλεγον, ὅτι Οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ προφήτης ὁ ἐρχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

Then those men, having seen the sign-miracle that Jesus had done, said, “This is truly the prophet who is coming to the world.”

John 6:14 is found in the context of Jesus’ tremendous miracle of feeding the five thousand which later became the ground for His great discourse on the bread of life (6:1-14, and 22:59 respectively). The disciples after having witnessed this wondrous event declared that Jesus is truly “that prophet that should come into the world.” The word προφήτης here is also written with the definite article.⁹⁸ The disciples were certain in identifying Jesus as the Moses-like prophet of Deut 18:15. This is seen by the use of the word ἀληθῶς which conveys the idea of *reality* (ie “pertaining to being real and not imaginary”).⁹⁹

In the mind of the disciples, the Moses-like prophet was no ordinary prophet. He is described as “the coming into the world prophet.”¹⁰⁰ The phrase ὁ ἐρχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον is used elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel only with reference to Christ, the coming Messiah (3:19, 9:39, 11:27, 12:46, 16:28, and 18:37). In John’s mind, the Prophet like Moses of Deut 18:15 is the Messiah.

Moreover, Jesus’ bread of life discourse should not escape our attention. In His sermon, Jesus compared Himself with Moses. In John 6:32-33, Jesus said to the multitude,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

The following distinctions between Moses and Jesus may be drawn:¹⁰¹

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1. Moses, as God's agent, merely gave directions to the people regarding the manner in which manna was to be collected, Ex. 16.	1. The Father in heaven is ever the real Giver.
2. Even if Moses be considered the giver, it remains true that he did not give the real bread out of heaven. The manna was a type; it was not the Antitype.	2. The Father is giving the real bread out of heaven. That real bread is Jesus, the Antitype.
3. What the manna provided, as it descended from the visible heaven, was nourishment (τροφή).	3. What Jesus, the real bread of life, gives, is life (ζώη).

Jesus was therefore claiming to be greater than Moses. The fact that the supernatural multiplication of the bread and the fishes was called a σημεῖον indicates that the event was regarded as "having some special meaning."¹⁰² What did the sign actually teach?

The people had already been attracted because of the "signs" of healing which Jesus did (v.2); now this greater "sign" led them to think of him as "the prophet that cometh into the world." The woman of Samaria had been convinced that He was "a prophet" (4:19), as the blind man whom He healed said of Him afterwards (9:17); but the miracle of the loaves and fishes inclined the eye-witnesses to go further, and to identify Jesus with the prophet of popular belief whom Israel expected ... as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Deut. 18:15.¹⁰³

Hahn likewise commented, on the basis of the σημεῖον of the multiplication of bread the people recognize the "prophet" in Jesus and desire to make him their "king". A reference to Deut. 18:15ff. may not be disputed, for precisely this miracle is understood as a repetition of the feeding with manna and assumes the Moses typology.¹⁰⁴

Jesus is the Prophet like Moses in that He takes the place of Moses whose ministry is a shadow of that which is to come, namely, the ministry of Christ (Heb 10:1).

John 7:40

πολλοὶ οὖν ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον, ἔλεγον, Οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ προφήτης.

Many therefore from the crowd having heard the word said, “This is truly the prophet.”

John 7:40 should be read in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-36), and in particular, the practice of drawing water from the fountain of Siloam on the last day of the Feast (John 7:37-38). Barclay describes this ceremony:

This special ceremony is very closely connected with this passage and with the words of Jesus. Quite certainly he spoke with it in his mind, and possibly even with it as an immediate background. Each day of the festival the people came with their palms and their willows to the Temple; with them they formed a kind of screen or roof and marched round the great altar. At the same time a priest took a golden pitcher which held three *logs*—that is, about two pints—and went down to the Pool of Siloam and filled it with water. It was carried back through the Water Gate while the people recited Isaiah 12:3: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” The water was carried up to the Temple altar and poured out as an offering to God. While this was being done *The Hallel*—that is, Psalms 113-118—was sung to the accompaniment of flutes by the Levite choir. When they came to the words, “O give thanks to the Lord” (Psalm 118:1), and again to the words, “O work now then salvation” (Psalm 118:25), the worshippers shouted and waved their palms towards the altar. The whole dramatic ceremony was a vivid thanksgiving for God’s good gift of water and an acted prayer for rain, and *a memory of the water which sprang from the rock when they travelled through the wilderness*. On the last day the ceremony was doubly impressive for they marched seven times round the altar in memory of the sevenfold circuit round the walls of Jericho, whereby the walls fell down and the city was taken.¹⁰⁵

It was perhaps at this very moment that Jesus stood up and said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).

The response of the people to these salvific words of Jesus was, “Of a truth this is the Prophet.” In other words, “This man is *the* Prophet like Moses of Deut 18:15.”¹⁰⁶ But what caused this group of men to identify Jesus with the Moses-like Prophet? It is possible that the veiled allusion to the water from the rock during the time of the exodus led them to this

conclusion.¹⁰⁷ There is also an analogy between John's portrayal of Jesus as the bread of life (John 6:14), and as the water of life (John 7:37-38 cf 4:14). Bruce likewise observed,

Just as Jesus' feeding the multitude in the wilderness suggested to the people that he was the second Moses, the coming prophet of Deut. 18:15 (cf. John 6:14), so now his offer of living water suggested the same identification afresh, for many remembered how Moses had brought water out of the rock for their forefathers to drink (Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:11).¹⁰⁸

Both the provision of the manna, and the gift of water from the rock, were incidents directly related to Moses. The gifts of bread and water were expected of the Messiah.¹⁰⁹ Moses was a great performer of signs and wonders. His miracles were unparalleled as Deut 34:10-12 records,

And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.

It is no wonder that when Jesus attributed to Himself the unique miracles of Moses, some of the Jews concluded that He was the Prophet like Moses.¹¹⁰

It has been argued by some that a distinction between "the prophet," and "the Christ" is intended here.¹¹¹ This need not necessarily be the case.¹¹² The apparently divided opinion of the crowd need not be taken to mean that the Prophet and the Christ are two separate persons. Since there is an absence of a strong disjunctive marker like *ἀλλά*, it is possible to take *προφήτης* and *Χρίστος* exegetically. Thus, the crowd may be of the same opinion. They could be using two different terms to describe the same person (ie "This is the Prophet, namely, the Christ"). This is supported by the question, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" (John 7:41), which evoked the response, "Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52).¹¹³

Synopsis/Analysis

The function of the definite article is significant in the above Johannine texts. The basal function of the Greek article is that of *identification* or *indication*. When the Jews used the phrase *ὁ προφήτης*, who were they referring to? They were most certainly referring to the Deuteronomic Prophet like Moses.

John 1:21,25 tells us that the Jews understood Deut 18:15 as predicting the coming of a prophetic figure rather than a prophetic institution, and were expecting this Prophet to come sometime in their history. The Jews thought that John the baptiser was that Prophet, but John correctly denied it. He was a herald of the Prophet.

John 6:14 informs us that some Jews were convinced that Jesus is the Prophet like Moses. His sign-miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fishes, and His “bread of life” discourse led them to conclude that Jesus is “the coming into the world prophet”—the Messianic Prophet—the Prophet like Moses. Moses gave the Israelites perishable manna, but Jesus gave the people living manna. Jesus gave Himself—the Manna of life (John 6:48).

John 7:40 complements 6:14. In John 6:14, Jesus presented Himself as the bread of life. In John 7:40, He revealed Himself as the water of life. Jesus’ offer of living water caused the Jews to remember the water from the rock. It was from this special rock that Moses quenched the thirst of the Israelites. It is therefore no surprise that some of the Jews identified Jesus as the Moses-like Prophet.

The intended allusions underscore the fact that (1) the נָבִיא of Deut 18:15 meant a prophetic individual, rather than the prophetic institution, and (2) Jesus, in His ministry, unmistakably portrayed Himself as a Prophet like Moses.

CONCLUSION

The prediction text of Deut 18:15 promises the coming of a special prophetic *individual* rather than the beginning of the prophetic *institution*. The arguments for this view, from the text, are: (1) The word נָבִיא is used in the singular throughout the passage. There is no interchanging of the singular and plural which might suggest that more than one prophet was intended. (2) The Prophet is like Moses in that He too will come in the capacity of a unique revealer, and mediator. (3) Deut 34:10 and Num 12:6-8 indicate that no other prophets in the Old Testament functioned in the same lofty capacity as Moses did. (4) The imperfect יִקְרָא reveals that the promise will be fulfilled sometime in the future. And (5) the irregular sentence structure of the text seeks to emphasise the importance of נָבִיא, indicating that He is one special personage. Therefore, Deut 18:15 predicted the coming of a Moses-like prophet of exceptional standing

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whose identity at that time was still a mystery. It is only when we get to the New Testament that the identity of Moses-like Prophet is revealed

The Deuteronomic text is alluded to in the New Testament. They come in the form of (1) apparent allusions (Luke 4:24, 7:16, 9:19, 13:33, 24:19; John 1:45, 4:19, 9:17), and (2) intended allusions (John 1:21, 6:14, 7:40). The above texts reveal (1) that Jesus regarded Himself as a prophet, (2) that the Jews at large considered Him a prophet, and (3) that some recognised Him as the Moses-like Prophet.

Deut 18:15 is quoted in the New Testament in only two places: (1) in Peter's speech (Acts 3:22), and (2) in Stephen's apology (Acts 7:37). Both citations record the fact that Christ is the predicted Prophet like Moses of Deut 18:15. In the light of both the prediction and fulfilment texts, the Moses-like Prophet is a Revealer, Intercessor, and Ruler; hence, a threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. Apart from Moses, it is only the greater Moses—Jesus Christ Himself—who can be said to have fulfilled all three roles.

It is the conclusion of this paper that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Moses-like Prophet of Deut 18:15. And as the Moses-like Prophet, Christ is Prophet, Priest, and King. The *Westminster Confession of Faith (VIII.1)* affirms the threefold office of Christ,

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the *Prophet, Priest, and, King*, the Head and Saviour of His Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified¹⁴

Soli Deo Gloria!

NOTES

¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *An Ecclesiastical History* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1842), 44.

² Calvin, the great reformed theologian, taught, "that faith may find in Christ a solid ground of salvation, and so may rely on him, it is proper for us to establish this principle, that the office which was assigned to him by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given as a Prophet, a King, and a Priest." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans John Allen (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1949), 1:540-541. Calvin's exegetical basis for the threefold office of Christ can be found in his commentaries on Ps 2:7 110:4, Isa 61:1, Zech 6:11, Matt 21:12, Luke 2:25, 4:18, John 4:25-26, 17:4, Acts 10:38, and Heb 4:14. See also Robert A Peterson, "Christ's Threefold Office of Prophet, King, and

Priest,” in *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1983), 27-39.

³ See TDNT, sv “Χρί(ω) κτλ,” by Frank Hesse, 9:496-505.

⁴ See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1970), 2:459-61. D T Williams in his recent article “The Four-Fold Office of Christ,” *ExpTim* 100 (January 1989): 134-137 suggests that it is inadequate to see Christ as merely prophet-priest-king. He argues that the Messianic office should be prophet-priest-king-servant. See also John Begley, “Prophet, Priest, and King,” in *The Word in the World*, ed Richard J Clifford, and George W MacRae (Cambridge: Weston College Press, 1973), 145-157. It is the contention of this writer that though Christ is portrayed in the Gospels as “servant,” it is best to see the word as indicating a *function* rather than an *office*. Jesus is a servant as a prophet, a priest, and a king. It is important to note that not all servants in the Old Testament were anointed. The title of Χρίστος thus limits the messianic office to that of the prophet, priest and king.

⁵ Contra Walter C Kaiser’s “analogy of antecedent Scripture,” in *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 90, 134-137, 145. See also his article “The Single Intent of Scripture,” in *Evangelical Roots*, ed Kenneth Kantzer (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 139-140.

⁶ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, nd), chapter 1, paragraph 9.

⁷ See Modechai Cogan, and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1988), 294-5. For a defense of the Mosaic authorship and early date of Deuteronomy, see Oswald T Allis, *God Spoke By Moses* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1951), 130.

⁸ *Chambers ‘20th Century’ Dictionary*, sv “Prophet.”

⁹ For an excellent study on the God-people-land relationship, see Daniel Isaac Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, ETS series vol 2 (Jackson: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988).

¹⁰ *TWOT*, sv “נָבִי” by Robert D Culver.

¹¹ Brown, Francis, S R Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, nd), 612. A parenthetical note records, “in oldest forms, of religious ecstasy with or without song and music; later, essentially religious instruction, with occasional predictions.” The etymological argument is unconvincing; see the article by H H Rowley, “The Nature of Prophecy in the Light of Recent Study,” *HTR* 38 (1945): 1-38. For an excellent defense of the non-ecstatic nature of the prophetic ministry of God’s prophets, see Leon J Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 37:56. See also Hobart E Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 51-73.

¹² Edward J Young, *My Servants the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1952), 57. The apparent difficulty, according to Young, seems to be the fact that “The root *nb*’ which appears in the Hebrew Bible is almost certainly derived itself from the noun *nabhi*. It is apparently denominative, and the root from which the noun *nabhi* itself is derived does not appear in the Bible.” This observation is supported by the entries of

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Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, 2 vols (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1953): 2:586.

¹³ See Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz Zum Hebraischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958), 890-892.

¹⁴ BDB, 611.

¹⁵ Lisowsky, *Konkordanz*, 892.

¹⁶ Ibid, 890-892.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The NRSV has the footnote, "Or *prophets*."

¹⁹ S R Driver says, "The *exclusively* Messianic reference of v.15-18, adopted by many of the older expositors (cf. Acts 3:22f, 7:37), is inconsistent with the context; and has been deservedly abandoned by the great majority of modern commentators and theologians. ... The promised prophet is to meet a *continuous* and *permanent* need of the people, after they are settled in Canaan (v.9). ... The argument of the passage shows that the "prophet" contemplated is not a single individual, belonging to a distant future, but *Moses' representative for the time being*, whose office it would be to supply to Israel, whenever in its history occasion should arise, with needful guidance and advice: in other words, that the reference is not to an individual prophet, but to a *prophetic order*. The existence of such an order in Israel, forming a permanent channel of revelation, was, of course, a signal mark of distinction between Israel and other nations of antiquity. At the same time the terms of the description are such that it may be reasonably understood as *including* a reference to the ideal prophet, Who should be "like" Moses in a pre-eminent degree, in Whom the line of individual prophets should culminate, and Who should exhibit the characteristics of the prophets in their fullest perfection." *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895), 228-229. See also Peter C Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1976), 262, 406-407; C F Keil and F Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 3 vols, trans James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, reprint 1971), 394-396.

²⁰ Oswald T Allis says, "This is a prophecy which has its complete fulfilment *only* in the Lord Jesus Christ, who spake to men as never men spake (John vii.46; Acts iii.22f). But verses 20-2 indicate quite clearly that it also refers in a very real, though *lower* sense, to the great succession of prophetic voices, whose supreme function was to point Israel to the Prophet, Priest, and King who was to be the Saviour of Israel and of the world." *God Spake By Moses* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1951), 145; italics mine. See also Young, *Servants*, 29-35.

²¹ Bruce K Waltke and M O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 236.

²² "... that the promise neither relates to one particular prophet, nor directly and exclusively to the Messiah, but treats of the sending of prophets generally. And this is also confirmed by what follows with reference to true and false prophets, and shows most incontrovertibly that it is not one prophet only, nor the Messiah exclusively, who is promised here." Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 394.

²³ A prophet will be raised up “as occasion may demand.” The singular noun denotes “Moses’ representative for the time being. The context shows that no single, or particular, prophet can be intended: ... the reference here is to a permanent institution, not to a particular individual prophet.” Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 227.

²⁴ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, trans Samuel Ives Curtiss (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891), 61. E W Hengstenberg, in his classic work, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, reprint 1970), 38-39, wrote, “The force of this argument is evident from the fact, that not a few non-Messianic interpreters have been compelled by it to make some particular individual the subject.”

²⁵ As noted in the above lexical study of נָבִיא whenever a prophetic group is viewed collectively, the word is usually found in the plural.

²⁶ It is significant to note that in the author’s discussion of the priestly institution in Deut 18:1-8, the singular and the plural “priest” is found within 3 short verses; the plural in verse 1, and the singular in verse 3. Unless there is such a switching between the singular and plural, it is preferable to understand the נָבִיא in 18:15 as referring to an individual rather than an institution.

²⁷ GKC, 406.

²⁸ It is also possible to see מֵאֵתֶּיךָ as being in apposition to מִקִּרְבְּךָ, hence “from the midst of your kin.” Note the two-fold distinction in verse 18. In any case, whether taken separately or together, they refer to the same thing. This particular individual will be a Hebrew.

²⁹ The “Mosaicity of chs. 32 to 34 is extremely difficult to dispute. As regards the obituary itself, Jewish tradition is most probably correct in assigning the final eight verses of the Torah to Joshua” (*ISBE*, sv “Deuteronomy,” by D M Edwards, and R K Harrison).

³⁰ BDB, *Lexicon*, 879. The hiphil stem signifies “to cause an event.” The subject is the active agent who causes the event. See Waltke and O’Connor, *Syntax*, 433.

³¹ Choon Leong Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 141.

³² *Ibid*, 142.

³³ The imperfect can also be taken in the *distributive* sense translating “always,” or “from time to time.” Delitzsch, however, contends that the “imperfect יִקֵּן is not an adequate expression for ‘always.’” Delitzsch, *Prophecies*, 61. His conclusion is based upon his understanding of the singular נָבִיא.

³⁴ הָ is a classic example of the ל of interest, expressing advantage. Ronald J Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 2d ed (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 48.

³⁵ This is true also for verse 18.

³⁶ Williams, *Syntax*, 97.

³⁷ Before a study of the New Testament fulfilment texts is embarked, the issue of whether Jeremiah fulfilled the prophecy of Deut 18:15 must be addressed. It has been argued by some scholars that Jeremiah was the predicted Prophet like Moses on the basis of verbal parallels between Deut 18:9-22 with Jer 1:4-10. See P E Broughton, “The Call of Jeremiah: The Relation of Deut. 18:9-22 to the Call and Life of Jeremiah.” *AusBR* 6 (1958):

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41-58; and William L Holladay, "The Background of Jeremiah's Self-Understanding." *JBL* 83 (1964): 153-164. Although the literary similarities between the Mosaic Call Narrative and the Jeremianic Call Form may not be denied, there is no indication whatsoever in the text that Jeremiah was the fulfilment of the Moses-like Prophet of Deut 18:15. The similarities can be explained by the fact that Jeremiah received the same kind of call from God as did Moses, and simply recorded his call experience as it happened. There is no need to assume any editorial work done by either Moses or Jeremiah. Furthermore, the apparent literary parallels between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy are not several, but just one (Jer 1:7,9 and Deut 18:18). It goes without saying that a conclusion on actual fulfilment cannot be based on just one parallel clause. More important is a fulfilment formula which Jeremiah does not record.

³⁸ The reason why the accounts of Luke and John are chosen is because they are the ones which specifically identify Jesus with the Prophet like Moses, and not because Matthew and Mark have no teaching of Jesus' prophetic office and ministry whatsoever. However, it is evident that "Mark and Matthew show little concern with identifying Jesus as either a prophet or the prophet." See David E Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1983), 154-6.

³⁹ W F Moulton, and A S Geden, eds, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, 5th ed, rev H K Moulton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 871-2.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Interestingly, there are no references in the Epistles which apply the word προφήτης to Jesus.

⁴¹ *NIDNTT*, sv "Prophet," by Colin Brown.

⁴² Johannes P Louw and Eugene A Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:543. The editors note that, "There is a tendency ... to translate προφήτης only in the sense of 'one who foretells the future,' but foretelling the future was only a relatively minor aspect of the prophet's function, though gradually it became more important. Patristic authors defined the function of a prophet mainly in terms of foretelling the future. In New Testament times, however, the focus was upon the inspired utterance proclaimed on behalf of and on the authority of God. Accordingly, ... it is more appropriate to translate προφήτης as 'one who speaks for God.'"

⁴³ BAGD, sv "προφήτης," 723-4.

⁴⁴ See *TDNT*, sv "προφήτης," by Gerhard Friedrich.

⁴⁵ See Wai C Tan, "Introductory Formulas in the Gospels and Acts and their Implications," unpublished ThD dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, May 1982, 126, 139.

⁴⁶ Kistemaker likewise concludes, "The exact wording, therefore, differs from the Hebrew text and the Septuagintal translation, but the meaning is virtually identical" (Simon J Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, NTC [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990], 136-7).

⁴⁷ In this context the verb 'raised up' does not allude to resurrection but to emergence on the plane of history (other examples in Acts occur at 5:36-37; 7:18; 20:30);" see Everett F Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 76. Verse 26 should

thus be translated, “Unto you God has first caused his Son to arise (ie send Him to earth), blessing you, if every one of you turn from his sins.” See Ernest Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 210.

⁴⁸ It has been suggested that Acts 3:23 is taken from Leviticus 23:29, but this may be debated. For a discussion, see Darrell L Bock, *Proclamation From Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, JSNT Supp 12 (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 192. Since the Old Testament origin of Acts 3:23 is uncertain, it is probably better to regard them as Peter’s own words.

⁴⁹ Hengstenberg, *Christology*, 38. The δειτικαὶ ἀντωνυμῖαι (demonstrative pronouns), as the name indicates, serve as *pointers*. It may be used to produce greater emphasis. See BAGD, sv “ἐκεῖνος,” 239. Although it is not used anaphorically here, it certainly functions as such for the pronoun is directing our attention to the Prophet mentioned in verse 22. See A T Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 693.

⁵⁰ Stephen’s text is closer to Deut 18:15 than 18:18. See Bock, *Proclamation*, 218-9.

⁵¹ *NIDNTT*, sv “Moses,” by Horst Seebass, 2:641.

⁵² F F Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev ed, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1988), 142.

⁵³ Bock, *Proclamation*, 221.

⁵⁴ In early Judaism Moses is considered prophet, priest and king. (1) Moses as prophet: in Philo (see Wayne A Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum [Leiden: E J Brill, 1967], 125-9); in Josephus (ibid, 137-8); in the Apocrypha (ibid, 147-56); in Qumran (ibid, 173). (2) Moses as priest: in Philo (ibid, 113-20); in Josephus (ibid, 136-7), in Qumran (ibid, 174-5). (3) Moses as king: in Philo (ibid, 107-17), in Josephus (ibid, 134-6), in Qumran (ibid, 147-54). See also Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans John Bowden (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 309-20.

⁵⁵ So Aune, *Prophecy*, 156. Friedrich claims that Jesus did not call Himself a prophet here, but “in a proverbial saying, He compares His fate with that of a prophet” (*TDNT*, sv “προφήτης,” by Gerhard Friedrich, 6:841). According to Marshall, “This is an inadequate verdict, for the saying is not really different in form from the independent saying in Luke 13:33; moreover, so long as no precise parallel to the saying is produced, it cannot be labelled proverbial, but must rather be regarded as a fresh creation in which Jesus deliberately likens Himself to a prophet” (I Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970], 125).

⁵⁶ See Joseph A Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday & Co, Inc, 1981), 215, 656.

⁵⁷ I Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1978), 286.

⁵⁸ *TDNT*, sv “προφήτης,” G Friedrich, 6:846.

⁵⁹ Marshall, *Commentary*, 286-7.

⁶⁰ Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1969), 379.

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⁶¹ Oscar Cullmann points out, “In the Greek there is no article before the noun προφήτης, and it is even accompanied by an adjective. This indicates that the remark of the crowd does not point to the eschatological Prophet; that prophet does not need the description ‘great’. Jesus is simply placed in the prophetic category, a category in which others have belonged” *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1959), 30.

⁶² See Fitzmyer, *Luke (I-IX)*, 660.

⁶³ John 6:32-35.

⁶⁴ The temporal phrase σήμερον καὶ αὐριον καὶ τῇ ἐχομένῃ may reflect a Hebrew idiom indicating a short, limited period of time. See Marshall, *Luke*, NIGTC, 572.

⁶⁵ “We know from the NT, from Jewish legends concerning the prophets, and from the growing custom of honouring the tombs of the prophets by expiatory monuments, to what a great extent, even in the days of Jesus, martyrdom was considered an integral part of the prophetic office.” *TDNT*, sv “παῖς θεοῦ,” by Joachim Jeremias, 5:714.

⁶⁶ Calvin is right to observe that the phrase, “mighty in works,” does not only mean Jesus’ miracles but also applies to His teaching ministry, blameless conduct, and other outstanding accomplishments. See John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew. Mark and Luke*, 3 volumes, trans A W Morrison (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1972), 3:233.

⁶⁷ It is not necessary to translate ἐγένετο in its usual sense of “to become,” as though Jesus grew to be a prophet. Lenski calls this “the constative historical aorist which states summarily what Jesus ‘was’” (R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Luke’s Gospel* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946], 1184). However, a deeper nuance could have been intended in the use of ἐγένετο. Ἐγένετο may be translated, “he proved to be,” or “he showed himself to be” (Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St Luke*, ICC [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900], 553). The phrase ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ is dative or instrumental of means. Hence the whole clause may be translated, “Jesus of Nazareth, who proved Himself to be a mighty prophet by means of (His) deed and word before God and all the people.” Thus, Jesus’ external works and words of power marked Him as a true prophet—“one who adds the power of deeds to his speaking, and takes care to excell in the sight of men and sincerely to conduct himself as under the eyes of God” (Calvin, *Harmony*, 3:234).

⁶⁸ cf Acts 1:16; 2:29,37; 7:2. See Marshall, *Luke*, NIGTC, 894-5.

⁶⁹ Lenski, *Luke*, 1184.

⁷⁰ Deuteronomy clearly envisaged Moses as a *suffering* mediator. See Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols, trans D M G Stalker (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), 1:294-5, 2:273-7. Miller points out that one of the prominent features of the “Mosaic” portrait is that Moses was a *suffering servant of God*. See Patrick D Miller, “‘Moses My Servant:’ The Deuteronomic Portrait of Moses,” *Int* 41 (1987): 251.

⁷¹ Plummer, *Luke*, 555. See also William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 1065.

⁷² Barclay M Newman, and Eugene A Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John* (London: United Bible Societies, 1980), 47.

⁷³ The normal word order is nominative-verb-accusative. This is not the word order here. The accusative of direct object here *precedes* the verb εὐρήκαμεν which denotes the action of the subject. “The fact that these words [Ὁν ἔγραψεν Μωϋσῆς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ καὶ οἱ προφῆται] come first in the Greek gives them emphasis” (Leon Morris, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, vol 1, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986], 53).

⁷⁴ The clause, Ὁν ἔγραψεν Μωϋσῆς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ καὶ οἱ προφῆται, is a formula which embraces all the 39 books of the Hebrew Scripture. The other occurrences of this formula are: (1) ‘Moses and the prophets’ (Luke 16:29,31; 24:27; Acts 26:22; 28:23); and (2) ‘Law and the prophets’ (Matt 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; 24:44; Rom 3:21).

⁷⁵ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), 109. Morris agrees and argues, “Philip may be saying more by his use of but one singular verb [ἔγραψεν] to cover the two subjects [Μωϋσῆς and προφῆται]. He may be emphasizing that it was one person of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. Their Messianic passages agree. They point to the same person, and that person is Jesus” (Morris, *Word*, 54).

⁷⁶ E W Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St John*, 2 vols (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, Inc, 1865), 1:103-4. See also F F Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1983), 59.

⁷⁷ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (1-12)*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday and Co, Inc, 1966), 86.

⁷⁸ ZPEB, sv “Samaritans,” by J L Kelso.

⁷⁹ Contra C K Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 2nd ed (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 236.

⁸⁰ It should be noted that Essenism has elements akin to Samaritan theology. The Samaritan *Ta'eb* resembles the Qumran *Teacher of Righteousness*. According to Samaritan and Qumran theology, both of them are (1) Lawgivers, and (2) the second Moses. See J Massingberd Ford, “Can We Exclude Samaritan Influence from Qumran?” *RevQ* 6 (1967): 109-29.

⁸¹ The Samaritans called Him *Ta'eb*. The meaning of the word *Ta'eb* is still being debated. Scholars are not able to agree whether the word should be read intransitively, “the Returning One,” or transitively, “the Restorer.” Deut 18:18 “must have been extremely important to the Samaritans from a very early date, for it is one of the elements in the composite tenth commandment in the Samaritan Pentateuch added after Exodus 20:19. Deuteronomy 18:18 is clearly applied to the coming of the Taheb. Particularly important are the ... hymns by Abisha ben Phinehas, and which ... represent a compendium of fully developed Samaritan eschatology. The sixth hymn quotes, “I will raise up a prophet for them from the midst of their brothers, like you,” and adds: “and he will be king and will be clothed in fearfulness. ...” Significantly, the Taheb here is both prophet and king ... A reference to Deuteronomy 18.18 probably lies also in the cryptic statement at the end of the fifth hymn, “He who says, ‘The Prophet like Moses’ will see what his greatness is.” Most likely this means: He who recites the passage ‘The Prophet like Moses,’ ie, Deuteronomy 18:15-22, will understand the prophecy of the Taheb as set forth here. The same phrase occurs in the *Durrar*: “God seated him [Moses] upon the throne [יָרָד] upon which no king is able to sit, and God appointed him below, and he entrusted him with the unseen world. He who says ‘A

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Prophet like Moses' will see what his greatness is" (Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 250-1). Not only did the Samaritans regard Moses as a prophet-king, they also saw him as a prophet-priest (John MacDonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans* [London: SCM Press Ltd, 1964], 209-10). See also John Bowman, "Early Samaritan Eschatology," *JJS* 6 (1955): 63-72; and James Alan Montgomery, *The Samaritans* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc, 1968), 225-31.

⁸² "The 'Prophet like Moses' of the last days was to complete the giving of the Law and validly interpret it. The Samaritans and Essenes, who both nurtured—although independently—the idea of the eschatological Moses-prophet, must have drawn on earlier shared traditions. One thing of importance here is the connection between Law and eschatological prophet, the teacher and true expositor of the Law." See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans Hubert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co, 1981), 449.

⁸³ Bruce, *John*, 108.

⁸⁴ See Rudolf Schnackenberg, *The Gospel According to John*, 3 vols (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 434.

⁸⁵ William Hugh Brownlee, *The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline*, Supplemental Studies 10-12 (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1951), 34-6. See also Raymond E Brown, "The Messianism of Qumran," *CBQ* 19 (1957): 53-82.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, italics mine.

⁸⁷ George R Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC (Waco: Word Books, Publishers, 1987), 157.

⁸⁸ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:400. There is an intrinsic connection between the Hebrew דבר and the Greek λόγος. See Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 9.

⁸⁹ The perennial law and grace controversy behoves this writer to say that the Decalogue as contained in the Mosaic Law is in no way abrogated. As a reflection of God's moral character, it continues to remain the standard for Christian faith and practice. With the advent of the New Covenant, the law is no longer a sword but a light to all who trusts in Christ. The Lord in His salvation work fulfilled the judicial and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law through His active and passive obedience. See Timothy Tow, *The Law of Moses and of Jesus* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1986); and James O Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 2:110-3.

⁹⁰ The question of how Jesus is able to call John, Elijah, when John himself denied that he was him, is well answered by Calvin, "they [the Jews] ask this ["Art thou Elias?"] from a false presupposition. For, believing as they did in the transmigration of souls, they imagined that when the prophet Malachi announced that Elijah would be sent, he meant the same Elijah who lived under Ahab. John therefore replies fairly and properly that he is not Elijah, using the word in their sense. But Christ affirms that he is Elijah, from a true interpretation of the prophet (Matt. 11.14)" (John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John 1-10*, trans T H L Parker [Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1959], 27).

⁹¹ “The basal function of the Greek article is to point out individual identity.” H E Dana and Julius R Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The MacMillan Co, 1946), 137.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 222. The author cites John 1:21 as an example.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ See F F Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Den Haag: Uitgeverij Van Keulen N V, 1959), 45.

⁹⁶ Based on the questions asked by the Jews, it has been argued that there is a distinction between the Messiah and the prophet. The Christ and the prophet are not the same persons (see Barrett, *John*, 173). This need not necessarily be so since the Jews were known to have an inaccurate understanding of their Messiah (cf Matt 16:14, Mark 6:15, Luke 9:19). It is the Johannine emphasis that Jesus is the Prophet (Cullmann, *Christology*, 29). Thus, “It is not without its interest that from the days of the very earliest Christian preaching it was held that ‘the prophet’ was identical with the Christ.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1971), 136.

⁹⁷ Bruce, *John*, 48. For proof of this, see discussion under John 6:14.

⁹⁸ Vide supra, John 1:21.

⁹⁹ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:667

¹⁰⁰ The adjectival clause ὁ ἐρχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον is in the attributive position modifying ὁ προφήτης.

¹⁰¹ Hendriksen, *John*, 233.

¹⁰² “For the Gospel of John, ... a σημεῖον is not simply a miraculous event but something which points to a reality with even greater significance.” Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:443.

¹⁰³ J H Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St John*, ICC, vol 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 183. It is thus not surprising that Peter linked Jesus to the prophecy of Deut 18:15 in Luke 9:20.

¹⁰⁴ Hahn, *Christology*, 364. Whether Deut 18:15 has a royal motif is debated. Although Brown does not exclude the possibility that the Moses-like Prophet can be seen as a king, he says that the apparent identification of the Prophet and the (messianic) king is difficult (Brown, *John*, 235). The identification is not as difficult as it seems. The Samaritans certainly saw Moses as a king (cf Luke 4:19).

¹⁰⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol 1, rev ed (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 249-50, emphasis supplied.

¹⁰⁶ The word προφήτης here is also found with the article (vide supra; John 1:21, 6:14).

¹⁰⁷ See Schnackenburg, *John*, 2:155-7.

¹⁰⁸ Bruce, *John*, 183.

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¹⁰⁹ On the former, *Midr. Qoh.* says, “As the first Redeemer brought down the manna ... so will also the last Redeemer cause the manna to come down.” On the latter, *Midr. Rabb.* says, “As the first redeemer made a well to rise, so will the second Redeemer bring up water.” Cited by Beasley-Murray, *John*, 91,118.

¹¹⁰ For the historical support of such Jewish thinking, see Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 162-4.

¹¹¹ See Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol 1, rev Everett F Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 781; and R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 581.

¹¹² Hengstenberg contends that although some in the group declared that Jesus is the Christ, that does not mean that “they assumed ‘decisively a distinction between the Prophet and the Messiah:’ it only means that they left the question an open one. So much to them was certain, that the marks of the Prophet in Deut. xviii. would be present in Christ” (*John*, 1:410).

¹¹³ The προφήτης in John 7:52 is rendered without the definite article. The anarthrous προφήτης reflects the reading of the majority of the manuscripts. However, it is significant to note that P⁶⁶, which is one of the oldest papyrus texts of John, reads ὁ προφήτης. If that reading is correct, then the statement of the Pharisees is directly linked to the question of the crowd in verse 40. An amplified translation of verse 52 could read like this: “Search, and see that *the* prophet does not arise, ie, the Prophet like Moses, awaited to appear in the last times. As everyone knows that there is no statement in the Bible that the Prophet would come out of Galilee, so everyone knows that Galilee is not godly enough to produce that Prophet!” (Beasley-Murray, *John*, 121). Though the anarthrous προφήτης is the correct reading, it is preferable to understand it with the definite article.

¹¹⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, nd), 7, italics mine.

Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo is academic dean and lecturer in New Testament at Far Eastern Bible College.

GOD'S PROMISE TO PRESERVE HIS WORD (PS 12:5-7)

Shin Yeong Gil

INTRODUCTION

Problem

The Protestant church has today not only the 39 books of the OT but also the 27 books of the NT.¹ The biblical canon consists of a total of 66 books. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Word of God.² The Word is not only inspired, but also preserved by God. On the doctrine of Bible preservation, the Westminster Confession states:

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and *by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages*, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them (I.8a).

The Westminster Confession shows that the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT are the only authentic Scriptures,³ and they have been preserved.

The doctrine of Bible preservation rests upon two unfailing authorities: (1) the promise of God (Pss 12:6,7; 33:11; 100:5; 111:7-8; 117:2; 119:89,152,160; Isa 40:8; 59:21; Matt 5:18; 24:35; 1 Pet 1:23,25; Rev 22:18,19), and (2) the character of God. God, who has revealed Himself in an inspired Book and magnified that Word to the highest degree, would carefully superintend its transmission. The doctrines of divine inspiration⁴ and providential preservation of Scripture are important, and they stand in the same position as the doctrines of creation and providence. Louis Gaussen believed that the God who inspired the Bible also preserved it from “all error and from all omission.”⁵ Gaussen considered inspiration and preservation as twin doctrines.⁶

Daniel Wallace, on the other hand, contends that the doctrine of the

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preservation has “neither ancient historical roots, nor any direct biblical basis.”⁷ By so saying, Wallace has contradicted many portions of Scripture, including Psalm 12, which speak of the divine preservation of the Word of God.

The King James Bible translates Psalm 12:6-7 thus,

The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever (Ps 12:6-7).

The KJV translation of Psalm 12:7 speaks of the preservation of the Bible. This view was held by many down through the centuries.⁸

However, some do not agree that Psalm 12 should be included in a list of verses on Bible preservation.⁹ The modern versions for example translate verse 7 in such a way that it cannot possibly mean Bible preservation. The NIV is representative:

And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. O Lord, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever.

The NIV translation of Psalm 12:7 can only refer to the preservation of people.

This problem primarily comes from the interpretation of two pronominal suffixes in the Hebrew words תְּשַׁמְּרֵם and תִּצְרְנֵנוּ. These two pronominal suffixes are read in various ways. Some interpret the suffix *em* as “us,”¹⁰ and others as “them.”¹¹ And the suffix *ennu* is understood as “them,”¹² “each one,”¹³ “him,”¹⁴ or “us.”¹⁵

There are various views on the meaning of the words תְּשַׁמְּרֵם and תִּצְרְנֵנוּ. Some scholars view Psalm 12:7 as being applicable to Bible preservation.¹⁶ Others view it as having a double application, ie, preservation of the Bible and the godly man.¹⁷ There are still others who view it as being applicable only to the preservation of God’s people.¹⁸

So, does Psalm 12 teach the preservation of the Bible, or the people, or both? Peter Van Kleeck says, “there is no consensus within the English Bible tradition for the interpretation of the suffixes, and the churchly tradition in the new versions is censored by not including a translation that is broad enough to include both interpretations.”¹⁹

Purpose of Study

Since there are many questions concerning whether Psalm 12 teaches the preservation of the Bible or the preservation of God's people, there is a need to examine it.

This paper will attempt to make clear the meaning of Psalm 12:6-7. It is the hope of this writer that a study of these verses would reveal that they do teach us the doctrine of Bible preservation.

Presupposition

The writer regards the 66 books of canonical Scripture to be the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God (Matt 5:17-18, 2 Tim 3:16). Though the Bible is essentially a salvation textbook, it is absolutely inerrant when it addresses matters pertaining to history, geography, and science.

Method of Study

The study will be exegetically oriented. The historical-grammatical-canonical method of interpretation will be adopted. The meaning of the text will be determined in the light of both the OT and NT. The Westminster divines said that the "infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."²⁰ This is known as the "analogy of Scripture." The intention of God is ascertained by both antecedent and subsequent Scripture.²¹

In order to understand Psalm 12:5-7 (6-8), this paper will attempt to ascertain its meaning through an exegetical study. It will then examine the validity of various views before concluding with a discussion on the doctrine of Bible preservation as found in the text.

Passages

The passage under consideration is Psalm 12:5-7:²²

משד עניים מאנקה אבונים עתה אקום יאמר יהוה אשית ביסע יפח לו:
אמרות יהוה אמרות טהרות כסף צרוף בעליל לארץ מזקק שבועים:
אתה יהוה תשמרם תצרכו מן הדור וזו לעולם:

(Ps 12:6-8, Hebrew OT)

²⁰ Ἀπὸ τῆς ταλαιπωρίας τῶν πτωχῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ στεναγμοῦ τῶν πενήτων ὡς ἀναστήσομαι, λέγει κύριος, θήσομαι ἐν σωτηρίᾳ, παρησιασθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ. τὰ λόγια κυρίου λόγια ἀγνά, ἀργύριον

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πεπυρωμένοι δοκίμιον τῇ γῇ κεκαθαρισμένοι ἐπταπλασίως. σύ, κύριε, φυλάξεις ἡμᾶς καὶ διατηρήσεις ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (Ps 12:6-8, LXX).

In verse 7, though certain manuscripts read תְּשַׁמְּרוּ for תְּשַׁמְּרוּם, and the LXX follows it (φυλάξεις ἡμᾶς), it is better to follow the traditional Masoretic Hebrew text.²³ It is possible that those manuscripts which read תְּשַׁמְּרוּ followed the error of the LXX in a mistranslation. It ought also to be noted that the LXX is in general an inferior translation of the Hebrew OT.²⁴ This paper thus follows the Masoretic reading of תְּשַׁמְּרוּם.

Sources for the Scriptural quotations, are as listed below,²⁵ unless otherwise indicated by the writer.

AN EXEGESIS OF PSALM 12:5-7

Introduction

Title of Psalm 12

The title of Psalm 12 is, לְמִנְצָח עַל־הַשְּׁמִינִית מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד. The term לְמִנְצָח appears 55 times in the titles of the psalms, and seems to suggest that such psalms were used in the temple service.²⁶ It comes from the root meaning, “to shine,” “to be pre-eminent,”²⁷ from the Piel stem. The word as a substantival participle refers to an individual, a “director of music,” “choirmaster,” or “chief musician.”²⁸ The KJV translates it as “to the chief musician.”²⁹

The word הַשְּׁמִינִית appears in Psalms 6 and 12, and 1 Chronicles 15:21. It is related to the Hebrew word “eight.”³⁰ Some claim that it may denote an instrument with eight strings,³¹ to the manner of singing, or to an octave.³² However, it is hard to accept the rendering “on the octave,” because the Hebrews had no eight-toned scale.³³ Since this term signifies the number “eight,” Spurgeon says that it refers to the coming of Messiah, following the Arabic version which says it concerns the end of the world, which shall be on the eighth day.³⁴ It also is hard to accept this since there is no biblical evidence.

In 1 Chronicles 15:21, several musicians were celebrating the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem by playing “harps on the *Shemnith* to excel.” The KJV has it as “*Shemnith*.” What is meant by the term הַשְּׁמִינִית remains a mystery.³⁵

The term מְזֹמֵר occurs in the titles of 57 psalms. The LXX translates it as ψαλμὸς. The word “psalm” comes from it. The term comes from the root זָמַר, meaning “sing,” “sing praise,” “make music.”³⁶ It has the idea of taking hold of the strings of an instrument with the fingers, and thus implies that the psalms were “sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument, or instruments.”³⁷

The word לְדָוִד may denote the authorship of David. The Hebrew preposition means “to,” “belonging to,” “of,” “for.” It has also other shades of meaning like “for the use of” or “dedicated to” according to the context.³⁸ However, David probably composed this psalm because of his name in the title.

The Literary Form and the Implied Situation

Psalm 12 is a psalm of lament. It is sung in times of distress. The vocative הוֹשִׁיעָה יְהוָה (“Help Lord”) in verse 1 reveals that it is a situation where the people needed to be delivered by the Lord. Brug claims that this psalm may have been “provoked by the lie directed against David by the followers of Saul or Absalom.”³⁹ There is nothing in the psalm, however, which indicates that it is referring to any special persecution or trouble.⁴⁰ Geier says that this psalm contains “the common complaint of the church of all times.”⁴¹ According to verse 2, falsehood, hypocrisy, and deception are everywhere in society. This absence of truth and truthfulness evidently grieved David.⁴²

Summary and Structure of Psalm 12

The topic of the poem is about the proud words of the wicked versus the pure words of God. The theme is that the Lord preserves His words for His people. The psalmist intimates that in the midst of prevailing falsehood and hypocritical words of ungodly men, he finds consolation from the pure words of God, which the Lord has promised to preserve. The psalmist hopes the Lord will cut off the flattering lips of wickedness, and put the godly, the poor and the oppressed in a place of safety which is in the pure words of God. God will preserve His words forever for His people, although the wicked walk on every side.

This providential psalm is structured in such a way as to contrast the proud words of the wicked with the pure words of God. The psalm can be divided into two main parts.

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- (1) *Vv 1-4: God's people taunted by the proud words of the wicked.*

V 1: God's people pray for help because of the oppression from the ungodly.

Vv 2-3: The ungodly speak falsehood with flattering lips.

V 4: The ungodly boast of their success in their lies and false words.

- (2) *Vv 5-8: God promises to preserve His pure words for His people.*

V 5: God promises to keep His people safe from the proud words of the ungodly.

Vv 6-7: God speaks only pure words and will keep His words perfectly.

V 8: God assures His people that His words will come true even when the wicked seem to prevail in their lies and falsehood.

In addition, this psalm can be seen as a chiasm:

- (A) God's people despair because of the proud words of the ungodly man (v 1).

(B) The words of the wicked are false and treacherous (vv 2-3)

(C) The wicked boasts about their safety (v 4).

(C¹) God promises His people safety (v 5).

(B¹) The words of God are pure and perfect, and God promises to preserve His words for His people (vv 6-7).

- (A¹) God's people are comforted by God's promise to preserve His Word in the midst of prevailing wickedness (v 8).

Thus in this psalm contrast is drawn between the words of evil men and the words of God. While the wicked speak perversely, God speaks purely. The words of evil will come to nothing, but the words of the LORD will endure forever.

The Implication of יְהוָה אֱשִׁית בְּיִשַׁע יְפִיחַ לִּי in Verse 5

From the first verse, the psalmist laments that the faithful are being overwhelmed by the oppression from the wicked. The psalmist hopes that the treachery through flattering lips would be stopped (vv 3-4). Seeing "the oppression of the poor" and listening to "the sighing of the needy," the Lord gives a promise in verse 5, יְהוָה אֱשִׁית בְּיִשַׁע יְפִיחַ לִּי.

However, in understanding this promise statement, there are various interpretations among the English versions:

KJV	I will set <i>him</i> in safety <i>from him that</i> puffeth at him.
ASV	I will set him in the safety he panteth for.
NASV	I will set him in the safety for which he longs.
RSV	I will place him in the safety for which he longs.
NRSV	I will place them in the safety for which they long.
NIV	I will protect them from those who malign them.
NKJV	I will set <i>him</i> in the safety for which he yearns.

The above English versions show a difference in understanding the words לִּפְנֵי לֹ. For the phrase לִּפְנֵי לֹ, most versions render it with the sense of “hope” or “desire” on the part of the poor and needy. On the other hand, the KJV reads it as “from him that puffeth at him,” and the NIV “from those who malign them.”

Meaning of בְּיָשׁוּעַ

The word בְּיָשׁוּעַ consists of the Hebrew noun יָשׁוּעַ and Hebrew preposition בְּ. The term יָשׁוּעַ derived from שָׁעַ which means, “be saved,” “be delivered,” “save,” “deliver,” “give victory,” “help,” “be safe,” “take vengeance,” “preserve.”⁴³ In the OT, the term יָשׁוּעַ occurs 36 times.⁴⁴ According to New BDB, it refers to “deliverance,” “rescue,” “salvation,” “safety,” and “welfare.”⁴⁵

The Hebrew preposition בְּ is primarily used in the following ways: “of position *in* a place,” “of presence in the midst of a multitude,” “among, and the limits enclosing a space *within*.”⁴⁶ The KJV reads “in safety” and the ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, and NKJV read “in the safety.”⁴⁷ The LXX reads it as ἐν σωτηρίᾳ. The Greek word σωτηρία refers to “salvation,” “safety,” “deliverance,” “preservation from danger or destruction.”⁴⁸ Hence the word בְּיָשׁוּעַ may be understood as “in the safety,” as found in most of the English versions, connoting “freedom from distress and the ability to pursue one’s own objectives.”⁴⁹

Meaning of פָּנִי

The word פָּנִי is a verb in the Hiphil stem of פָּנִי.⁵⁰ It means primarily “to breathe” or “to blow” in the negative sense of “to utter” lies, to be utterly deceitful.⁵¹ This verb appears 15 times in the OT.⁵²

The prophet Ezekiel used this word to refer to the blowing of God’s judgement, prophesying the sentence against the Amonites.⁵³ In Habakkuk

2:3, the word is used to refer to speaking: "... but at the end it shall speak, and not lie ...". In the Song of Solomon, it refers to blowing: "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden ..." (4:16). In the other two occurrences, it refers to the "blowing" of the day: "Until the day break ..." (2:17; 4:6) in the Qal stem.⁵⁴ The word is used in the Song of Solomon with reference to nature.

In Proverbs, it is interesting to note that the object of the word is "lies" (see 6:19; 14:5, 25; 19:5, and 9). Similarly, Proverbs 29:8 speaks of scornful men who "bring a city into a snare." Thus in most of these verses, the Hebrew verb פָּחַ is translated in the LXX by ἐγκαλέω which means "to accuse," "to bring a charge against."⁵⁵ Only in Proverbs 12:17 is the word used of "uttering truth."

In Psalm 10:5, "as for all his enemies," those who show contempt and scorn for God's Law, the Lord "puffeth at them."

From the above, most of the usages indicate that the verb refers to "speak," "utter" or "blow" in the negative sense. So what does the word mean in Psalm 12:5? The context of the psalm speaks about flattering lips and words of deceitful men (vv 1-4). The word seems to refer to "being puffed up with proud words," "showing contempt for and to scorn at God's law" and "speaking lies." Thus, the KJV is justified in rendering it this way.

As seen in the usage, the word פָּחַ does not seem to mean "to desire," "to hope," "to long for," or "to pant" with a positive sense. Hence it is difficult to accept the ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, and NKJV translation of it.

The verb פָּחַ means "to puff," "to scorn," or "to show contempt." The word פָּחַ could be interpreted literally as "he puffed" or "he has contempt for."

Interpretation of לוֹ פָּחַ

The word לוֹ is a preposition לְ with a pronominal suffix attached in the form of the third person masculine singular.⁵⁶ The preposition לְ denotes "direction towards," "locality," "the object of a verb," or "a reference to."⁵⁷ The KJV understands it as the object of the verb פָּחַ expressing disadvantage.⁵⁸

In לוֹ פָּחַ the subject of the verb might be "he" for the word פָּחַ is in

the third person masculine singular. Thus, since the subject and the object of **לֹא יִפְיֶה לוֹ** are both in the third person masculine singular, it is hard to accept the NIV and NRSV translation of it as the third person plural.

Since, the word **פִּנָּה** means to “puff,” “scorn,” or “show contempt” with a negative sense, then, the phrase **לֹא יִפְיֶה לוֹ** could be interpreted literally “he will scorn at him (ie, another person).” From the context, it perhaps means “the one who speaks proud words has a contempt for one who is poor, needy or godly.”

The Words of Promise **אֲשֶׁת בִּישַׁע יִפְיֶה לוֹ in Context**

Why, then, does God promise that He will “set him in safety?” Since **לֹא יִפְיֶה לוֹ** can mean “the one who speaks proud words has a contempt for one who is poor, needy or godly” in the context, the term **בִּישַׁע** probably denotes “in safety” from **לֹא יִפְיֶה לוֹ**. The psalmist laments, “... for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men” (v 1). Speaking “vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips *and* with a double heart” (v 2), the wicked “walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted” (v 8). The righteous suffer because the wicked speak lies with flattering lips and with a double heart. In this circumstance, a person might not be able to keep his social and political position without becoming a friend of the wicked. Hence the faithful man who speaks truth might lose his position and become poorer. They hope that God would cut off those with the flattering lips, who utter proud words (vv 3-4). Motivated by His love, the Lord promises the godly man to set him in safety from the circumstance in which the wicked man threatens.

Then, what kind of safety does God set for him? It could be assumed from the context that the godly man was suffering because of the proud words of the wicked. The godly desire not proud words but pure words of God. Thus, the promise clause **אֲשֶׁת בִּישַׁע יִפְיֶה לוֹ** connotes that the Lord will set the godly man in safety where there are no falsehood, flattering lips, double heartedness, proud words, but only the pure words of God.

Since the term “in safety” comes before the words of God in the next two verses, the psalmist continues speaking about the pure words of God. Man shall be saved in the words of God, and not in the words of men. For setting the godly man in safety, God promises to preserve His Word in the following verses.

Meaning of the Clause אִמְרוֹת יְהוָה אֱמָרוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת in Verse 6

The clause אִמְרוֹת יְהוָה אֱמָרוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת in verse 6, is described by the clause אֱמָרוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת modifies אִמְרוֹת. כֶּסֶף צָרוּף בַּעֲלִיל לָאָרֶץ מִזְקָק שִׁבְעָתַיִם.

The Hebrew words אֱמָרוֹת and אִמְרוֹת are feminine plural of the noun אִמְרָה. The term אִמְרָה is derived from the verb אָמַר, which primarily means “utter,” or “say.”⁵⁹ The term אֱמָרָה here refers to the “word,” “law,” “wisdom,” “instruction,” and “teaching” of God.⁶⁰ The LXX translates אֱמָרָה as λόγιον in the form of a neuter plural noun. The term λόγιον is used “mostly of sayings originating from a divinity,”⁶¹ or “the utterance of divine oracles.”⁶² Since the term אֱמָרָה is used with a suffix of the feminine plural form,⁶³ אִמְרוֹת יְהוָה does not denote just a few words, but the whole Word of God, that is, the Holy Scriptures.

The Hebrew term טְהוֹרוֹת is an adjective in the feminine plural form of טָהוֹר. The word טָהוֹר is derived from the verb טָהַר which means “be clean,” or “be pure.”⁶⁴ The adjective טְהוֹרוֹת describes the “words of God.” Also the psalmist speaks in a simile to compare the words of God to כֶּסֶף צָרוּף בַּעֲלִיל לָאָרֶץ מִזְקָק שִׁבְעָתַיִם (“silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”). The clause אֱמָרוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת describes אֱמָרוֹת, qualifying the degree of purity. Silver is the emblem of everything precious and pure.⁶⁵ The verb צָרַף means “smelt,” “refine,” “test,”⁶⁶ and the verb זָקַק means “refine,” and “purify.”⁶⁷ That the term צָרוּף is used in the passive participle and the term מִזְקָק is used in the participle in the Pual stem means that silver should be tried in a furnace of earth and be refined until it could be useful. Since the number “seven” in Jewish terms is a number of perfection,⁶⁸ indicating the completion of any process,⁶⁹ seven times purified is the same as being “perfectly purified.”⁷⁰ It is “completely pure.”⁷¹ Hence, the clause אֱמָרוֹת יְהוָה אֱמָרוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת means the silver is tried and refined until it is pure and unmixed. Similarly, the words of God have been tried and refined. They are perfectly pure, and completely reliable and true. Thus, the words of God are absolutely authentic (v 6).

Various Readings of Psalm 12:7

This verse has various readings among the English versions:

AB	You will keep them and preserve them, O Lord; You will guard and keep us from this [evil] generation for ever.
ASV	Thou wilt keep them, O Jehovah, Thou wilt preserve them from this generation for ever.
JB	And You, Yahweh, hold us in your keeping, against that breed protect us always.
KJV	Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.
NASV	Thou, O LORD, wilt keep them; Thou wilt preserve him from this generation forever.
NEB	Do thou, Lord protect us and guard us from them a profligate and evil generation.
NIV	O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever.
NKJV	You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.
NRSV	You, O LORD, will protect us; you will guard us from this generation forever.
NWB	You yourself, O Jehovah, will guard them; You will preserve each one from this generation to time indefinite.
RSV	Do thou, O Lord, protect us, guard us ever from this generation.
TLV	Yes, Lord, thou wilt watch over us, and keep us ever safe from these evil days (11:7-8).

It is noted that there are various views for rendering the words, תשמרם and תצרכנו, especially the pronominal suffixes *em* and *ennu*. The KJV, AB, ASV, NASV, NKJV and NWB render the suffix *em* as “them,” but the others render it as “us.” The suffix *ennu* is read in three ways. The KJV, ASV, and NKJV have it as “them” and the NWB has it as “each one.” The other group, such as the NIV, AB, JB, NEB NRSV, RSV, and TLV read “us.” The NASV and NWB depart from most by having it as “him,” and “each one” respectively.

Thus in order to understand this verse correctly, the words תשמרם and תצרכנו should be studied in order to ascertain the usage of the two pronominal suffixes.

Meaning of שמר

Meaning of the Term שמר

The Hebrew verb שמר occurs 468 times in the Old Testament.⁷² It is used 427 times in the Qal, 37 times in the Niphal, 4 times in the Piel and in the Hithpael. The Hebrew verb means “keep,” “watch,” “preserve.”⁷³ Etymologically it has parallels with the ancient languages in the Middle East. For example, the Akkadian *shamaru* means, “wait upon,” “attend to;” the Phoenician, *shamaru* means “watch,” “guard;” and the Arabic *samara* means “watch.”⁷⁴

The basic idea of the root שמר is “to exercise great care over.”⁷⁵ In the Qal stem, the meaning of the verb שמר has five large categories.

First the term means to “take care of,” “guard,” “keep,” “have charge of,” “tend.” This involves: (1) tending to or keeping of things such as a garden,⁷⁶ a flock,⁷⁷ ark,⁷⁸ a house,⁷⁹ a property in trust;⁸⁰ (2) tending to or keeping person(s);⁸¹ guarding against intruders,⁸² God’s care and protection,⁸³ to have care of;⁸⁴ (3) personal conduct and discipline, ie, the need to take heed in respect to one’s life and actions,⁸⁵ and (4) watching for or waiting for.⁸⁶

Second, in combination with other verbs, it refers to “keep understanding,”⁸⁷ “observe”⁸⁸ or “take heed to.”⁸⁹ Here the meaning of the verb in combination with another verb is “to do carefully or diligently.”⁹⁰

Third the term can mean to “regard” or “give heed to.” It is used of a man’s attitude of paying attention to,⁹¹ or reverence for God or others,⁹² in a hostile sense,⁹³ or in an expectant sense.⁹⁴

Fourth, it has to do with the “preserving,” or “storing up,” of (1) anger,⁹⁵ (2) knowledge,⁹⁶ (3) food,⁹⁷ (4) anything that is precious,⁹⁸ and (5) people,⁹⁹ or (6) their ways.¹⁰⁰

Fifth, the most frequent use of the verb is that of paying careful attention to the obligations of a covenant, to the laws and statutes of God.¹⁰¹ It is used in the following ways: (1) to “celebrate” a festival, etc,¹⁰² (2) to “keep” the Sabbath,¹⁰³ (3) to “keep or do” a covenant,¹⁰⁴ a command,¹⁰⁵ an office,¹⁰⁶ a function or duty,¹⁰⁷ and (4) to “observe” justice,¹⁰⁸ words of wisdom,¹⁰⁹ vanities.¹¹⁰ The expression “to do them” is frequently appended to the word.¹¹¹ This shows that the observance of God’s law was not to be a matter of theory only or of superficial compliance. The people of God are required to keep God’s

commandments in their heart.¹¹²

In Psalm 12, the godly are harmed by the flattering words of men. God's intention for preserving His words is shown in this verse. Hence, the Hebrew verb שמר has to do with the safekeeping of the purity of the words of God in opposition to the flattering and unfaithful words of man.¹¹³

Meaning of the Word תשמרם

Certain manuscripts read תשמרנו for תשמרם, following the LXX, which goes contrary to the reading of the accepted the preserved consonantal text.¹¹⁴ The Masoretes considered the consonantal text "sacred and inviolable."¹¹⁵ The same is not attributed to other readings. It would seem that the Masoretes were determined on "no account to alter the consonantal text that had been handed down to them."¹¹⁶ So the Traditional (Masoretic) Hebrew Text,¹¹⁷ is the Received text of the Hebrew OT.¹¹⁸ Its transmission was confirmed by the Lord Jesus,¹¹⁹ and was preserved by the Jews from the first century until the Reformation.¹²⁰ Hence in this paper, it will read as תשמרם.

The Hebrew term שמר is used as a verb in the Qal stem of imperfect tense with the suffix of the third person masculine plural form. Though the NIV, JB, NRSV, RSV, and TLV read "us," the *-em* suffix refers to the third person masculine.¹²¹ Since the prefix indicates the third person singular form, the word תשמרם perhaps means literally, "he will preserve them." The words אֶת־הַיְּהוָה indicates that the subject of תשמרם is the LORD. The context denotes the object of the word תשמרם as the "words of God," though there is no agreement in gender. While אִמְרוֹת in verse 6 is feminine, the suffix of תשמרם is masculine. For this reason, some claim that it is not possible that verse 7 could be referring to the words of verse 6.¹²²

However, it should be noted that there are occasional exceptions to the principle of gender agreement in the Hebrew Scripture. It is noticeable elsewhere that there is a weakening in the distinction of gender.¹²³ It ought to be noted that "*masculine* suffixes (especially in the plural) are not infrequently used to refer to *feminine* substantives."¹²⁴ Also, the masculine pronoun is often used for a feminine antecedent.¹²⁵ The KJV rendering that the Lord preserves His words is "not automatically incorrect, grammatically, but is definitely possible."¹²⁶ Thus, in this particular case, the difference in gender does not prove or disprove a position.¹²⁷

Therefore, the word תִּשְׁמְרֶם could be taken to mean “*The LORD shall keep His words.*”

Meaning of the Term תִּצְרֶנּוּ

Meaning of the Verb נָצַר

The word תִּצְרֶנּוּ is derived from the root נָצַר. Its etymology is illustrated in the Akkadian *nasaru* “watch over,” and “protect,” and the Arabic cognate *nazara* “keep in view,” and “look at.”¹²⁸ This verb appears 63 times in the OT.¹²⁹ The term primarily means “to guard,” “to watch,” “to watch over,” “to keep.”¹³⁰ This meaning can underlie the various semantic modifications. First, it refers to “keep” or “watch over” material things such as agricultural or military installations.¹³¹ In Isaiah 27:3, the LORD Himself is regarded as a keeper or watchman over His vineyard Israel, and over all men in general.¹³²

Second, it is used in an ethical sense of guarding one’s mouth,¹³³ tongue,¹³⁴ way of life,¹³⁵ and heart.¹³⁶

Third, it has the concept of “guarding from danger” or “preserving.” Here the subject is God or His attribute. So the Lord keeps or preserves a man’s life,¹³⁷ the king,¹³⁸ peace,¹³⁹ Israel,¹⁴⁰ the faithful and their life,¹⁴¹ and knowledge.¹⁴² The Lord also protects the righteous from trouble,¹⁴³ and from the secret plots of the wicked¹⁴⁴ and violent men.¹⁴⁵ Also in Proverbs the subject of keeping is wisdom,¹⁴⁶ wise understanding,¹⁴⁷ and righteousness.¹⁴⁸

Fourth, it has the concept of “guarding with fidelity,” of “keeping,” and of “observing.” It is mainly used with reference to God’s covenant or God’s law. The Lord Himself is the One keeping mercy to thousands of generations.¹⁴⁹ Men are responsible for observing the covenant,¹⁵⁰ the divine law,¹⁵¹ the commands of parents,¹⁵² and the discipline of wisdom.¹⁵³

Fifth it has the sense of “keeping a secret,” and is used with reference to things,¹⁵⁴ places,¹⁵⁵ and subtleties of the heart.¹⁵⁶

Another meaning is that of keeping closed or besieging a city.¹⁵⁷

In Psalm 12, the psalmist is talking about two kinds of words. He is contrasting between hopeless words of men in the first part and hopeful words of God in the second part. God promised to set His people in safety in verse 5. The phrase “in safety” is linked to the “words of the Lord” in

verses 6 and 7. Psalm 12:7 could thus refer to “preserving” the words of God, having the concept of “guarding with fidelity.”

Meaning of the Hebrew Word תִּצְרֶנּוּ

The Hebrew verb תִּצְרֶנּוּ here is used in the Qal stem of imperfect tense with the suffix of either third person masculine singular form with energetic *nun*, or the first person plural form.¹⁵⁸ Since the verb is prefixed by the second masculine singular form of the Qal stem of the imperfect tense, the initial *nun* of the verb was assimilated to the second root consonant throughout the inflection,¹⁵⁹ adding a compensatory dagesh forte in the letter צ.¹⁶⁰ For the third person masculine singular, according to *Gesenius*, the verbal suffix הוּ is used to express the accusative of the personal pronoun.¹⁶¹ However, a verbal form with a suffix gains additional strength, and sometimes intentional emphasis, when a special connecting-syllable (*an*) is inserted between the suffix and the vowel stem.¹⁶² Thus, הוּא is used, for הוּהוּ in the third person masculine singular ($n + h > nn$) and for הוּהוּ in the first person plural ($n + n > nn$).¹⁶³ Here, the *n* is assimilated and is indicated by dagesh forte,¹⁶⁴ expressing an energetic *nun*.¹⁶⁵

While the NIV, AB, JB, NRSV, NEB and TLV render it as “us;”¹⁶⁶ the NASV reads “him;”¹⁶⁷ the KJV, ASV, and NKJV, “them;” and the NWB “each one.” Each of them should be examined.

If the suffix *-ennu* refers to “us,” it should refer to the people including the psalmist. However, the context does not support this. This is because the previous verse is speaking about the words of the Lord, and not men or people. Rendering the suffix as “him” also has some problems. The context suggests the preserving of the “words of God” though there is no agreement in gender and number. Furthermore the suffix of the word תִּצְרֶנּוּ is in the masculine singular with the energetic *nun*,¹⁶⁸ which is emphatic. According to *Gesenius*, the energetic *nun* intends “to give greater emphasis to the verbal form.”¹⁶⁹ Thus, the reading “them” or “each one” (of them) remains legitimate. If so, the words אֶת־דְּבָרֵי־יְהוָה tell us that the subject of תִּצְרֶנּוּ is the LORD. The word תִּצְרֶנּוּ following the context means that the Lord will preserve His words. The context suggests that the object of the verb is the “words of God” though there is no agreement in gender and number.¹⁷⁰ Again, it must be stated that there are occasional exceptions to the principle of gender agreement in the Hebrew Scripture. That there is a weakening in the distinction of gender has been already dealt with

above.¹⁷¹

The *ennu* suffix, as an energetic *nun*, may indicate the intention of special emphasis.¹⁷² The term נצר is the closest synonym to the term שמר and is used in much the same way.¹⁷³ Not only the verbs but also the pronominal suffixes in this verse show this “preserving of the words of the Lord” emphasis. The words תשמרם and תצרכנו seem to emphasise the “preservation of the words of God,” by repeating two synonymous verbs and the pronominal prefixes and suffixes.¹⁷⁴ So the *ennu* suffix could be understood as “each one of them,”¹⁷⁵ following the antecedent pronominal suffix. Evidently, the KJV, ASV, and NKJV understand the suffix –*ennu* by a form of energetic *nun* of the third person masculine singular, then, properly use the pronoun “them” to keep the sense parallel with the former word.¹⁷⁶

Thus the word תצרכנו can mean that God is promising to preserve every single one of His words.

Interpretation of the Verse

In the verse, the words תצרכנו and תשמרם show a synthetic parallelism. The synthetic parallelism, without repeating part of it, “consists of a pair of lines that together form a complete unit, and in which the second line completes or expands the thought introduced in the first line.”¹⁷⁷ To express God’s promise to preserve every single one of His words, the psalmist seems to be employing a synthetic parallelism. Hence, the word תצרכנו expands the thought of the Bible preservation introduced in the word תשמרם and declares that God is promising to preserve every single one of His words.

The phrase מן־הדור זי לעולם shows the temporal extent of the Lord’s preservation of His Word. The term זי is a rare form of the Hebrew demonstrative and relative pronoun,¹⁷⁸ and is used here as a demonstrative.¹⁷⁹ Since the preposition מן is in the temporal sense,¹⁸⁰ the phrase מן־הדור זי (“from this generation”) shows the beginning point of the action. And the word עולם with the preposition ל shows the duration or the ending point of the action. The term עולם refers to long duration, antiquity, and futurity.¹⁸¹ The LXX generally reads עולם by αἰών which means “age,” “(span of) time,” or “eternity.”¹⁸² In this verse, the LXX has it as αἰῶνα. Since it is used here to refer to the future, מן־הדור זי לעולם means “from this generation forever.”

Thus, this verse can be interpreted, “O Lord, You shall keep them (ie, your words), and preserve them (ie, every single one of *your words*) from this generation forever.”

EXAMINATION OF VARIOUS VIEWS

The Bible?

In the previous chapter, the Hebrew words תִּשְׁמְרֵם and תִּצְרְפוּ are rendered, “You shall *keep* them (ie, the words of the Lord),” and “You shall *preserve* (each one of) them” respectively. Many scholars view Psalm 12:7 as applying to Bible preservation.¹⁸³ On Psalm 12:6-7, Waite commented,

The word “them” in verse seven refers back to “*the words of the LORD.*” That is a promise of Bible preservation. God has promised to “*PRESERVE* His “*PURE WORDS.*” This promise extends “*from this generation* [that is, that of the Psalmist] *FOR EVER.*” That is a long time, is it not? God is able to do this, and He has done it! He has kept His words even more perfectly, if that is possible, then He keeps the stars in their course and the sun, moon, and all the other heavenly bodies in their proper place.¹⁸⁴

David Pitman likewise commented,

In v 7, the first “them” is masculine plural; the second “them” is masculine singular. “words” each time in v 6 is feminine plural. The word “silver” is used as another name for the Word of God in this passage. “Silver” is masculine singular. This allows for agreement in gender and may explain why preservation is promised to the words of God (plural) and to the Word of God (singular). This interchange between masculine singular and masculine plural (particularly in circumstances where a collective plural is suggested by the singular) is not uncommon in the OT. We believe God has preserved the Bible, but further, we believe that He has preserved the very words of the Bible.¹⁸⁵

Pitman proposed that the antecedent of “them” in the verse refers to “silver” in verse 6. This seems allowable contextually and theologically. If so, then the second suffix *-ennu* would lose the emphatic force of its energetic *nun* since it builds upon the previous suffix. It seems preferable to view the antecedent of the first suffix “them” to be referring to the “words.” By these two suffixes the faithfulness of God in guarding His Word, as a whole and in its parts, from corruption is underscored.

The Bible and the People?

Derek Kidner suggests that the first suffix may refer to the “words” in verse 6, and the second to the people in verse 5.¹⁸⁶ Anderson thinks the word *הַשְׁמֵרָה* refers to “the poor and the needy” (v 5) and “the promises of Yahweh” (v 6).¹⁸⁷ Matthew Poole also holds to this view.¹⁸⁸

Hammond translates this verse thus, “Thou, O Lord, shalt keep, or perform, those words; thou shalt preserve the just man from this generation forever.”¹⁸⁹ He has viewed it as having a double application; that is, the first suffix refers to the words of God, and the second to the godly man. The AB translation “preserve them, ... and keep us” seems to show this understanding of the suffixes.¹⁹⁰

Did the psalmist use these suffixes to refer to both the words of the Lord and the godly man? Is there any evidence for such a usage in the Scriptures? It is interesting that there are 12 verses where the verbs *שָׁמַר* and *נָצַר* are found in a single sentence in the same verse in the OT.¹⁹¹ There are four verses in which the synonymous verbs have the synonymous independent objects between the verbs without pronominal suffixes, three verses in the imperfect tense,¹⁹² and one verse with the form of the imperfect tense and infinitive.¹⁹³ In three verses in Proverbs, the verbs take the participle form, and their objects follow them.¹⁹⁴ In two verses, the first verb takes an object and the following verb has only a pronominal suffix that refers to the object of the first verb,¹⁹⁵ though the defined object is placed between the two verbs. In the final two verses, one of them has verbs that take the pronominal suffixes in the imperfect tense,¹⁹⁶ and the other has it in the imperative mood and the imperfect tense.¹⁹⁷

Among the verses, the synonymous verbs take the same objects or synonymous objects. When the objects are different, the verbs take independent objects without pronominal suffixes.¹⁹⁸ When the objects are the same, the verbs take either pronominal suffixes for their objects if possible,¹⁹⁹ or a definite and pronominal suffix.²⁰⁰ There are no usages where the synonymous verbs take different objects with pronominal suffixes. Hence in Psalm 12:7, the synonymous verbs take the same object with one having an energetic *nun* for emphasis. So these suffixes can refer to either the words of God or the godly man, but not both, unless context and usage are ignored.

Psalm 12 is speaking about “words.” The emphasis of the Psalm is

not on “man” but on “words.” The truthful words of God will prevail against the flattering words of man.²⁰¹ To the oppression and ninefold mention of the words of men (vv 1-4),²⁰² God interposes with a promise of deliverance (v 5), to which the psalmist gives a glorious declaration about the words of the Lord (v 6).

Since in this context the words of God are the nearest antecedents, the pronominal suffixes should be taken to mean God’s faithful preservation of His words alone, and not both His Word and the godly man. The Lord shall surely preserve every single one of His words.

The People?

Some scholars view the suffixes as applying to the preservation of God’s people.²⁰³ They claim that Psalm 12:6-7 has nothing at all to do with the preservation of the Word of God but everything to do with the preservation of the righteous from the wicked people around them.²⁰⁴

Calvin says, “some give this exposition of the passage, *Thou wilt keep them*, namely, *thy words*; but this does not seem suitable.”²⁰⁵ Though Calvin held to this view, he admitted that there were those who disagreed with him.²⁰⁶

Barnes claims that the clauses, “thou shalt keep them,” and “thou shalt preserve them” refers “to the poor and the needy who were suffering from the wrongs inflicted on them” in verse 5.²⁰⁷ However, the context does not seem to permit it. The context is talking about words. It is contrasting between the hopeless words of men in the first part and hopeful words of God in the second. God promised to set the godly in safety in verse 5. The “in safety” is found before the words of God in verses 6 and 7. Man shall be saved from the treacherous words of men by trusting in the pure and perfect Word of God. God thus assured the godly that He would preserve His Word. Some manuscripts and the LXX read תשמרנו for תשמרם. The NIV, NEB, JB, RSV, NRSV, and TLV seem to understand both objects in the first person plural, translating it as “us” as the LXX does ἡμᾶς (us).

Dahood rendered this phrase “*you have protected us, you have guarded us...*,”²⁰⁸ making the suffixes refer to people (“us”) as in the NIV. He claims that reading the Hebrew word תשמרם in such a way is allowable because “of the poetic principle of balancing a pronominal suffix (in the case found in תשמרנו) with an enclitic *mem*.”²⁰⁹ Hummel suggests that

“originally the verb was probably without suffix, but with an enclitic *mem*: תשמרם.”²¹⁰ According to grammarians, the enclitic *mem* is common in poetry and is mostly used in the middle of the contract chain.²¹¹

Although in verbal pronominal suffixes, the third person masculine singular (with the energetic *nun*) and the first person common plural may have the same object suffix *-ennu* (save the dagesh forte),²¹² it is hard to think that the suffix *-em* of the word תשמרם should be an enclitic *mem*, and so become *-ennu* since it was not originally written as such,²¹³ and the context does not allow for it. Moreover, the suffix *-ennu* of תשמרנו could be construed as an energetic *nun* of assimilated form with the third singular suffix, as in the words ישמרנו (“... and he has not kept him in ...,” Exod 21:29), ארצנו (“... make him run away ...,” Jer 49:19), תזכרנו (“... that thou art mindful of him ...,” Ps 8:4) and יסובבנו (“... shall compass him about ...,” Ps 32:10). This would make the suffix “him” and not “us.” Patton also does not see the suffix *-em* as an enclitic *mem*. He also sees the *-ennu* of the word תצטרנו as an energetic *nun*, which is used for emphasis, and is found in Ugaritic literature.²¹⁴

Raphael Weiss says, “It appears that the pronominal suffix of one of the verbs תצטרנו or תשמרם is the result of an error and that the correct reading must be either תצטרנו ... תשמרנו or תצטרם ... תשמרם.”²¹⁵ He seems to prefer reading תצטרם ... תשמרם in Psalm 12:7 by following the Aramaic Targum.²¹⁶ If so, the *mem* of תשמרם could be regarded as a pronominal suffix, and not as an enclitic *mem* at all.

The NIV considers the object of the verb to be the man spoken of in verse 5.²¹⁷ Such a rendering is strange. It breaks down the structure of the psalm. For instance, the word אשית in verse 5 is singular,²¹⁸ but the suffix of the word תשמרם is in the plural. The number of the noun and pronoun should agree. This rendering has not only contextual but also grammatical problems.

Those who view the text to mean the protection of the people pose another argument. Delitzsch claims that the suffix *-em* refers to the poor and needy, and the suffix *-ennu* refers back to the man who longs for deliverance mentioned in the divine utterance in verse 5.²¹⁹ However, it is hard to accept this because the context is talking about the Word, not the man. Furthermore, it breaks the synthetic parallelism that exists between verses 6 and 7. To the poor and the needy, God's promise to save them is

already given in verse 5. In verses 6 and 7, God is here interjecting to show that His promises to the man (v 5) will never be broken,²²⁰ because God keeps His Word. The context of the psalm and its poetical structure plainly say that God would preserve His Word forever. The view that God's protection of people is meant in verses 6 and 7 can be excluded. This verse strongly emphasises God's preservation of the Scriptures, not man.

CONCLUSION

Psalm 12:6-7 is one explicit proof-text for the doctrine of Bible preservation. It tells us that the merciful God will preserve His Word for His people forever. God will preserve His Word plenary (the whole of Scripture in its perfect harmonious unity), and verbally (every word to its jot and tittle). The Westminster divines were absolutely correct to say that the Holy Bible is “immediately inspired by God, and *by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages*” (WCF 1.8).

The degree of preservation is in every single word of His as contained in the Holy Scriptures. This is supported by the energetic *nun* in the word נִצָּנְנוּ already discussed. Jesus Christ also taught this in Matthew 5:18, “for verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” Here, Jesus Himself proclaimed that every jot and tittle of the OT until His time was faithfully transmitted and preserved without error. Hence, the Word of God is “innocent of error until someone can prove it guilty.”²²¹ Jesus Christ strongly emphasised God's preservation of the Bible in every single one of His words. Therefore, the Bible teaches that the Lord will preserve His Word in pure form, including the minutest details in the whole of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments.²²²

So it is clear that Psalm 12:5-7 teaches that the words of the Lord are pure words of God. God promises that His words will be preserved in every generation.²²³ It is important to note that God preserves His words, not just doctrines, or historical facts, but the very Word as a whole and in its parts. The Bible plainly teaches this plenary and verbal preservation of Scripture. Thus, this verse is “the great charter of the church's preservation of truth,” as John Owen called it.²²⁴

NOTES

¹The 66 books of canonical Scripture refers the 39 books of the OT and 27 books of the NT as stated in the Westminster Confession (1.2). However, the Talmud and Jewish

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Bibles (the OT) today number 24. Since 1-2 Samuel is one book, 1-2 Kings is one book, 1-2 Chronicles is one book, Ezra-Nehemiah is one book, and the 12 minor prophets make up one book, the difference between the numbering of 39 and 24 is accounted for. For more information about the structure and division of the Bible, see Norman L Geisler and William E Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 21-9.

²“The NT canon was arrived at by consensus of God’s people who were indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). The Council of Carthage (397), after a period of discussion, identified the sacred books by name. There were exactly 27 of them. The list presented was no innovation, but an official statement of what the Church had already accepted as canonical Scripture. It was a grassroot acceptance of the many churches that have been planted worldwide, and not just by a single church or denomination. There was an ecclesiastical consensus.” Jeffrey Khoo, “The KJV-NIV Debate,” unpublished lecture notes, Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore, 1998, 4. Cf, Alan E Johnson and Robert E Webber, *What Christians Believe: A Biblical and Historical Summary* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1989), 39.

³Turretin gives the reasons. They are: “(1) because the sources alone are inspired of God both as things and words (2 Tim 3:16); hence they alone are authentic. For whatever the men of God wrote, they wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), who to keep them from error, dictated not only the matter but also the words, which cannot be said of any version. (2) They are the standard and rule to which all the versions should be applied, just as the copy should answer to the pattern and the stream be distinguished from its source. (3) These editions were authentic from the very first and were always considered to be so by the Jewish and Christian church many centuries after Christ ...” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992), 1:114.

⁴Wilbur Norman Pickering, “John William Burgon And The New Testament,” in *True or False?*, ed Davis Otis Fuller (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1983), 277. According to Laird Harris, there is no doctrine, except “those of the Trinity and the deity of Christ, which has been so widely held through the ages of Church history as that of verbal inspiration.” R Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures: An Historical and Exegetical study* (Greenville: A Press, 1995), 55. Cf, Benjamin B Warfield, *The Inspiration And Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1945). Brian H Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1993), 57.

⁵Louis Gaussen, *Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, trans David D Scott (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971). Published in Edinburgh in 1842 under the title, *Theopneustia: The Bible, its Divine Origin and Entire Inspiration, Deduced from Internal Evidence and the Testimonies of Nature, History, and Science*, 34.

⁶See E J Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1957, reprinted 1991), 91-2.

⁷Daniel B Wallace, “Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism,” in *New Testament Essays: In Honor of Homer A Kent Jr*, ed Gary T Meadors (Winona Lake, BMH Books, 1991), 84. Cf, Daniel B Wallace, “The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991): 152-69. Gordon D Fee, “Modern

Textual Criticism and the Revival of the Textus Receptus” *JETS* 21 (1978): 19-33. However, Harold G Stigers gives biblical bases; see Harold G Stigers, “Preservation: the Corollary Of Inspiration,” *JETS* 22 (1979): 217-22.

⁸See G Rawlinson, *The Pulpit Commentary: Psalms*, H D M Spence and Joseph S Exell, eds, “Homiletics,” by E R Condor and W Clarkson (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, nd), 8:76-7.

⁹Frank E Gaebelein, gen ed, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 5:136.

¹⁰NIV, RSV, and TLV etc.

¹¹KJV, ASV, and NWB etc.

¹²KJV, ASV and AB.

¹³NWB.

¹⁴Geneva Bible, 1560.

¹⁵NIV, JB, RSV and TLV.

¹⁶Donald Williams, *Mastering The Old Testament: Psalms 1-72* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1986), 107. *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible and Christianity*, sv “Preservation—Bible,” by David W Cloud.

¹⁷Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72, TOTC* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973). A A Anderson, *The book of Psalms*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1972).

¹⁸Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms*, ed Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 1:108. *Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Psalms*, 12 vols, ed Carl Bernhard Moll, 9:107-8.

¹⁹Peter Van Kleeck, *The Translational and Exegetical Rendering of Psalm 12:7 Primarily Considered in the Churchly Tradition of the 16th and 17th Centuries and Its Expression in the Reformation English Bibles: The Genius of Ambiguity*, Calvin Theological Seminary, March 1993. Quoted in David W Cloud, “Psalm 12:7 and Bible Preservation,” *O Timothy* 12 (1995), go to <http://www.whidbey.net/tl040003.htm>.

²⁰*The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, nd), 1.9.

²¹This writer disagrees with Walter C Kaiser who claims that meaning can be ascertained only from the amount of prior information available to the text under consideration. See Walter C Kaiser, “Analogy of Antecedent Scripture,” in *Towards an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 90, 134-7, 145.

²²For indicating chapter and verse of the passages, there are variants among the English versions, the Hebrew text and the LXX. To avoid confusion, chapter and verse of the passages will be quoted from the English version in this paper.

²³Edward F Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines: Christian Research Press, 1984), 88-102.

²⁴*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, sv “Septuagint” by S K Soderlund. Blaiklock evaluates the LXX, saying, “... the LXX, besides manifesting those faults of carelessness, weariness, and ignorance common enough in translation, shows also attempts

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to correct an existing text which may be well- or ill-founded, deliberate tampering with the story, and a quite unusual freedom in interpolation, improvisation, and modification. It is an uneven translation." *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, sv "Septuagint," by E M Blaiklock. 5:342-7. Francis Turretin claims that the LXX is not authentic, giving several reasons: "(1) It was executed by human study and labor not divinely inspired men; (2) If they wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit, such a number would have been superfluous; (3) In many instances, it varies from the sources in words and things and has various interpretations and discrepancies, as has been shown by the handlers of this argument; and (4) It is not considered pure now, but greatly corrupted and interpolated" Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:128.

²⁵The OT Hebrew text is from BHS. The OT Greek Text (LXX) is from Alfred Rahlfs, ed, *Septuaginta*. The English text for both Testaments is from the KJV.

²⁶Charles Seet, "Old Testament Poetic Books," unpublished lecture notes, Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore, 1998, 42.

²⁷New BDB, 663.

²⁸TWOT, sv "גִּבְרָה," by Milton C Fisher.

²⁹Cf, The LXX translates *telos* that means "the last, highest station" in classical Greek. EDNT, sv "τέλος" by H Hubner.

³⁰As this term signifies "eight," Spurgeon says that it refers it to the coming of Messiah, following the Arabic version which says it is concerning the end of the world, which shall be the eighth day. However, it also is hard to accept this since there is no biblical evidence. Cf, C H Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 6 vols (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott Limited, 1957 reprinted), 1:141.

³¹John F Brug, *Psalms*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 1:75.

³²TWOT, sv "שְׁמִינִיָּה," by Herbert Wolf.

³³Oesterley argues, "All authorities are agreed that the ancient music of the Hebrews was similar in style to that of the *primitive* type of Arab music, which may still be heard in parts of Arabia; in this, quarter-tones as well as semitones are recognized; it follows that they have no octave consisting of eight tones and thirteen semitones; and this must be presumed of ancient Hebrew music. There can, then, be no doubt that this term cannot mean 'On the octave,' ie, that the musical instruments were to be played, or that the male voices were to sing, an octave lower, as has been maintained." W O E Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: SPCK, 1962), 12.

³⁴Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1:141.

³⁵Oesterley, *Psalms*, 12.

³⁶TWOT, sv "זִמְרָה," by Herbert Wolf.

³⁷Oesterley, *Psalms*, 10.

³⁸New BDB, 510-8.

³⁹John F Brug, *Psalms*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 76.

⁴⁰Barnes, *Psalms*, 103.

⁴¹Geier, cited in William S Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1867), 174.

⁴²Joseph Exell, *The Psalms*, 2 vols, The Biblical Illustrator (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, nd) 1:185.

⁴³TWOT, sv “ישע,” by John E Hartley

⁴⁴The KJV translated it “salvation” (32 times), “safety” (three times), and “saving” (once).

⁴⁵New BDB, 447.

⁴⁶New BDB 88.

⁴⁷But the NIV translates the promise phrase אֲשֶׁרֶה בְּיָשָׁע as “I will protect them ...” The NIV understands the phrase in the sense of protection for “the weak” and “the needy.”

⁴⁸WSDNT, 1360.

⁴⁹TWOT, sv “ישע,” by John E Hartley.

⁵⁰According to Gordon, however, “The problem of tracing the occurrences of this root in the OT is complicated by the fact that in Hebrew there are two roots, פִּיחַ and פִּיחַ, both meaning “to breathe, puff” and in many instance the consonantal skeleton of verbal forms of these two verbs will be indistinguishable.” C H Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, 19: no. 1129 lists “Ugaritic פִּיחַ but פִּיחַ, cited in TWOT, sv “פִּיחַ” by Victor P Hamilton.

⁵¹New BDB, 806; TWOT, sv “פִּיחַ” by Victor P Hamilton.

⁵²The KJV translated it as “speak” six times, “puff” twice, “blow” twice, “break” twice, “utter” once, “bring into a snare” once.

⁵³The Lord said, “... And I will pour out mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, *and* skilful to destroy” (Ezek 21:31).

⁵⁴Among 15 occurrences, the verb is used in the Qal stem only twice, and all others in the Hiphil stem.

⁵⁵BAGD, 215.

⁵⁶E Kautzsch, ed, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed, trans A E Cowley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1910), 301.

⁵⁷New BDB, 510-8.

⁵⁸Cf, Ronald J Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 2nd ed (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 48-9.

⁵⁹New BDB, 55.

⁶⁰The term אִמְרָה occurs in the OT 37 times, mostly in poetry. It occurs 19 times in Psalm 119 and seven times in other Psalms as collective singular. The KJV translates it as “word” 29 times, as “speech” seven times, and as “commandment” once.

⁶¹BAGD, 476.

⁶²WSDNT, 923.

⁶³Cf, The usage of the feminine singular form of the word אִמְרָה with יְהוָה in the OT. In 2 Samuel 22:31 and Psalm 18:30, אִמְרַת־יְהוָה בְּרוּסָה (“the word of the LORD is tried”), and in Psalm 105:19, אִמְרַת־יְהוָה בְּקִשְׁתּוֹ (“the word of the LORD tried him”).

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⁶⁴New BDB, 372. The term טָהוֹר occurs 94 times in the OT. The KJV reads it as “clean” 50 times, “pure” 40 times, “fair” twice, “purer” once, “variant” once. The adjective is used in three senses; (1) in a material sense of “pure” (of gold in Exod 25:22, 27, 24, 29, 31, 36, 38, 39; 28:14, 22, 36; 30:3; 37:2, 6, 11, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 26; 39:15, 25, 30; 1 Chron 28:17; 2 Chron 3:4; 9:7; 28:19; of water in Ezek 36:25; of incense in Exod 30:35; 37:29; of a lampstand in Exod 31:8; 39:37; Lev 24:4; of the table in Lev 24:6; 2 Chron 13:11, and “clear” (of turban) in Zech 3:5; (2) in a ritual sense of “clean,” of animals in Gen 7:2, 8; 8:20; Lev 14:4; 20:25; Deut 14:11, 20; of place in Lev 4:12; 6:4; 10:14; 11:36; Num 19:6], of persons in Lev 7:19; 13:13, 17, 37, 39, 40, 41; 15:8; Num 5:28, 9:13; 18:11, 13; 19:9, 18, 19; Deut 12:15, 22; 15:22; 1 Sam 20:26, 2 Chron 30:17; Ezra 6:20, and of things in Lev 10:10; 11:37, 47; 14:57; Ezek 22:26; 44:23; Isa 66:20; Mal 1:11; and (3) in an ethical sense of morally “pure” and “clean” in Prov 30:12, Eccle 9:2; Job 14:4; of heart in Ps 51:10 (12); Prov 22:11, of hands in Job 17:9, of eyes in Hab 1:13, of men’s words in Prov 15:26, and of God’s law as object of reverential fear in Ps 19:9 (10). TWOT, sv “טָהַר,” by Edwin Yamauchi.

⁶⁵Bahr, *Symbol*, 1:284, quoted in F Delitzsch, *Psalms*, trans James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, nd), 5:197.

⁶⁶New BDB, 864, TWOT, sv “צָרַף,” by John E Hartley. It occurs 33 times in the OT. The KJV translates it as “try” 11 times, “founder” five times, “goldsmith” five times, “refine” three times, “refiner” twice, “melt” twice, “pure” twice, “purge away” once, “casteth” once, and “finer” once.

⁶⁷TWOT, sv “זָקַק,” by Leon J Wood. It occurs seven times in the OT. The KJV translates it as “refined” three times, “fine” once, “pour” once, “purify” once, and “purge” once.

⁶⁸Plumer, *Psalms*, 178.

⁶⁹Quoted in Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 197.

⁷⁰Plumer, *Psalms*, 178.

⁷¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 93.

⁷²The KJV translates it as “keep” 283 times, as “observe” 46 times, as “heed” 35 times, as “keeper” 28 times, as “preserve” 21 times, as “beware” nine times, as “mark” eight times, as “watchman” eight times, as “wait” seven times, as “watch” seven times, as “regard” five times, as “save” twice, and miscellaneous nine times.

⁷³New BDB, 1036.

⁷⁴TWOT, sv “שָׁמַר,” by John E Hartley.

⁷⁵TWOT, sv “שָׁעַ,” by John E Hartley.

⁷⁶Genesis 2:15.

⁷⁷Genesis 30:31; in participle: 1 Samuel 17:20.

⁷⁸1 Samuel 7:1

⁷⁹2 Samuel 15:16. 16:21; 20:3.

⁸⁰Exodus 22:6, 9; Numbers 3:8; 1 Samuel 25:31; 2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chronicles 34:22, Zechariah 3:7;

⁸¹Genesis 4:9; 1 Samuel 26:15; Joshua 10:18; 1 Kings 20:30, Proverbs 6:22, 24; Hosea

12:13; Esther 2:3, 8, 15. In Proverbs 4:6, wisdom is the subject of that “shall preserve thee.” Cf, 6:24; 7:5.

⁸²Such as cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life in Genesis 3:24, or watchmen (Isa 21:11,12; 62:5; Cant 3:3; 5:7; Ps 127:1; Cf, 1 Kgs 14:27; 2 Chron 12:10; Neh 13:22; Eccl 12:3; Jer 35:4.

⁸³Psalms 34:20; 86:2; 121:3-4, 7.

⁸⁴Job 2:6, 2 Samuel 18:12. In hostile sense: 2 Samuel 11:16; Job 14:16;

⁸⁵In Psalm 39:1, “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle...” In Proverbs 13:1, “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life ...”

⁸⁶Judges 1:24; 1 Samuel 19:11; Job 10:14; 13:27; 24:15; 33:11; Psalms 56:7; 59:1; 71:10; 130:6; Jeremiah 20:10.

⁸⁷Proverbs 19:8.

⁸⁸In Deuteronomy 11:32 “And ye shall observe to do (all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day).”

⁸⁹Numbers 23:12.

⁹⁰TWOT, sv “עָשָׂה,” by John E Hartley.

⁹¹Psalm 130:3, “If thou, LORD shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand.”

⁹²In Hosea 4:10, “to take heed to the LORD,” Psalm 31:6, “that regard lying vanities.”

⁹³2 Samuel 11:16.

⁹⁴Zechariah 11:11; Psalm 59:9.

⁹⁵Amos 1:11.

⁹⁶Malachi 2:7.

⁹⁷Genesis 41:35, 1 Samuel 9:24.

⁹⁸Exodus 22:7.

⁹⁹1 Samuel 30:23; Jer. 31:9; Numbers 6:24; Job 29:2; Psalms 16:2; 121:3, 5, 7; 1 Samuel 2:9; Proverbs 3:26.

¹⁰⁰Genesis 28:15, 20; Exodus 23:20; Psalm 91:11; 121:8; Joshua 24:17.

¹⁰¹Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo, *A Theology for Every Christian: Book I, Knowing God and His Word* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1998), 43.

¹⁰²Exodus 12:17; 23:14; 34:18; Deuteronomy 16:1.

¹⁰³Exodus 31:13,14,16; Leviticus 19:3, 30; 26:2; Deuteronomy 5:12; Isaiah 56:2,4,6.

¹⁰⁴Deuteronomy 29:8; 1 Kings 11:11; 2:43; Ezra 17:14;

¹⁰⁵This occurs 120 times in the OT. In Genesis 18:19, Abraham is to command his children “to keep the way of the Lord,” that is, give careful attention to the ways of God. Cf, Exodus 20:5, 6; Leviticus 18:26; Deuteronomy 5:10; 28:16; Judges 2:22; 2 Sam. 22:22; 1 Kings 2:3; Ezra 20:18; Proverbs 2:20; 8:32; Psalms 18:22; 119:8, 17, 34; Jeremiah 35:18; Ezekiel 11:20; Amos 2:4.

¹⁰⁶The expression is used to a sacred occupation such as the priesthood (Num 3:10;

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18:7; 2 Chron 5:11).

¹⁰⁷Leviticus 8:35; Numbers 1:53. It occurs 32 times.

¹⁰⁸Hosea 12:6; Isaiah 56:1

¹⁰⁹Proverbs 4:4; 5:2; 7:1,2.

¹¹⁰In Psalm 31:7, it is used in bad sense.

¹¹¹Ezekiel 37:24.

^{112a}“Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart” (Prov 4:21).

¹¹³Tow and Khoo, *Knowing God and His Word*, 43.

¹¹⁴Since Hebrew has no vowels, the Jews had the consonantal text. The Masoretes introduced the vowel-points, and fixed accents to ensure correct pronunciation. They explained the meaning of words where ambiguity existed, supplied marginal readings to remove obscurity, and marked intended pauses which often affected the meaning. For more information about the Masoretes, see Malcom H Watts, *The Lord Gave the Word: A Study in the History of the Biblical Text* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, nd), go to <http://biz.ukonline.co.uk/trinitarian.bible.society/articles/tr-art.htm>.

¹¹⁵The consonantal text is called *kethiv*, and the Masoretic addition of vowel points and marginal consonants is called *Qere*. At certain places the Masoretes put other readings that differed from the consonantal text. Since the consonantal text was “considered sacred and inviolable, the Masoretes added the traditional reading in the margin, and placed the vowels of the traditional reading, together with a mark calling attention to the note, on the consonantal text.” William Sanford Lasor, *Handbook of Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1988), 25.

¹¹⁶ZPED, sv “Text and Manuscripts of the Old Testament,” by A A MacRae, 5:689.

¹¹⁷Hills, *King James Version Defended*, 88-102.

¹¹⁸Benjamin C Wilkinson, “Our Authorized Bible Vindicated,” in *Which Bible?* ed David Otis Fuller (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1971), 187, 263.

¹¹⁹Matthew 5:18; 22:42-45; John 10:34-36;

¹²⁰Edward F Hills, *Believing Bible Study*, 3rd ed (Des Moines: The Christian Research Press, 1991), 12-3.

¹²¹William Sanford Lasor, *Handbook of Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1988), 225.

¹²²Cf, Doug Kutilek, “A Careful Investigation of Psalm 12:6,7,” *The Biblical Evangelist*, October 1983.

¹²³*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 135 o.

¹²⁴*Ibid*.

¹²⁵In Job 1:14, רָעוּת עַל-יְדֵיהֶם (The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them). Here, the suffix of יְדֵיהֶם is masculine plural, which is used for feminine antecedent רָעוּת (feminine plural). Job 39:3, תִּבְרַעְנָה יְלָדֵיהֶן תַּסְלַחְנָה חִבְלֵיהֶם תַּשְׁלַחְנָה, רָעוּת (They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows.). Here חִבְלֵיהֶם (masculine plural) is used in parallel with יְלָדֵיהֶן (feminine plural). See also Job 42:15; Song of Solomon 4:2; 6:6; Proverb 6:21.

¹²⁶Lackey, quoted in *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible and Christianity*, sv “Preservation—Bible” by David W Cloud.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸TWOT, sv “נָצַר,” by Walter C Kaiser.

¹²⁹The KJV translates with “keep” 38 times, “preserve” 13 times, “watchmen” 3 times, “besieged” twice, “keeper” once, “monuments” once, “observe” once, “preserver” once, “subtil” once, “hidden things” once, “watchers” once.

¹³⁰New BDB, 665.

¹³¹A vineyard (Job 27:18; Isa 27:3); a fig tree (Prov 27:18); fortification (Nah 2:2); Watchman (2 Kgs 17:9; 18:8; Jer 31:6);

¹³²Cf, the Lord Himself regarded as “preserver” in Job 7:20.

¹³³Proverbs 13:3; Psalm 141:3.

¹³⁴Psalm 34:14.

¹³⁵Proverbs 16:17.

¹³⁶Proverbs 4:23.

¹³⁷Psalms 25:20; 40:12; Proverbs 24:12.

¹³⁸Psalm 61:8.

¹³⁹Isaiah 26:3.

¹⁴⁰Deuteronomy 32:10; Isaiah 42:6; 49:8.

¹⁴¹Psalm 31:24; Proverbs 2:8.

¹⁴²Proverbs 22:12.

¹⁴³Psalm 32:7.

¹⁴⁴Psalm 64:2.

¹⁴⁵Psalm 140:2, 5.

¹⁴⁶Wisdom keeps those who do not forsake her (Prov 4:6).

¹⁴⁷Proverbs 2:11.

¹⁴⁸Proverbs 13:6.

¹⁴⁹Deuteronomy 34:7

¹⁵⁰Deuteronomy 33:9; Psalm 25:10.

¹⁵¹Psalms 78:7; 105:45; 119:2, 22, 33, 34, 56, 69, 100, 115, 129, 145.

¹⁵²Proverbs 6:20; 28:7.

¹⁵³Proverbs 3:1; 21; 4:13; 5:2.

¹⁵⁴In Isaiah 48:6 it refers to hidden things previously not revealed by God.

¹⁵⁵“The rebellious Israel spends her night remaining among the graves, and lodging in the monuments with the idols in order to receive dreams about the future” (Isa 65:4).

¹⁵⁶“A harlot with the secret, crafty mindedness of a seductress, or wily minded met a young man void of understanding” (Prov 7:10).

¹⁵⁷Isaiah 1:8; Jeremiah 4:16; Ezekiel 6:12.

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¹⁵⁸In the pronominal suffixes of the verbs, for the third person masculine singular, -*ennu*, and -*ehu* are used, and for the first person plural -*ennu* is used. Thomas O Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 271.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 133.

¹⁶⁰Nathan R Bunce and Mark A Price, "An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Grammar Correlated With the Grammars of Gesenius/Kautzsch/Cowley and Waltke/O'Connor," unpublished ThM thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1991, 157. Cf, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 20.a.

¹⁶¹In the third person masculine, -*ahu*, "by contraction of *a* and *u* after the rejection of the weak ה, frequently gives rise to *o*." Ibid, 58.a.

¹⁶²This is called the *Nun energicum*. Ibid, 58.i

¹⁶³ Ibid, 58.i.

¹⁶⁴In Psalm 8:4 תַּפְקֶדְנוּ ("thou visitest him"), in Psalm 32:10 חֶסֶד יִסְבֶּבֵנוּ ("mercy shall compass him about"). Cf, Exodus 21:29; Jeremiah 49:19; Deuteronomy 30:12; Proverbs 18:14. The dagesh forte indicates the strengthening of a consonant. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 20.a.

¹⁶⁵Cf, Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 31.7.2a.

¹⁶⁶The LXX, Coverdale Bible 1535, and The Matthew Bible 1537 also read it "us."

¹⁶⁷The Geneva Bible also reads it as "him."

¹⁶⁸ Lasor, *Handbook of Biblical Hebrew*, 225.

¹⁶⁹*Gesenius Hebrew Grammar*, 58.i.

¹⁷⁰While the אֶמְרוּהָ in verse 6 is feminine plural, the suffix of the word תַּעֲרֶנּוּ is the masculine singular form with the energetic nun.

¹⁷¹ See discussion on the word תַּעֲמִידָם.

¹⁷² Bunce and Price, "Biblical Hebrew Grammar," 292.

¹⁷³ TWOT, sv "עָמַד," Hartley.

¹⁷⁴Cf, Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 7.

¹⁷⁵ Khoo, "The KJV-NIV Debate," 58.

¹⁷⁶D A Waite, *Foes of the King James Bible Refuted* (Collingswood: Bible For Today Press, 1997), 38, 40.

¹⁷⁷Seet, *Poetic Books*, 20.

¹⁷⁸TWOT, sv "וָהוּ," by Herbert Wolf.

¹⁷⁹Cf, Waltke and O'Connor argue that the term is used in determinative, reading this phrase "from the generation, *the one* of everlasting (ie, the everlasting generation)." See *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 337.

¹⁸⁰Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 55.

¹⁸¹More than 20 times it is used to indicate past time, pointing to something that has occurred long ago (cf, Deut 32:7; Job 22:15; Prov 22:28; 23:10). It rarely if ever refers to a limitless past (Cf, Ps 73:12; Ecc 3:11). New BDB, 761. It is, however, used more than 300 times to refer to indefinite continuance into the very distant future. TWOT, sv "עוֹלָם," by Allan A MacRae.

¹⁸²EDNT, sv “αἶών,” by T Holtz.

¹⁸³Williams, *Psalms 1-72*, 107. David W Cloud, *For Love of the Bible* (Ontario: Way of Life Literature, 1995), 48-50. William P Grady, *Final Authority* (Schereville: Grady Publication, 1993), 7.

¹⁸⁴D A Waite, *Defending the King James Bible: A Fourfold Superiority* (Collingswood: Bible For Today, 1992), 6-7.

¹⁸⁵David Pitman, quoted in *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible and Christianity*, sv “Preservation—Bible” by David W Cloud.

¹⁸⁶Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 76.

¹⁸⁷Anderson, *Psalms*, 127.

¹⁸⁸Matthew Poole, *Psalms*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, rp 1990), 2:18.

¹⁸⁹Cited in Plumer, *Psalms*, 178.

¹⁹⁰Cf, *The Amplified Bible*.

¹⁹¹All are written in the Qal stem: Seven times in Proverbs, four times in Psalms, and once in Deuteronomy.

¹⁹²In Deuteronomy 33:9, כִּי שָׁמְרוּ אֶמְרֶתְךָ וְבְרִיתְךָ יִנָּצְרוּ (“for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant”), in Psalm 105:45, בְּעִבּוֹר יִשְׁמְרוּ חֻקֵּיו וְתוֹרָתוֹ יִנָּצְרוּ (“That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws”), and in Proverbs 2:8, וְדַרְךְ חֲסִידָיו יִשְׁמֹר (“He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints”).

¹⁹³In Proverbs 5:2, לְשֹׁמֵר מְזֻמּוֹת וְדַעַת שְׂפָתֶיךָ יִנָּצֵר (“That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge”).

¹⁹⁴In Proverbs 13:3, נֹצֵר פִּי שֹׁמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ וּפִתְחֵי מוֹתָהוּ יִנָּצְרוּ (“He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction”), and in Proverbs 27:18, נֹצֵר תְּאֵנָה יֹאכַל פְּרִיָּהּ וְשֹׁמֵר אֲדֹנָיו יִכָּבֵד (“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured”).

¹⁹⁵In Psalm 119:34, וְאֶצְקֶה תּוֹרָתְךָ וְאֶשְׁמְרָהָ (“...and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it ...”), and in Proverbs 2:11, מְזֻמָּה תִּשְׁמֹר עָלֶיךָ תְּבוּנָה תִּנְצֵרְךָ (“Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee”).

¹⁹⁶In Proverbs 4:6, וְהִשְׁמַרְתְּ אֶתְּבָרָה וְהִצַּרְתְּ (“and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee”), and in Psalm 12:7.

¹⁹⁷In Psalm 140:4-5, שְׁמֹר ... תִּנְצֵרְנִי (“Keep me ... preserve me”).

¹⁹⁸Deuteronomy 33:9; Psalm 105:45; Proverbs 2:8; 5:2; 13:3; 16:17; 27:18.

¹⁹⁹Psalm 140:4; Proverbs 4:6

²⁰⁰Psalm 119:34; Proverbs 2:11.

²⁰¹Jack Moorman, “Psalm 12:6,7 and the Bible Preservation,” *Foundation*, Mar-Apr 1994, go to <http://www.tcsn.net/fbcchurch/fbcpresv.htm>.

²⁰²“*They speak vanity ... with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak, The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue, that speaketh proud things, Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; and our lips are our own* (vv 2-4)” (emphasis added).

GOD'S PROMISE TO PRESERVE HIS WORD

²⁰³ Brug, *Psalms*, 76; Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 1.147; *The Chokmah Commentary: Psalm I*, ed Kang Byoung Do (Seoul: The Christian Wisdom Publishing Company, 1992), 117-8.

²⁰⁴ Doug Kutilek, "A Careful Investigation of Psalm 12:6,7," *The Biblical Evangelist*, October 1983. 9; Edward Glenny, "The Preservation of Scripture," in *The Bible Version Debates: the Perspective of Central Baptist Theological Seminary*, (Minneapolis: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 90-2

²⁰⁵ John Calvin, *Psalms I*, trans James Anderson, (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1973), 178-9.

²⁰⁶ Cf, John T McNeil, ed, *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, nd), I.viii.9-10.

²⁰⁷ Barnes, *Psalms*, 108; Rawlinson, *Psalms*, 77-8.

²⁰⁸ William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, gen eds, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 75.

²⁰⁹ Dahood, *Psalm*, 75.

²¹⁰ Horace D Hummel, "Enclitic *Mem* in Early Northwest Semitic," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957), 103. He tries to prove citing the LXX and the Vulgate. However, the Aramaic Targum presupposes תשמרם ... הצרם. Quoted in Weiss Raphael, "On ligatures in the Hebrew Bible (*m=nw*)," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 72 (1963): 192.

²¹¹ According to Waltke and O'Connor, the enclitic *mem* is common in poetry and most of it is used in the middle of the construct chain. "The archaic grammatical format called the enclitic *mem* ... was generally reinterpreted by later scribes as a plural marker. ... [So] the *mem* became confounded with other common morphemes formed with *mem* such as the masculine plural suffix *-im*, the pronominal suffix *-am*, the inseparable preposition *min*, etc. ... In Hebrew, it sometimes has an emphatic force, while at other times, it serves as a morpheme for indetermination. It is seen in connection with almost every part of speech, including verbs, nouns, pronominal suffixes, adverbs, etc." Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 1.6.2e and 9.8.

²¹² Lasor, *Biblical Hebrew*, 225.

²¹³ See Hebrew pointing by Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 197.

²¹⁴ Patton, *Canaanite Parallels in the Book of Psalms*, 13. Cited in Weiss Raphael, "On ligatures in the Hebrew Bible (*m=nw*)," *Journal Of Biblical Literature*, 72 (1963): 192. Cf, Psalm 91:12, עַל-כַּפֵּיָם יִשְׁאוּנֶךָ, ("They shall bear thee up in their hands"), and Deuteronomy 32:10, יִסְבְּבֶנְהוּ יְבוֹנֶנְהוּ יִצְרֶנְהוּ, ("he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him").

²¹⁵ He claims that "the existence of such ligatures accounts for a number of cases in the text of the Hebrew Bible in which an original *nun* + *waw* (נ) at the end of a word is represented by a closed *mem* (ם) or in which, on the contrary, the closed *mem* (ם) which the context requires is represented by *nun* + *waw* (נ); for the joining of *nun* and *waw* in the square script results in a closed *mem*, or something very much like it. A copyist might therefore easily take a closed *mem* in his archetype for a combination of *nun* and *waw*, or a ligature of *nun* and *waw* for a closed *mem*." Weiss Raphael, "On ligatures in the Hebrew Bible (*m=nw*)," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 72 (1963): 188, 192.

²¹⁶The Hebrew word *targum* denotes an Aramaic translation of paraphrase of some part of the OT. The Targums offer an important witness to the OT text, comparable in value with the LXX and Peshitta, though the targums are not of any great value for fixing the text. Targums are extant for every book except Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel. The evidence is much more reliable in literal than in paraphrastic targumic material, for obvious reasons. NBD, sv “Targums,” by D F Payne. ZPEB, sv “Targums,” by A A MacRae. 5:597. John Owen said, that the targums “do corrupt the Bible most wretchedly.” See his *Biblical Theology* (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), 553.

²¹⁷James R White claims that verse 7 “does not refer back to ‘the words of the LORD’ in verse 6, but instead back to those of verse 5 of whom the LORD says, ‘I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns’ (NKJV).” James R White, *The King James Only Controversy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 243-4.

²¹⁸The Hebrew verb יָשַׁם is in the imperfect tense, with Qal stem and common person singular form.

²¹⁹Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 197.

²²⁰Lackey, quoted in *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity*, sv “Preservation—Bible” by David W Cloud.

²²¹Mickey P Carter, *Things That are Different are Not the Same* (Haines City: Landmark Baptist Press, 1993), 14.

²²²David Cloud, “Inspiration is Perfect but Preservation is General,” *Myths About The King James Bible* (Oak Harbor: Way of Life Literature, 1993), 13.

²²³Ibid, 12.

²²⁴John Owen “Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of Scripture,” *Works*, 6:381. Quoted in Douglas W Taylor, “Pure Words, Preserved Words: The Doctrine of Providential Preservation,” *Australian Beacon*, July 1995, 3.

Rev Shin Yeong Gil is an MDiv and ThM graduate of Far Eastern Bible College, and is presently serving as a pastor-teacher in Korea.

THE DOCTRINE OF HEALING IN THE ATONEMENT (ISA 53:4-6)

Charles Seet

REASONS FOR STUDY

The Biblical Concern for Healing

The subject of healing often strikes a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of many people. Original sin, pain and sickness have afflicted man and caused him to search for health and relief. In almost all societies, healing receives great priority; from primitive ones where shamans or witchdoctors are honoured with reverence, to developed ones where health institutions, hospitals, centres of medical research and health education take up a sizeable portion of public and private spending.

Healing is undoubtedly one of the major social concerns today. It is also undoubtedly a biblical concern as there are no less than 154 references to healing, found in 31 of the 66 books of the Bible. When God began to reveal Himself to the nation of Israel, one of the titles He used for Himself was “the LORD that healeth thee” (Exod 15:26). When God became incarnate and revealed Himself as Jesus Christ, one of the visible aspects of His ministry was “healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matt 4:23).

But this biblical concern for healing has often led to much misapplication and abuse, in the interest of providing a much needed solution for man’s problem of sickness, pain and suffering. Many have overstepped the limits of Scripture to make unwarranted offers of healing, and claims of power to heal. The gift of healing has become one of the most prominent and most sought after gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:9). John MacArthur Jr postulates why this is so,

If I could have any gift of the spirit, beyond the ones given me, I would ask for the gift of healing. On innumerable occasions I have wished I had the gift of healing. I have stood with a mother and father in a hospital room and watched their child die of leukemia. I have prayed with a dear friend as

cancer was eating up his insides. I have been in intensive care units; I have seen people crushed by accidents; I have observed them torn up by surgery; and through it all I have wished that I could heal them with a word, with a touch, but I cannot think of how thrilling and rewarding it would be to have the gift of healing! Think of what it would be like to go into a hospital among the sick and dying and just go up and down the hall touching them, talking to them, and healing them.¹

To prevent ourselves from yielding to the pressure of healing proponents in the Christian world, we need to carefully define what the Scriptures teach concerning healing.

The Faith Healing Movement

The faith healing movement of today has its beginnings in the 19th century,

There is first of all the movement that started in the 1800's spearheaded by New Thought and Christian Science. These groups have continued to grow. Then there are the Pentecostal Churches ... At first their revival of the healing ministry was only incidental to their emphasis on tongue speaking and other gifts of the Spirit. The early leaders were surprised to find healing occurring when converts were baptised and spoke in tongues. As a result, healing practices became a part of the Pentecostal way of life. Meanwhile services for healing had begun to appear in a few of the more orthodox Protestant Churches, while among Catholics the occurrences at Lourdes and other shrines brought renewed interest in healings taking place in this way.²

The last few decades saw the onset and rapid spread of a new movement in Christianity. This charismatic renewal movement has been promoting spiritual healing through those who claim to have this spiritual gift. As Peter Masters writes,

The fact is that healing has become the chief attraction and propaganda tool of a new, crusading Pentecostalism which wants to permeate and engulf traditional Bible Christianity.

Divine healing has become the flagship of the charismatic armada, the *piece de resistance* of the charismatic banquet, and the main buttress of charismatic faith. Supposed incidents of healing are everywhere used to sanctify and justify a multitude of practices which cannot be verified by the Bible.³

The Charismatic movement is, however, not a homogeneous group. Within it a new movement has arisen, which can be classified as the 'Neo-Charismatic' movement, espousing doctrines which are radically

different from other Charismatics and from mainline Christianity. The roots of this movement have been traced back to the writings of E W Kenyon as well as to the teachers of Emerson College, from which also emerged the present day Christian Science cult.⁴ Represented today by names like Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Robert G Tilton, John H Osteen and Frederick C Price, Neo-Charismatics preach doctrines that have come to be known by names such as “Revelation Knowledge,” “the Health-Wealth Gospel,” “Positive Confession,” “Dominion Theology,” and “the Double Death of Christ.”⁵

Proponents within this new movement have been bolder in their claims concerning the redemptive work of Christ. According to them, Christ redeemed His people not only from the curse of spiritual death, but also from the curse of poverty and the curse of sickness as well. By virtue of His redemption which has been completed, a Christian therefore has an undisputable right to riches and healing. Among the claims made for redemption from the curse of sickness, in particular, are the following:

... sickness and disease are a part of the curse of the law—and they should come upon us. But praise God, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal 3:13).⁶

Sickness and disease are not the will of God for His people. He does not want a curse to be upon His children because of their disobedience; He wants to bless them with health.⁷

We can say, “God laid my sickness on Jesus and made Him sick with my disease” ... He made Jesus, who knew no sickness, to be sickness.⁸

Sin and sickness have passed from me to Calvary, and salvation and health have passed from Calvary to me.⁹

Healing is a gift, like salvation, already paid for at Calvary. All we need to do is accept it. All we need to do is to possess the promise that is ours. As children of God, we need to realise that *healing belongs to us*.¹⁰

Charismatic View of Healing in the Atonement

One of the prominent arguments used by Kenneth Hagin as well as others in the Charismatic movement to promote healing, is the argument that “... all Christians should expect God to heal their bodies today, because Christ died to atone for our sicknesses as well as for our sins.”¹¹ This argument is alleged by them to be the true interpretation of Isaiah 53:4-5, “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of

our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” This interpretation is cited by Hagin to be the proven exegesis of a Scotch-Canadian Presbyterian pastor and professor of Greek and Hebrew languages at Manitoba University in Canada called T J McCrossan whose book—*Bodily Healing and the Atonement*—is regarded by Hagin as a classic (though it has been out of print for half a century). Hagin claims that “From an in-depth study of Isaiah 53 and 1 Peter 2:24, Dr. McCrossan proves that the original manuscripts leave no room for doubt—Christ died for our sicknesses as He died for our sins.”¹²

The crux of McCrossan’s interpretation of Isaiah 53:4-5 is that the Hebrew word for “griefs” really means “sicknesses,” and the Hebrew word for “sorrows” really means “pains,” so that Isaiah 53:4 should read, “Surely he hath borne our sicknesses and carried our pains.”¹³ And since the words “borne” and “carried” are used in the same passage for Christ’s vicarious bearing of our sins, it is to be concluded that Christ bore our sicknesses and pains vicariously in the same way that He bore our sins on the cross.¹⁴ McCrossan strengthens his proposition that literal sickness and physical pain is being referred to in this verse by citing Matthew’s use of Isaiah 53:4, “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matt 8:16-17). He then attempts to prove that this prediction of Christ’s work is one “which will not be completely fulfilled until the end of this Church age.”¹⁵ He also assures the literal meaning of the last phrase of Isaiah 53:5, “by his stripes we are healed,” postulating that this refers to the shedding of blood that resulted from the scourging that Christ suffered prior to His crucifixion. This view of interpreting Isaiah 53 was also shared by A J Gordon in his book—*The Ministry of Healing, or Miracles of Cure in All Ages*—who urged every transgressor “to accept the Lord Jesus as his sin-bearer, that he may no longer have to bear the pains and penalties of his disobedience;” so we should urge the sick “to accept Him as his pain-bearer.”¹⁶

If this interpretation of Isaiah 53:4-5 is true, then Christians who are not healed would have considerable reason to doubt their salvation also, since both healing and spiritual salvation are, according to this interpretation, derived from the same atonement. One who is truly saved should never fall sick, suffer any pain, or be afflicted with any disease,

THE DOCTRINE OF HEALING IN THE ATONEMENT

since Christ had endured all of these for us as our Substitute. A debt which has already been paid will not need to be paid again. How then should we regard Christians who fall sick, suffer, or are afflicted with disease?

It is evident that the right interpretation of this passage in Isaiah is crucial for Christians. The important doctrine of salvation would be tremendously affected by it.

APPROACH AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

Many Charismatic teachers tend to give equal weight, if not more weight, to arguments from experience. Their books often abound with claims of healings and deliverances that had taken place, but there is evidence that these claims were invalid and that the healings were questionable.¹⁷

All experiences must therefore be subject to the authority of the Scripture, as the apostle Peter said in comparing the Scriptures with his experience of the transfiguration of Christ: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19).

This paper is thus written with the assumption that the Scriptures have the final word on the matter of healing. Anything that is contradictory to the sound interpretation of the inspired Word of God is to be rejected no matter how seemingly good or expedient it may be.

The intention of this paper is to examine wrong concepts about the meaning of healing in the atonement of Jesus Christ through an in-depth exegetical study of Isaiah 53:4-6.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF ISAIAH

The issue of authorship of the prophecy of Isaiah has received much attention from modern scholarship since the rise of higher biblical criticism in the 18th century. Liberals have made unwarranted distinctions between various parts of the book, denying the fact that the whole book was written by one author, that is Isaiah, the son of Amoz (Isa 1:1) who lived in the kingdom of Judah before the Babylonian exile (740-680 BC).

The common objection raised by these scholars is that Isaiah did not write chapters 40-66. Some held that this latter part of the book was written by many authors. On the basis of literary styles, Bernhard Duhm

postulated that two authors were responsible for this section:

- (1) One who lived about 540 BC probably in Lebanon or northern Phoenicia (Chapters 40-55—“Deutero-Isaiah”).
- (2) One who probably lived in Jerusalem just before the time of Nehemiah’s activity, 400 BC (Chapters 55-66—“Trito-Isaiah”).¹⁸

This issue of authorship and date is important as it will affect the discussion of the historical background later on. If Isaiah 53 was written at the end of the exile and not before it (a difference of 140 years), the purpose of writing it would have been very different. However, the evidence for single authorship of the whole book is more than sufficient to settle the issue:

- (1) In the eyes of the New Testament, Isaiah was the author of the entire prophecy (21 references in the NT).
- (2) In the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus, the author attributes the work to Isaiah.
- (3) The title of the book (1:1) specifically states that Isaiah wrote it.
- (4) The author does not show a familiarity with the land or religion of Babylon, as we might expect if he was living among the captives.
- (5) The walls of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah are spoken of in the whole book as still standing.
- (6) If one begins to divide the book, it is impossible to rest with just two or three divisions.
- (7) The differences in the different sections can be explained by the different purposes and styles of the same author.
- (8) There is unity in the prophecy which is too often overlooked. There are words and expressions common to both parts.
- (9) The whole book of Isaiah seems to have been in existence when the books of Zephaniah, Nahum, Jeremiah and Zechariah were written.¹⁹

Isaiah 53:4-6 was therefore written before the Babylonian exile by the prophet Isaiah. As such it was written not to comfort the exiled Jews that there would be a return from Babylon, but rather, as prophecy for God’s people that He is sovereign and that in the midst of judgement He has a wonderful plan of salvation.²⁰

CONTEXT

Isaiah 53 has been called the “holy of holies” of Isaiah, and is one of the best known chapters in the Word of God. Polycarp, the early church writer, referred to it as the “golden passion” of the Old Testament.²¹ A study of the rich context in which this passage is found reveals why this chapter has such great importance.

Historical Context

Isaiah’s ministry was set in troublous times of Israel’s history. The northern kingdom was judged for her rank idolatry and fell to the Assyrians. The southern kingdom was insecure under the constant threat of attack. The Gentile superpower of Assyria waned only to be succeeded by the Babylonians. There was much international movement and intrigue amid this turmoil. Isaiah prophesied to the kings and the people of Judah with words of warning as well as with words of comfort. He “held strongly to the principle that Judah’s hope was not in armies or alliances, but in the promised protection of Yahweh. Judah was different from all lands. As a theocracy it was under the special electing love of God.”²²

Very little is known about the life of Isaiah, whose name means “the Lord is salvation.” According to Jewish tradition, he may have been related to the royal family and thus gained early access to the kings. He lived and ministered in Jerusalem for most of his life.²³

His ministry was not always a popular one. King Ahaz rejected his advice to trust in God for deliverance from Israel and Syria, rather than in the Assyrians (Isa 7). At other times he was influential. Hezekiah, the godly king, hearkened to him and listened to the Word of God he delivered (Isa 37:1-7, 21-35). Isaiah also dispensed medical advice when he instructed physicians to apply figs to Hezekiah’s boil (Isa 38:21).

Isaiah probably wrote chapters 40-66 after the great deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyrian conquest in about 701 BC (Isa 38). “The last chapters of Isaiah may have a background either in the Babylonian struggles for power of the late 8th century or the Babylonian renaissance under Esarhaddon.”²⁴ This may be the reason why they contain many passages prophesying Israel’s impending captivity under the Babylonians, and God’s promise to deliver them from this captivity.

Isaiah probably died shortly in the reign of Hezekiah’s wicked son. According to the pseudepigraphical work—*The Ascension of Isaiah*—

Isaiah was killed by being sawn in two during the rule of Manasseh (cf Heb 11:37). Although the Scriptures are silent about his death, it would have been characteristic of Isaiah to have condemned the gross wickedness of Manasseh and consequently to have suffered at his hands.²⁵

The historical context of Isaiah 53 therefore affirms that our passage of study falls within the last years of the prophet's ministry, and was meant to prepare God's people for the coming Babylonian captivity, emphasising confidence in God and in His purpose. But what is also probably true is that the book was written, "not merely for the prophet's contemporaries, but also for the future Church of God."²⁶

Book Context

The Book of Isaiah can be divided into three easily distinguishable sections:

- (1) (1-35) which deals largely with the Assyrian threat. This section was written in poetic form.
- (2) (36-39) which provides a historical interlude describing Assyria's defeat, fulfilling the prophecies Isaiah made concerning her in the first section. This section ends with a prediction of Babylonian conquest (39:6-8). It was written in prose form.
- (3) (40-66) which deals largely with the Babylonian captivity and return. This section reverts back to poetic form.²⁷

The third section (40-66) can be further subdivided into three divisions of nine chapters each:

- (1) (40-48) which emphasises the deliverances from Babylon and the doctrine of God:²⁸ (a) God will prepare the way for the exiles to return. (b) To prove His power and His love, God is portrayed as One who conducts a legal case against the nations and their idols (41:1; 43:9), and against Israel and her unbelief (43:26). (c) The uniqueness of Israel's God is underscored repeatedly as the lawsuit develops. (d) The important theme of the Servant is introduced.
- (2) (49-57) which could be entitled "Salvation through the Servant", with a corresponding emphasis on soteriology. (a) The theme of salvation is developed in its world-wide dimensions. (b) An invitation is extended to the whole world to avail itself of this salvation (55). (c) This emphasis on Gentile conversion was a warning to Jewish idolaters and Sabbath breakers that their nationality did not guarantee their salvation (56:9-12; 57:1-13).

(3) (58-66) which focus on the theme, “salvation in the last days,” or eschatology. (a) References to the return from Babylon fade into the background, and greater emphasis is placed on the second coming, the millennial rule, and the new heavens and new earth. (b) Judgement for the wicked is also promised. (c) Only believing individuals within Israel may hope to enjoy God’s blessings.

Throughout the whole book of Isaiah, God’s special relationship with Israel is presupposed. This links the book with the covenant, which is the overarching theme of Old Testament theology.²⁹

The book context of Isaiah therefore brings us to the understanding that Isaiah 53 was designed to give God’s people hope while they were in the shadow of the impending Babylonian captivity, and to bring them into a deeper commitment to God for His salvation which will be gloriously wrought for all by His Servant, and will climax in the year of the Lord’s favour (ie, the last days).

There are also some theological themes running through the book of Isaiah that appear in our passage:

(1) *The judgement of sin by a holy God:* (a) This theme first appears in chapter 1 where Israel is rebuked for her sins “they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger” (Isa 1:4). Israel’s sinfulness is portrayed as total sickness. (b) Sins such as pride are condemned and terrible punishment is prescribed for those who commit them (eg 2:6-22). (c) Because of God’s holiness, Isaiah’s encounter with God in chapter 6 gives him a smarting sense of sin (“uncleanness”). (d) In Isaiah 53:4-6, the hope is given that the great burden of judgement of sin by a holy God is to be borne not by those who deserve it but by the Servant. (e) Sin makes all men as unclean as filthy rags in God’s sight and takes men away like the wind (Isa 64:6).

(2) *The blotting out of sin by a loving God:* (a) This theme also appears first in chapter 1 where God extends His invitation to Israel “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (1:18). (b) Hezekiah’s prayer in 38:9-20 reflects this theme: “for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” (v 17). (c) At the beginning of the third section of the book (40-66) this theme appears again with great emphasis as it now becomes the whole basis for comforting Israel: “Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath

received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (40:2). (d) God's graciousness is again mentioned in Isaiah 43:25 "I, even I, am he that blotted out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." (e) Again, in 44:22: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." (f) This theme reaches its climax in Isaiah 53:4-5 where the means of this "blotting out," "pardon," "casting behind (God's) back," and "making white as snow/wool" is spelled out plainly by the Servant's atonement.

(3) *The suffering Servant who does the will of God:* (a) The servant theme begins perhaps with Isaiah himself who received His call to be God's servant in 6:1-8 (cf, 20:3—"my servant Isaiah"). (b) God's appointed magistrate—Eliakim the son of Hilkiah—is also designated God's servant (22:20). (c) David is likewise designated God's Servant (37:35). (d) The nation of Israel had been called to this high standing as God's servant (41:8,9; 44:1) but had failed (42:19,20).³⁰ (e) But it is the supreme servant of the Lord who fulfills Israel's destiny of taking light to the nations: "And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."³¹ (f) Isaiah 53:4-6 which we are concerned with, is really a part of a passage describing this supreme Servant (Isa 52:13-53:12). This Servant's accomplishments and resulting exaltation are described here in detail.

Understanding these three themes in the book of Isaiah will help to keep us from arriving at an interpretation that is inconsistent with the rest of the book.

Literary Context

The determination of the literary genre of a passage is essential as it will decide the principles that are to be used to approach it. As a literary genre, poetry is one that requires much care and effort to study, as it is often full of intricacies, complexities and figures of speech. Poetry is not only meant to convey facts and information, but emotions, moods and feelings as well. The poetry of Isaiah is no exception. Wolf comments,

Scholars have long marvelled at the literary beauty and at the depth and power of Isaiah's poetry. Most of the Book of Isaiah was written in parallelism, the primary form of Hebrew poetry. Isaiah employed a wide variety of poetic devices in individual verses, ...³²

Four Servant Passages

Most interpreters of Isaiah recognise four particular passages within the third section of the book (40-66). These have been called "Servant passages" (E J Young) or "Servant Songs" (Berhard Duhm; a misnomer however, for there is no evidence that they were ever sung³³). These passages are: 42:1-7—1st Servant passage, 49:1-9a—2nd Servant passage, 50:4-11—3rd Servant passage, 52:13-53:12—4th Servant passage.³⁴

These four passages clearly form an identifiable series and it looks as if Isaiah is gradually educating his readers as to the deep significance of the Servant.³⁵

As our study in this paper concerns only Isaiah 53:4-6, we shall confine ourselves to the 4th Servant passage.

Structure of Passage

The 4th Servant passage appears to have the structure of a poem. Kidner³⁶ elaborates that it consists of five stanzas or strophes with three verses each.³⁷ This is portrayed in Table 1 (see next page).

The above table reveals an interesting compositional pattern inherent in the 4th Servant passage: the themes of the stanza are symmetrical.

It begins and ends with the Servant's exaltation; set within this is the story of his rejection in sections two and four, which in turn form the centre-piece (vv 4-6) where the atoning significance of the suffering is expounded. God and man, reconciled, share the telling (see the 'my' and 'I' of the outer sections, and the 'we' and 'our' of 53:1-6).³⁸

This pattern adds beauty to this passage and adds greater significance to verses 4-6 which becomes the central idea that the author intended to display, like a gem set in a gold frame, in order to enhance its beauty. The costly substitutionary atonement of the Suffering Servant is the dominant theme being presented to the readers, and this must be taken into consideration in the exegesis of verses 4-6.

TABLE 1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE FOURTH SERVANT PASSAGE

Stanza	1 st Stanza (Isa 52:13-15)	2 nd Stanza (Isa 53:1-3)	3 rd Stanza (Isa 53:4-6)	4 th Stanza (Isa 53:7-9)	5 th Stanza (Isa 53:10-12)
Bible Text	Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.	Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.	Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.	He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.	Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.
Subject	Exaltation	Suffering	Substitutionary Atonement	Suffering	Exaltation
Speaker	God	Men	Men	God	God & Men
Theme Sentence	"so shall he sprinkle many nations"	"despised and rejected of men"	"the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"	"for the transgression of my people was he stricken"	"my righteous servant justify many"

Poetic Devices Used

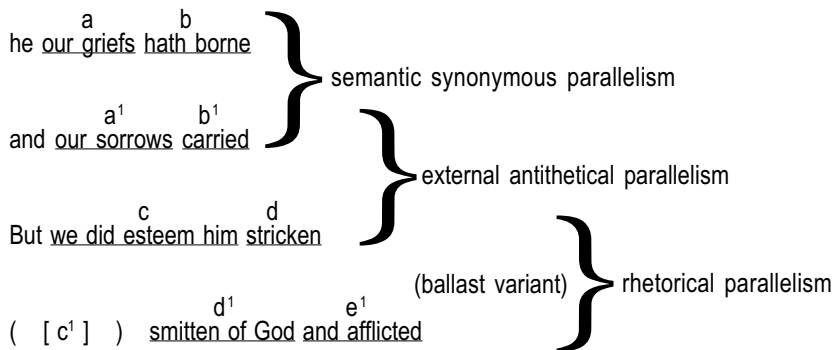
Parallelism

The most dominant stylistic feature of poetry in the Old Testament according to Robert Lowth (in 1753) is parallelism. This is defined by him as follows:

The correspondence of one verse or line with another, I call parallelism. When a proposition is delivered, and a second is subjoined to it, or drawn under it, equivalent, or contrasted with it in sense, or similar to it in the form of grammatical construction, these I call parallel lines; and the words or phrases, answering one to another in the corresponding lines, parallel terms.³⁹

Parallelism may occur in pairs (couplets), in threes (triads) or in fours (quatrains) and may be semantic rhetorical . An analysis of the central stanza of the 4th Servant passage of Isaiah 53:4-6 reveals the following parallelisms:

v 4 Surely [anacrusis: a technical poetical device in which a single word (it may be an interrogative or an exclamation such as “How” in Lam 1:1) stands outside of the basic pattern of balance and parallelism in the couplets or strophes. The presence of these words has an effect on all that follows them.]⁴⁰



The external antithetical parallelism that exists between the two pairs of couplets in this verse creates a stark contrast between Christ's work and our response. The first couplet is parallel in meaning as well as form. The second couplet is in rhetorical parallelism, which contains two rhetorical

devices to increase both the beauty and simplicity of the meaning: (1) deletion of the verb [c¹] in the second line, and (2) addition of a ballast variant [e¹] to retain the same general bulk or shape of the couplet.⁴¹

v 5

f

g

But he was wounded for our transgressions

f¹

g¹

he was bruised for our iniquities

}

semantic synonymous
parallelism

h

i

the chastisement of our peace (was) upon him

i¹

h¹

and by his stripes we are healed

}

chiasm

This verse contains two couplets with similar ideas, but the second couplet provides a further development: the idea of benefit gained by us is added to the idea of substitution of the first couplet. The second couplet contains a chiasm. This is a technique in which the poet reverses the order of a series of nouns or the arrangement of the parts of a sentence.⁴² Hence the second line reads, “By his stripes we are healed,” instead of “We are healed by his stripes.”

v 6

j

k

All we, like sheep have gone astray

j¹

k¹

Every one of us, to his own way have turned

}

semantic synonymous
parallelism

And the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The last verse of the stanza has only one couplet, followed by a sentence that seems to be in typical prose form rather than poetic. Perhaps this last line is the theme of the whole stanza stated plainly, devoid of all embellishments, to express the central idea of verses 4-6 clearly to the reader.

The interesting feature about this verse is that it begins and ends with

THE DOCTRINE OF HEALING IN THE ATONEMENT

the same word כָּלָנוּ (“all we” or “we all”). This poetic device is called *inclusio*, and here, it is used to emphasise the idea that we are the reason why the Servant had to suffer.

The three verses (vv 4-6) when seen together seem to have a regular pattern: All three begin with a couplet which is in semantic synonymous parallelism, and all three end with something different. The Servant is the dominant subject of verse 4, but those for whom He suffered are the dominant subject of verse 6. The transition seems to have taken place at the chiasm in verse 5b.

It seems clear that verses 4-6 must therefore be seen as one unit, expressing in poetical form, one essential idea—the suffering due to our sins that was endured by the suffering Servant. Seen from this viewpoint which takes into account the poetical nature of this passage, we can infer that most of the words used in it really belong to only two semantic fields (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: SEMANTIC FIELDS IN ISAIAH 53:4-6	
Semantic Field A	Semantic Field B
OUR LIABILITY	HIS SATISFACTION
our griefs	he hath borne ... and carried
our sorrows	he was bruised
our transgressions	he was wounded
our iniquities	his stripes
we ... have gone astray	the LORD hath laid on him ...
everyone ... have turned to his own way	
the iniquity of us all	

This grouping into semantic fields will be useful in determining how the scope of meaning of the words are limited by the context.

Figurative Terms and Symbols

Expressive language such as poetry often employs figurative terms to convey unfamiliar concepts in more familiar terms as well as to enhance the variety and richness of expression. Wolf comments on Isaiah's use of such symbols,

His similes and metaphors are based on a wide range of subjects, including items as mundane as chaff and as spectacular as the cedars of Lebanon. The variety and scope of his imagery helps to drive his message firmly into the hearts and minds of his readers ... Isaiah was a keen observer of nature and human behaviour, a fact that contributes to the beauty and forcefulness of his prophecy.⁴³

At times it is therefore necessary for us to determine if a word used by Isaiah is to be taken in its literal or natural meaning, or in a figurative sense. This can be seen quite obviously in the similes used in Isaiah 53:

“For he shall grow up before him as a *tender plant*, and as a *root out of a dry ground*” (v 2). “*All we like sheep have gone astray ...*” (v 6).

“... he is brought as a *lamb to the slaughter*, and as a *sheep before her shearers* is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (v 7).

Some other figurative terms are however not as apparent and they are often called metaphors—an implied or unexpressed comparison where an idea is carried over from one element to another without directly or expressly saying that A is “like” (or “as”) B; A is B.⁴⁴

In our passage of study some possible metaphors may be found in “... he hath borne our griefs (sicknesses), and carried our sorrows (pains)” (v 4), and in “... with his stripes we are healed” (v 5). In order to devise a strictly literal interpretation of the words “sicknesses,” “pains,” and “healed” (as many Charismatic teachers have done) one would have to exclude entirely the possibility that these were being used here in a figurative sense. The metaphorical nature of these words in this context will be discussed later on.

Prophecy

Despite the view expressed by Jewish scholars that Isaiah 53 refers to Israel,⁴⁵ or the view by modernists and liberals that the Servant referred to in Isaiah 53 is “Deutero-Isaiah,”⁴⁶ it is clear that His identity is none other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ. One only needs to look at the New Testament references to this passage to confirm this:

And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias ... He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: ... And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.⁴⁷

It is also clear that at least verse 5 of the passage must refer to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, as Peter the apostle provides this link: “Who his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet 2:24). Therefore what Isaiah was prophesying was the substitutionary atonement fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Timothy Tow comments on verses 4-6,

In these verses we have a perspicuous picture of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. The substitutionary atonement, which is attacked by modernist and liberal theologian as a “denominational” doctrine, is being refuted.⁴⁸

The point established here will be of value in the later discussion of how the theological scope of this passage affects its interpretation.

Having explored the context of our passage, we shall now proceed to analyse the three verses (Isa 53:4-6) bearing in mind the limitations imposed by the findings from our contextual study.

ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH 53:4-6

Verse 4

Text

אָבֵן חַלְיָנוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמַכָּאֲבֵינוּ סָבַלָם וְאַנְחֵנוּ חָשְׁבָנָהוּ נָגַע מַכָּה אֱלֹהִים וּמַעֲנָה:

“Surely our sicknesses He lifted up and our pains he carried but we judged him stricken, being smitten of God and being afflicted.”

The first couplet of this verse is introduced with particle (אָבֵן) which affirms the statement that follows it, introducing a certain grandeur.⁴⁹

Unusual Word Order

It is striking to note that what immediately follows this affirmative particle is not the verb, as one would expect in Hebrew syntax, but the *direct object* (“our illness”). The same thing happens with the second phrase where “our pains” comes before the verb “he carried.” This device draws the reader’s attention to these two nouns, both of which have the

pronominal suffix “our” attached to them.

Antecedents of the Direct Objects

This attention can be explained when it is realised that these two nouns had their antecedents in the previous verse: “a man of sorrows (pains) and acquainted with grief (sickness).” Here, however, the pronominal suffixes are absent. It is evident therefore that the addition of the pronominal suffixes to these words in the next verse are the points of main emphasis; hence “Surely *our* sicknesses He lifted up and *our* pains He carried ...”

We need to ask ourselves then: What purpose did Isaiah have, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to stress the point that the “illnesses” and “pains” that the Servant was acquainted with, was in fact ours, even though they were the cause for the rejection He suffered from men? In what sense was Jesus bearing our “pains” and “sicknesses,” and was despised because of that?

Cause of the Rejection of the Servant

No part of the gospels can be adduced to prove that Jesus literally became sick and suffered pain from literal disease for us, and then suffered rejection on account of that. However, we read of the rejection that He endured on the cross:

And it was the third hour, and they crucified him ... And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross.⁵⁰

It is clear from the above passage that Jesus was despised and rejected when He was on the cross because the act of crucifixion itself implied bearing the punishment for wrongdoing. “He was numbered with the transgressors,” indicates that onlookers regarded the sufferings that Jesus endured as evidence that He must also be a transgressor. This consideration would tend to rule out the literal interpretation of “pains” and “sicknesses” in Isaiah 53:4.

Usage of “Sicknesses” and “Pains”

A study of the usage of these two key words will be helpful at this point. The word “illnesses” (which is translated in the KJV as “griefs”) is from the Hebrew **צָרָה** which appears 23 times in the Old Testament and four times in the book of Isaiah (of which two are in Isa 53:3,4). It is translated in the KJV as “sickness” 12 times (eg, in Deut 7:15, 28:59,61; 1 Kgs 17:17). There are at least two instances where this does not necessarily mean *literal* sickness:

The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his *sickness*. I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: *heal my soul: for I have sinned against thee*.⁵¹

When Ephraim saw his *sickness*, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.⁵²

It is also translated as “disease” six times in the KJV (eg, 2 Kgs 1:2; 8:8,9) all of which refer to literal disease. But, on the other hand, the word “griefs” is used to translate the same word four times, and other than the two instances in Isaiah 53:3,4, the only instances of this are found in Jeremiah 6:7 and 10:19 which plainly bear a *figurative meaning*:

As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she (Jerusalem) casteth out *her wickedness*: violence and spoil is heard in her; before me continually is *grief* and wounds ... Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a *grief*, and I must bear it.⁵³

Finally the same word is used in a figurative sense to describe the sinfulness of the nation of Israel in Isaiah 1:4-5 where it is translated as “sick” in the KJV:

Ah *sinful nation*, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is *sick*, and the whole heart faint.⁵⁴

The figurative use of **צָרָה** is therefore well-established and one of the main meanings of its figurative usage is sinfulness, especially with reference to a nation.⁵⁵

The word “pains” (which is translated in the KJV as “sorrows”) is from the Hebrew word **כָּאֵב** and is found in the book of Isaiah, only in 53:3-4. There are, however, 14 other instances of its use in the rest of the

Old Testament. The KJV translates it as “sorrows” 12 times, as “pains” twice, and as “grief” twice. In general, though it can be used to express physical suffering, it much more commonly has to do with mental anguish.⁵⁶ For example:

Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy *sorrow* is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee.⁵⁷

The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my *sorrow*: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.⁵⁸

There is therefore also a figurative usage for this word, as there is for חָזָן and one which is also used with reference to sinfulness.

Isaiah’s Figurative Usage of “Sickness”

Now that it has been established that these two words can be used figuratively, we need to determine if Isaiah intended them to be thus understood in Isaiah 53:4. In our preceding study of the context we had seen that (1) the judgement of sin and the blotting out of sin by God were themes that ran throughout the whole book of Isaiah; (2) by virtue of the poetic nature of the passage, one essential idea was being expressed in Isaiah 53:4-6, and therefore “griefs (illnesses)” and “sorrows (pains)” were really in the same semantic field as “transgressions” and “iniquities;” (3) poetry is often rich in figures of speech or metaphors. These provide three strong arguments in favour of the idea that Isaiah intended these two words to be understood as figures referring to sinfulness or sin, and not to be understood literally.

This would be consistent with the figurative usage of “sickness” in Isaiah. This figure in fact, begins in the very first chapter of the book, where Israel’s sinfulness is likened to a *totally sick body*:

... the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.⁵⁹

This figure is used again to indicate a change of Israel’s condition in future, “And the inhabitant shall not say, *I am sick*: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.”⁶⁰ (We shall see later how this figure is used in conjunction with the figure of “healing” used by Isaiah.) This view of Isaiah’s usage of “sickness” is shared by many:

Again, the picture is not that of one whose body is weakened by physical sickness, for the word *sickness* here stands for sin. Isaiah is using the same figure he had earlier employed (1:5b,6).⁶¹

Iniquity is used four times in Isaiah 53 and identifies the passage's major emphasis. In verse 5, Christ was crushed for our *iniquities*; so that in verse 6, the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him; in verse 11, that He will bear their iniquities, and in verse 12, that He Himself bore the sins of many. The primary thrust of Isaiah 53 is on the spiritual and the eternal effects of sin, not on its physical and immediate effects upon the body.⁶²

... it is certain that he was appointed not to cure bodies, but rather to cure souls; for it is of spiritual disease that the Prophet intends to speak.⁶³

Verse 4a views our punishment figuratively in terms of the visitation of disease ... while v4b shows the onlookers coming to the grievously wrong conclusion that the Servant was suffering for his own sins at the hand of God.⁶⁴

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament—the Septuagint—also seems to support the idea that the word “sickness” is to be taken as a figure for sins, for in it, Isaiah 53:4a is rendered thus, οὗτος τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν φέρει καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν ὀδυνᾶται, “He bears our sins, and is pained for us.”⁶⁵

“Bearing” and “Carrying”

Alva J McClain prefers to assume the literal sense of “sicknesses” and “pains” in Isaiah 53:4a, but he takes a stand against the doctrine of healing in the atonement by postulating,

The passage does not say that Christ *died* or *suffered* for the infirmities of men. He “took” them. The same verb is used in Matt 5:40, “If any man ... *take away* thy coat ...” Everyone knows exactly what this means. It is a practical, not a judicial act. Even so our Lord took away sicknesses of men in His day by healing them. Furthermore, in the case of the other expression, “bare our sicknesses,” the, Greek verb here is never used in the New Testament with reference to our Lord’s atoning death.⁶⁶

The weakness of this argument is that it violates the meaning of the words “bear” (נָשָׂא) and “carry” (כָּבַל) as they are used within the same context of the 4th Servant passage. The atonement is clearly implied in the use of the same words that are found in verses 11 and 12:

... by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall *bear* [כָּבַל] their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the

great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he *bare* [נָשָׂא] the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.⁶⁷

The appearance of the same words that are used in Isaiah 53:4a in verses 11 and 12 lends support to the view that Isaiah 53:4a (“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows”) refers to Christ’s atonement for sins on the cross. Keil and Delitzsch concur with this understanding,

For whist נָשָׂא denotes the toilsome bearing of a burden that has been taken up, נָשָׂא combines in itself the ideas of *tollere* [tolerate] and *ferre* [bear]. When construed with the accusative of the sin, it signifies to take the debt of sin upon one’s self, and carry it as one’s own, i.e. to look at it and feel it as one’s own (eg, Lev v.1,17), or more frequently to bear the punishment occasioned by sin, i.e. to make expiation for it ... in the case before us, where it is not the sins, but “our diseases” ... and “our pains” that are the object, this mediatorial sense remains essentially the same. The meaning is not merely that the Servant of God entered into the fellowship of our sufferings, but that He took upon Himself the sufferings which we had to bear and deserved to bear, and therefore not only took them away ..., but bore them in His own person, that He might deliver us from them.⁶⁸

The only way then to interpret “griefs” and “sorrows” which literally mean “sicknesses” and “pains” without advocating healing in the atonement, is by taking these two nouns figuratively, as referring to sins.

Verse 5

Text

וְהוּא מִחֻלָּל מִפְשָׁעֵנוּ מִדָּפָא מִעֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו וּבִחְבֻרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא לָנוּ:

And He was being pierced for our transgressions, was being crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace (was) upon Him and by His wound it is healed for us (literal translation).

Of the two couplets in this verse the first follows a regular pattern and the second has a chiasitic structure. The idea of substitution is very clearly developed in the first couplet which in some ways is similar to verse 4a (“Surely our sicknesses He lifted up and our pains he carried ...”) except for the regular word order here, in which the direct object is placed at the end of each phrase. The verbs feature more prominently here than in verse 4a.

Act of “Piercing” and “Crushing”

The emphasis given to them demonstrates perhaps a shift of attention intended by the inspired author, from the plain fact of the substitutionary atonement (v 4) to the intensity of the act of it (v 5) and its great accomplishment. The use of passive participles to express the verbal idea instead of Qal perfect forms (as in v 4a) adds to this shift. Figures are no longer used for the direct objects, but rather words that bear simple literal sense (“transgression,” “iniquities”). The focus is therefore no longer on them, but on the verbs.

Since emphasis on the verbs is clearly intended, we must then ask: In what sense was the Servant “pierced” and “crushed?” Once again, the only occasion in the Gospels that fits the magnitude or the event portrayed by these words, is the time Jesus hung on the cross.

The first verb **לָלַץ** is found in the rare Poel form. This form is found only in Isaiah, and there is only one other instance besides Isaiah 53.5 where it is found—Isaiah 51:9b: “Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and *wounded* the dragon?” Perhaps a better translation for the verb in both instances would be “pierced through.” Barnes elaborates,

There is probably the idea of painful piercing, and it refers to some infliction of positive wounds on the body, and not to mere mental sorrows, or to general humiliation ... Applied to the actual sufferings of the Messiah, it refers undoubtedly to the piercing of his hands, his feet, and his side.⁶⁹

The second verb **סָבַד** occurs 18 times in the Old Testament and five times in the book of Isaiah. It is translated “beat to pieces” in 3:15, “broken” in 19:10, and “contrite” in 57:15. When the idea is applied to the mind and used of the Messiah, it designates the most severe inward and outward suffering.⁷⁰ The combination of these two words convey a very graphic picture of the total suffering and torment that Christ endured when He was crucified. We state boldly therefore that verse 5a must always be understood with reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

“With His Stripes We are Healed”

The word “stripes” is from the Hebrew **חַבְרֵה** which may also be translated as “bruises” (Isa 1:6), “hurt” (Gen 4:23), and “wounds” (Ps 38:5). Therefore, it does not only refer to the stripes of scourging that Jesus received before His crucifixion, but also to the wounds He received

at the time of His crucifixion. (Hence the NIV translation, “by his wounds we are healed.”)

But greater attention needs to be paid here to the exact meaning of “we are healed.” In what sense has our healing been accomplished by Christ’s suffering? The first consideration that will help us to understand this “healing” is that the verb “to heal” here is in the perfect tense which denotes an already accomplished act. And since all verbs that are in the perfect tense in verse 5 as well as in the whole passage are used to refer to the same event, it does not seem likely that the act of healing here refers to another event yet future to the crucifixion. Its accomplishment is therefore, not postponed, but has already taken place. This consideration tends to rule out the possibility that this healing is to be understood as literal, physical healing. It is inconceivable that the healing of physical diseases should be accomplished *before* they even appeared. Non-existent diseases do not need healing! The healing of physical diseases can take place only after the diseases have been manifested. Therefore, the phrase “we are healed” in Isaiah 53:5 cannot refer to physical healing.

If we remember however (1) that this whole passage was written in poetical form, (2) poetry often employs figures of speech or metaphors, (3) figurative usage of “sickness” has been made within the same context, then a solution is offered in the figurative usage of “we are healed.”

Once again, we can find a consistency in Isaiah’s figurative usage of “healing:”

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be *healed*.⁷¹

And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and *heal* it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall *heal* them.⁷²

Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and *healeth* the stroke of their wound.⁷³

For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will *heal* him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.⁷⁴

Spiritual Healing

In all of these instances the word “heal” translates the Hebrew word **שָׁפַר** which is used 67 times in the Old Testament. This word has a figurative usage in many other books beside Isaiah where spiritual healing is obviously meant:

He *healeth* the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.⁷⁵

Return, ye backsliding children, and I will *heal* your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.⁷⁶

I will *heal* their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.⁷⁷

But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with *healing* in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.⁷⁸

Many eminent writers concur with this figurative understanding of “healing” in Isaiah 53:5,

The *healing* here referred to, is spiritual healing, a healing from sin. Pardon of sin, and restoration to the favour of God, are not unfrequently represented as an act of *healing*. The figure is derived from the fact that awakened and convicted sinners are often represented as crushed, broken, bruised by the weight of their transgressions, and the removal of the load of sin is represented as an act of healing. ‘I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee’ (Ps xli.4).⁷⁹

Was Isaiah talking about physical healing? A study of Isaiah shows that the prophet was talking about *the spiritual* healing that Israel needed so desperately ... When Isaiah 53 talks about the Suffering Servant by whose stripes Israel will be healed, it is talking about *spiritual* healing, not physical.⁸⁰

The reference in verse 5 is not to physical healing but to spiritual healing ... one who has looked to Jesus Christ for salvation can know that his sins are laid upon Christ, and that as a result of what Christ has done he has been spiritually healed and can live with Christ through all eternity. It is not a promise of physical healing but of spiritual healing.⁸¹

The most appealing feature of this view perhaps, is that it completes the metaphor of “sickness” for “sins” by providing the counterpart of “healing” for “forgiveness.” It beautifies the expression of showing the divine benevolence obtained for us, by the figure of “healing.” It adds the dimension of wholeness restored to those whose sins, like a dreaded disease, have debilitated them beyond hope.

Verse 6

כָּלֵנוּ כְּצֹאֵן תָּעִינוּ אִישׁ לְדֶרֶכוֹ כִּי־נִדְּחָה הַפְּגִיעַ בּוֹ אֶת־עֵיִן כָּלֵנוּ:

“We all like sheep had gone astray; we (each) man to his own path had turned and the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to strike him.”

This verse comprises a couplet and a statement, forming one unit. The couplet presents the idea of sin using the figure of sheep getting lost from the right path (cf, Exod 23:4 and Ps 119:176) as the reason for the Servant’s suffering. The usual order of Hebrew syntax has given way here to the placement of the subject (“we all,” “each man”) first. This shows perhaps an intended emphasis on the ones who receive the benefits of the Servant’s sufferings, both corporately and individually.

The striking feature about the figure employed in this verse is that it cannot be construed in any way to refer to physical sickness or disease unlike the figure used in verse 4a. The “going astray” in Isaiah 53:6 refers to sin. This makes it consistent with verse 5a, “But he was wounded for our *transgressions*, he was bruised for our iniquities,” and with verse 6b, “and the LORD laid on him the *iniquity* of us all.”

When we take this consideration into account, it becomes obvious that we cannot take “sickness” in verse 4a and “healing” in verse 5b literally without violating the context, which is dominated by the theme of sin. When any interpretation of a word is derived without considering its context the wrong interpretation will result, even if it is based on the literal sense of the word in question. “Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text.”⁸²

The above analysis of Isaiah 53:4-6 enables us to see that the only interpretation of “sickness” and “healing” that is consistent with the text, context, and syntax of the passage is that these were used figuratively, and must be understood as “sin” (spiritual sickness) and “forgiveness” (spiritual healing) respectively.

However, we need to consider also how the New Testament writers who quoted from those verses, understood them.

NEW TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS OF ISAIAH 53:4-6

The New Testament has more quotations from the book of Isaiah than from all the other prophetic books put together.⁸³ In the Four Gospels alone there are 13 quotations from Isaiah by name; in the book of

Acts, four; and in Paul's epistle to the Romans, four. It also seems striking that out of all these quotes, one-third are from the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. In addition to these there are also a number of references and allusions made to the book of Isaiah where his name is not mentioned (eg, 1 Pet 2:24). The significance of these quotes and references is that many of them concern Christ, and foretell His birth, earthly life, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation. Only the Psalms have more material about Christ than Isaiah.⁸⁴ All of these seem to indicate that the New Testament writers regarded the book of Isaiah as most explicitly foretelling and expounding the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is therefore important for us to understand how these writers used these quotes concerning Christ.

The two New Testament passages that we are concerned with in this study are Matthew 8:14-17 and 1 Peter 2:21-25.

Matthew 8:14-17

And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them. When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

Matthew quoted from Isaiah 53:4, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ..." and applied it to a different context from the one in Isaiah. In order to understand the writer's purpose for doing this, some observations need to be made first.

Matthew's quote does not follow the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 53:4. The Septuagint reads, οὗτος τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν φέρει καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν ὀδυνᾶται, "He bears our sins, and is pained for us."⁸⁵ Matthew 8:17b reads, Αὐτὸς τὰς ἀσθενείας ἡμῶν ἔλαβε, καὶ τὰς νόσους ἐβάστασεν,⁸⁶ "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (KJV). Most likely, Matthew was making his own translation of the Hebrew.⁸⁷ The number of such Old Testament quotations in Matthew with such a text form is about 10-14.⁸⁸

Matthew uses ἀσθενίας instead of ἁμαρτίας which was used in the Septuagint to translate "griefs" (Heb 'לָגַן). It would seem as if he was choosing deliberately to emphasise the literal sense in his quote, rather than

to follow the Septuagint's spiritual sense. Matthew's Jewish readers who were familiar with the Septuagint would have noticed this deliberate change.

Matthew uses λαμβάνω instead of φέρω which was used in the Septuagint to translate "bear" (Heb נָשָׂא). This change tends to move away from the idea of substitutionary "bearing," and toward the plain idea of "taking away." Richard Mayhue concurs with this:

The words in Matthew 8 means "to take away from," not "to bear." That difference helps us to understand what Jesus was teaching. The words used to translate Isaiah 53:4 mean "to sacrificially bear;" thus, the idea that "He took our sins upon Him."

However, Matthew is saying here that Christ took away their sicknesses. Christ did not bear in a substitutionary sense the sickness of Peter's mother-in-law. He didn't say, "Move fever from her to Me." He just touched her and it was gone. Neither did he bear the afflictions of those who were ill nor the spirits of those who were possessed (8:16).⁸⁹

The other word that Matthew uses (βαστάζω) to translate the Hebrew word נָשָׂא is a Greek verb that is never used in the New Testament to refer to the substitutionary atonement. According to McNeile, with whom A T Robertson agrees, the verb βαστάζω "as Matthew employs it, has no bearing on the doctrine of the atonement."⁹⁰ Here again we see the writer *deliberately* shifting away from the idea of substitutionary atonement, by the choice of the words he uses in his quotation.

These observations "indicate a strong possibility that Matthew was deliberately using the quote from Isaiah differently under the Holy Spirit's inspiration for a certain intended effect, which excludes claiming that Jesus' healing ministry was predictively prophesied by Isaiah in Isaiah 53:4. That effect was rather, an illustrative one.

Matthew employed a normal illustrative use of the Old Testament. He found a point of continuity, a point of identity between Isaiah 53 and Christ's healing ministry at Capernaum.⁹¹

Illustration may be the writer's intention rather than fulfilment of predictive prophecy, even though the quotation is preceded by the words, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, ..." The verb "to fulfill" (πληρόω) sometimes has broader significance than mere one-to-one prediction.

... though the NT used πληρώ in a number of ways, we are primarily concerned with what is meant by “fulfilling” the Scriptures. Included under this head are specific predictions, typological fulfilments, and even the entire eschatological hope epitomised in the OT by God’s covenant with his people.⁹²

One striking example of such a use of the Old Testament which is posited as fulfilled by Jesus is found in Matthew 2:14,15,

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Here, Matthew was in fact quoting Hosea 11:1, which reads in full, “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” The verses that follow this make it clear that Hosea was referring to the redemption of the nation of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt about 1440 BC. Matthew was not claiming that Hosea was prophesying the time that the Messiah would spend in Egypt. Evidently this quotation was meant to serve as an illustration, based on the correspondence of Israel, and Christ, who is “the locus of true Israel.”⁹³

But did Matthew have the context of Isaiah 53 in mind at all when he quoted part of it with reference to Jesus in Matthew 8:17? According to D A Carson, it is likely that he did:

It is generally understood since the work of C. H. Dodd ... that when the NT quotes a brief OT passage, it often refers implicitly to the entire context of the quotation. This is very likely here, for Matthew has a profound understanding of the OT. Moreover, Isaiah 53:7 is probably alluded to in Matthew 27:12, Isaiah 53:9 in Matthew 27:57, and Isaiah 53:10-12 in Matthew 20:28, the latter in a context affirming vicarious atonement theology. Any interpretation of verse 17 that does not take into account the thrust of the entire Servant Song is therefore dubious.⁹⁴

By using a portion of the passage on Christ’s substitutionary atonement illustratively in Jesus’ healing ministry, Matthew may perhaps be alerting the reader to a deeper significance behind this healing ministry. He may be indicating to us that it is actually linked to the atoning death of Jesus on the cross, even though this was to take place much later on. The correspondence made between Christ’s healing ministry and Christ’s atonement for sins through Isaiah 53:4 would perhaps indicate that the Lord who was now dealing with the consequences of sin, was about to

deal, once and for all, with sin itself. For Matthew, Jesus' healing miracles pointed beyond themselves to the Cross. In this, Matthew "is like the evangelist John, whose "signs" similarly point beyond themselves."⁹⁵

This view is very similar to the one held by Calvin in his commentary on Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 53:4,

Matthew quotes this prediction, after having related that Christ cured various disease; though it is certain that he was appointed not to cure bodies, but rather to cure souls; *for it is of spiritual disease that the Prophet intends to speak. But in the miracles which Christ performed in curing bodies, he gave a proof of the salvation which he brings to our souls.* That healing had therefore a more extensive reference than to bodies, because he was appointed to be the physician of souls; and accordingly Matthew applies to the outward sign what belonged to the truth and reality.⁹⁶

We conclude that Matthew's use of Isaiah 53:4 was not intended to be understood as meaning that this prophecy was fulfilled two years before Christ bore our griefs and carried our sorrows on Calvary. Matthew's deliberate movement away from the idea of substitution which is found in the Hebrew text and its Septuagint translation helps us to understand that he intended the quote to be an illustration, which may perhaps point indirectly to the atonement that was yet to come.

1 Peter 2:21-25

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Peter quoted from Isaiah 53:5, "... the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Although he does not refer to it as a quote, the words he used correspond almost exactly to the Septuagint translation, except for the change of the possessive pronoun to the relative pronoun, and of the first person plural form of the verb to the second person plural, in order to fit the quote into context of his teaching. Hence, the reading: οὗ τῶ μώλωπι αὐτοῦ ἰάθητε.⁹⁷

THE DOCTRINE OF HEALING IN THE ATONEMENT

The context in which Peter used this quote has nothing at all to do with sickness or physical healing. The central idea is “He bore our sins.” Peter was exhorting his readers to follow Christ’s example and patiently endure unjust suffering. Christ’s suffering brought about atonement for our sins, and our emancipation from the dominion of sin over our lives (so that we can now live unto righteousness), as well as the climactic result of it all: our reconciliation with the Lord.

The context therefore shows that Peter was speaking of spiritual healing through Christ’s atonement, when he quoted from Isaiah 53:5. Hence, he was consistent with the original context of this verse in Isaiah.

As in the Old Testament, the word translated “healed” (ἰάομαι) is not limited in meaning to physical healing. One need only refer to a few passages to see this:

And certain women, which had been *healed* of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils.⁹⁸

For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should *heal* them.⁹⁹

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be *healed*.¹⁰⁰

Therefore we must be careful not to assume that Peter was referring to physical healing when he wrote “by whose stripes ye were healed.” New Testament usage allows other senses of “healing,” and the context certainly limits the sense in 1 Peter 2:24 to a spiritual one.

Our study of the New Testament writers’ quotations from Isaiah 53:4-6 has been of great value to demonstrate the fact that no inconsistency with the New Testament is created by understanding “sickness” and “healing” in the 4th Servant passage as literary figures for “sin” and “forgiveness” (spiritual healing) respectively.

This interpretation is, however, not only harmonious with the New Testament quotations discussed, but also with the whole of theology as well, as we shall see in the next section.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND OF HEALING

Isaiah 53 deals with one of the most important tenets of biblical doctrine: the atonement of Jesus Christ which brings salvation to us. This theme can be traced throughout the whole Bible. It was foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices as well as in the Day of the Atonement ritual (Lev 16). It is of worth to note that in all of these, the object of atonement was strictly sin, and not sickness. “And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel *for all their sins* once a year.”¹⁰¹

The Need for Atonement

The word “atonement” is derived from the Hebrew **כָּפַר** which is used some 150 times in the Old Testament, and denotes the process of making reconciliation.¹⁰² Such reconciliation is needed only because of the problem of *sin* that has estranged man from God and made him incapable of dealing with this same problem. But God Himself provides the way of reconciliation through the institution of the blood sacrifice: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the Soul.”¹⁰³

This divinely-ordained shedding of blood is thus the means by which the sin that estranges man from God, is to be dealt with acceptably, resulting in forgiveness and a reconciled relationship with God (“... and without shedding of blood is no remission” [Heb 9:22]).

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

But since “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:4) as these were only temporary foreshadows of the real, divine sacrifice, it was necessary that Christ should be “once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28). The atonement of Jesus Christ thus becomes the most important theme of the New Testament:

The Cross is absolutely central to the New Testament, and, indeed to the whole Bible. All before leads up to it. All after looks back to it. Since it occupies the critical place, it is not surprising that there is a vast volume of teaching about it.¹⁰⁴

Absence of Healing in NT Teaching on the Atonement

Having seen the centrality of the atonement in the New Testament one would expect that if there is healing promised in the atonement, it would be featured well enough in the New Testament. However, the opposite seems to be true, as there is no mention at all of healing in the New Testament teaching on the atonement. We shall consider two instances:

Significance of the Lord's Supper

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He clearly taught that this was to be a memorial of His atoning death, when he said, "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many *for the remission of sins*."¹⁰⁵ Similarly when Paul related this institution to the Corinthians he mentioned that "as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor 11:26). There is no reference to healing, whether implicit or explicit. Such absence would be unusual if Christ intended His disciples to understand that there is healing in the atonement.

Paul's Declaration of the Gospel

1 Corinthians 15 reveals the important tenets of the Gospel, and here Paul provides a list of facts "by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you . . ." (1 Cor 15:2). What Paul mentions here about the atonement therefore tells us what we should believe concerning it. He says, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, *how that Christ died for our sins* according to the scriptures."¹⁰⁶ Once again we find any mention of healing strangely absent, if Christ indeed intended his disciples to believe that there is healing in the atonement.

Sickness Versus Sin

The question we need to ask ourselves is, "For what reason is there no verse in the Bible which reads, "Christ died for our sicknesses" or is to be interpreted as saying that?

The answer lies in the differences between sin and sickness. It is insufficient to say that the difference is merely in aspect alone (ie, sin is spiritual disease while sickness is physical disease). They really belong to two separate categories.

Sin is to be taken seriously because it is an affront to God's holiness; but in no sense can the same be said for sickness. The death penalty must be paid for sin because sin deserves death ("For the wages of sin is death ..." [Rom 6:23]). But in what sense can sickness be said to be deserving of death?

B B Warfield made this observation in pointing out the error of believing "that the Atonement was not only made for sin but for disease, the fruit of sin," and "that in atoning for our diseases of body, just as for our sins of soul, Christ took them upon Himself that He might bear *them away*, and thus relieve His people from the need of bearing them."¹⁰⁷

What exact meaning can be attached, for example, to the phrase, "atonement for disease"? Is it intended to suggest that disease is fault for which we are responsible? Atonement can be made only for fault ... And by what right can Stockmayer—the "theologian of Faith-Healing", as he is called—parallel the "power of disease" with "condemnation and disobedience" as alike taken away by Christ's redemption, unless he means to convey the idea that, as there is now no condemnation to them in Christ Jesus, so there can now be no disease to them that are in Christ Jesus; and as all disobedience is wilful and sinful, so also is all sickness? If so, we can only infer that none of us are in Christ Jesus: our universal physical decay and death are but the external manifestations of our inward corruption and our eternal doom.¹⁰⁸

The absurdity of applying to sickness, all that applies only to sin, is evident. Christ never forgave disease. He forgave sin. "The death of Christ as our Substitute was penal, not pathological."¹⁰⁹

It therefore becomes theologically absurd to entertain any interpretation of Isaiah 53:4-6, that would lead to such a proposition; and since it has been demonstrated that the context of these verses is the substitutionary atonement, it becomes theologically absurd *not* to understand the words "sickness," "pains," and "healed" in them, figuratively.

Theology of Healing

While it has been mentioned in the introduction that healing is a biblical concern, and that God did reveal Himself to the nation of Israel as "the LORD that healeth thee" (Exod 15:26), incarnately demonstrated in Christ's healing ministry, we must note that God's dealings with sickness were *entirely different* from God's dealings with sin, even from the very beginning.

Original Sin

Sickness and pain were the consequences of sin that came into existence after the fall of the first parents (Gen 3:16-19). But they were not the *only* consequences of sin, as the Scripture shows that the corruption of God's creation and the appearance of death also resulted from the original sin.

God dealt with sin by the promise of deliverance from the "seed of the woman" (Gen 3:15) and by the provision of skin coverings for Adam and Eve, which symbolise the institution of the atoning sacrifice. But He did not deal likewise with the consequences of man's sin. In fact no hope at all is given in the book of Genesis that man would be delivered from any of these consequences. The explanation for this is found in the book of Romans:

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.¹¹⁰

This passage explains the current existence of the corrupted state of nature (and together with that, the corrupted state of our bodies, which are subject to pain and disease), as being continued only by the delay of one great event that has yet to take place: the glorious event of the manifestation of the sons of God. That event, according to 1 John 3:2 will not take place until the second coming of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, however, we have been given the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of the blessed state that we will have in eternity, and also as a means to cope in life with our present corrupted physical state:

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day ... For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.¹¹¹

The Word of God also reveals that deliverance from the other consequence of sin besides sickness, which is death, also awaits the future:

“For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:25-26).

All of these deliverances however have an implicit condition—a person must first have the sin in his own life dealt with radically by the divine atonement of Christ before he can be assured of any of them. In this sense, God’s dealing with sickness is therefore dependent upon the completion of His dealing with sin. Healing is therefore, excluded from the atonement itself but will be an eventual consequence of it.

Nation of Israel

After the entrance of sin into the world, salvation history began. God chose Abraham to be the progenitor of the nation through which His salvation plan from sin would be revealed. He established His relationship with the nation of Israel by means of a covenant, which included laws that the Israelites were to keep. These laws revealed God’s will for dealing with many issues of life, including sin and sickness. We note that there is a significant difference between the laws dealing with sin and the laws dealing with sickness.

The laws dealing with sin are summarised in the Decalogue, and the violation of any of them exacted a penalty commensurate with the seriousness of the offence, for example, “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death” (Exod 21:12). In contrast, the laws dealing with sickness were not punitive in nature but curative. They were aimed at preserving the Israelite community from the “uncleanness” of diseases such as leprosy, for example:

If a man or woman have a plague upon the head or the beard; Then the priest shall see the plague: and, behold, if it be in sight deeper than the skin; and there be in it a yellow thin hair; then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a dry scall, even a leprosy upon the head or beard ... he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.¹¹²

The law did not make the one afflicted with disease responsible for his disease nor punish him for it. In fact, on a number of occasions, disease was inflicted by God Himself upon persons, for example, “And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague” (Num 11:33). As such, it was entirely God’s prerogative to withhold disease or to afflict a person with it:

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If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, *I will put none of these diseases upon thee*, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.¹¹³

Because of this, healing or preservation from illness was a matter which involved God's mercy or favour, and not the making of atonement. This is illustrated in Hezekiah's successful prayer of petition for healing (2 Kgs 20:1-6).

Healing in the New Testament

Although Jesus performed many miracles of healing, His purpose for His incarnation and earthly ministry is stated succinctly in the words of the angel of the annunciation, "... and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21), and in His own words, "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost" (Matt 18:11). The healings that He performed were not ends in themselves, but were meant to testify to the fact that He is the Son of God: "... for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (John 5:36).

Likewise the miracles of healings that the apostles performed later on, were really God's testimony that their message was of divine origin: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, but with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb 2:3-4).

These episodes of healing were therefore temporary. MacArthur writes,

Once the Word of God was complete, the signs ceased. Miraculous signs were no longer needed ... The purpose of the gift of healing was not to keep Christians healthy. It was used as a sign to unbelievers at those times when it was necessary to make the proclamation of the gospel effective ... If every Christian were well and healthy, if perfect health were a guaranteed benefit of the atonement, millions of people would be stampeding to "get saved" - but for the wrong reason. God wants people to come to Him in repentance for sin and because of His glory, not because they see Him as a panacea for their physical ills.¹¹⁴

The New Testament follows the Old Testament's prescription of *prayer* to entreat God's mercy or favour for dealing with sickness in believers. This is taught by Paul's example:

... there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.¹¹⁵

It is also taught in the Epistle of James: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."¹¹⁶

Concerning the use of oil in this verse, Peter Masters explains,

To understand the James 5 passage, we must therefore remember that oil was a standard medical remedy, and also that James uses the secular or physical verb for "oiling". The correct view of the passage is that the application of oil carried out by the elders was an administration of simple medical comfort.¹¹⁷

By this brief overview of the Biblical theology of healing, we have seen that, for believers today, sickness is to be accepted as a normal part of life, that will only be dealt with decisively by God in the future. The primary concern for us in this present age is God's dealing with sin through the atonement. Disease, like death and the corrupted state of Creation, is merely the consequence of this pernicious problem. But in the meantime, believers who are sick may seek God in prayer while receiving medical treatment since healing and the preservation of life are God's prerogatives alone.

Healing in Church History

A decline in manifestation of miraculous healing took place toward the end of the apostolic era. Paul could not heal Epaphroditus who was sick to the point of death, but the Lord had mercy on him (Phil 2:25-27). Paul also left Trophimus sick at Miletum (2 Tim 4:20), and even advised Timothy to "use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim 5:23).

Justin Martyr and Irenaeus

During the era that followed the only two evidences of miraculous healings come from the writings of Irenaeus and Justin. Irenaeus (200 AD) speaks of the restoration of sight, the curing of deafness and challenges others in these terms:

And so far are they from being able to raise the dead, as the Lord raised them, and the apostles did by means of prayer, and as has been frequently done in the brotherhood on account of some necessity—the entire Church in that particular locality entreating the boon with much fasting and prayer, the spirit of the dead man has returned, and he has been bestowed in answers to the prayers of the saints ...¹¹⁸

But according to Victor Budgen,

... in a later reference in the same work it would seem likely from the tenses used that he is speaking of events that took place in apostolic times, as he declares, ‘Yes, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remain among us for many years.’ Moreover it must be remembered that, as Warfield reminds us, ‘Irenaeus’s youth was spent in the company of the pupils of the Apostle ...’¹¹⁹

As for Justin Martyr (165 AD) his references to miracle working are brief:

For numberless demoniacs throughout the whole world and in your city, many of our Christian men, exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out of the men, though they could not be cured by all the other exorcists, and those who used incantations and drugs.¹²⁰

Warfield’s analysis helps us to understand this:

Justin may easily have known of, if not even witnessed, miracles wrought by Apostolically trained men. The fault of these writers need have been no more than a failure to observe, or to acknowledge, the cessation of these miracles during their own time; so that it is not so much the trustworthiness of their testimony as their understanding of the changing times which falls under criticism.¹²¹

Chrysostom

In the fourth century, John Chrysostom (345-407), the greatest preacher of the period and bishop of Constantinople, observed in one of his sermons that,

... miracles and signs were to the infant church like the supports and defences supplied by the gardener to a young tree, which ‘Christ took away for the future’ when it was strong enough to stand. He added, ‘Wherefore at the beginning the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were conferred even upon the unworthy, for ancient times needed such support as a confirmation of the Christian faith, but now they are not given even to those who are worthy to receive them, because the power of the Christian faith is such as no longer to need this help.’¹²²

In the fourth and succeeding centuries the writings of the Christian world became increasingly saturated with all kinds of miracles of healings, but many of them were wrought in the interest of grave doctrinal error, being ascribed to the tombs or relics of the saints, or connected with superstitions concerning the Romish Mass.¹²³ Thus was ushered in the darkness of the Middle Ages.

The Reformation

When the light of God’s Word penetrated the darkness through the Reformers, the clear teaching of the Word regarding healing helped not a little to dispel the mass of unbiblical pseudo-miracles of healing testified to by the Roman Catholic Church. Both Luther and Calvin taught that the gifts of healing had been withdrawn by God in order to give preeminence to the preached Word.¹²⁴ This became, by and large, the accepted view concerning healing among all Protestants.

The Modern ‘Healing’ Movement

It wasn’t until the 19th century that new doctrines concerning healing began to enter the Church. This began with the Irvingite movement which predicted the immediate advent of Christ, and proclaimed the restoration of the extraordinary offices and gifts of the Apostolic age.¹²⁵

This new movement influenced many, including a clergyman of the Church of England—Joseph William Reynolds—who wrote a book entitled, *The Natural History of Immortality*, claiming that there was indisputable evidence of the return of the gift of healing, as in the Apostolic Age, as one of the signs accompanying those who believe.¹²⁶

By 1887 this doctrine had spread to England and Europe and international conferences were being held by its advocates. Warfield cites a representative book advocating the teaching of this movement—A J Gordon’s *The Ministry of Healing, or Miracles of Cure in All Ages* (2nd

ed, 1883). It was probably in this book or one that was written at about the same time, that the doctrine that “Christ vicariously bore our sicknesses as well as our sins” (ie, healing in the atonement) first made its appearance, using Matthew’s quote of Isaiah 53:4 as proof text. The same teaching appeared again in an essay by Robert L Stanton in the *Presbyterian Review* 5 (1884): 49.¹²⁷

This short overview of Church History reveals the relatively recent nature of the doctrine of healing in question. This would tend to cast serious doubts on its validity. It seems likely that the teaching of physical healing in the atonement arose after the onset of the modern “healing” movement as an attempt to bolster its claims to authenticity.

VARIOUS VIEWS CONCERNING THE INTERPRETATION OF ISAIAH 53:4-6

Thus far our study of the context, grammar, New Testament quotations, and theology of the atonement and healing, has led us to the understanding that the literal interpretation of the words “sickness” and “pains” in our text is inaccurate. This should be the main way of approaching the so-called doctrine of healing in the atonement, and refuting it.

However there are also conservatives who oppose the same doctrine who do not take this approach. They seem to accept these words literally. It may prove to be profitable to discuss these other views and assess them.

Future Benefit View

This view is explained as follows:

The word translated *grief* in this passage is indeed the Hebrew word for sickness, and Isaiah certainly says that we are healed by the wounds of Christ. Without doubt the Saviour bore away for us on Calvary both the *punishment* for sin and the *consequences* of sin, which include all the results of the curse—disease, suffering, misery and death. On Calvary He bought the right to deliver us from our *spiritual* sicknesses and also our *physical* diseases, and therefore there is no doubt that bodily restoration is purchased in the atonement.

But it does not follow that this bodily restoration is wholly available now. Not all the blessings which were purchased for us in the atonement are available now ... If the Lord, in answer to prayer, grants that we recover from an illness, we remember that He purchased the right to forgive and heal us by bearing away the *consequences* of sin on Calvary. But the

principal fruit of this aspect of our Lord's atonement lies in the future, when all sickness and bodily decay, including death, will be swept away for ever ...¹²⁸

This view provides a seemingly simple solution to the problem, by emphasising the difference in the timing of the manifestation of the benefits of the atonement for dealing with our sins and our sicknesses respectively. But there are some important points that this view overlooks:

(1) The definition of the *atonement* is violated by saying that "bodily restoration is purchased in the atonement" and that "He purchased the right to heal us by bearing away the consequences of sin on Calvary." In what sense were the consequences of sin borne away on Calvary? If this means that Christ vicariously suffered the consequences of sin for us, would this not lead us to the unscriptural proposition that He actually became sick in our stead? The "purchasing of bodily restoration" may perhaps be an inappropriate choice of words when it is remembered that the atonement is a legal transaction where payment is made for sins to reconcile sinners back to God. The object of purchase is therefore the sinners themselves ("... the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" [Acts 20:28]) and not the benefits. But apart from that, the atonement, by its very nature (as discussed earlier), cannot include the purchasing of bodily restoration or the right to heal.

(2) If it is indeed true that the consequences of sin can be included in the atoning work of Christ, there is nothing in the text of Isaiah to indicate any difference of timing between the manifestation of the benefits of the atonement for our sins and the manifestation of the benefits of the atonement for our sicknesses. In fact those in support of the faith-healing doctrine can argue that since Matthew quoted Isaiah 53:4 as being fulfilled in Jesus' healing ministry, this then is clear indication that the healing benefits are *already* here, and not awaiting future manifestation.

These points may perhaps be answered and the view defended but this would still not clear away the most vital doubt: Did God intend that we should understand from Isaiah 53:4-6 that Christ bore *both* our sins and our sicknesses? The most important consideration therefore is "what does *the text* really teach us?"

'Different Events' View

According to this view, Isaiah 53:4-6 encompasses two different events in Christ's life, namely, his healing ministry and his atoning death. It

is explained as follows:

Thus the first half of Isa 53:4 is a description of Jesus' healing ministry, as Matthew points out so clearly. It is not a reference to the atonement at all, but rather a statement that those who saw Him perform His many miracles should have understood that only the Son of God could do these great works ... When they came to understand the meaning of His atonement, they would say, "Though he did all these marvelous works of healing, we completely misunderstood the meaning of His death. He did not die because God afflicted Him on account of any sins that He had committed. He died for our transgressions, for our iniquities, to produce our peace." Thus in verse 5 the disciples declare that it was not for any sins of His own that He died, but for theirs, and that "with his stripes we are healed." The reference in verse 5 is not to physical healing, but to spiritual healing.¹²⁹

Another explanation of this view is as follows:

The fact that the first text occurs in the great 53rd chapter of Isaiah has doubtless led some superficial readers to assume that the fourth verse must refer to the death of Christ. And certainly the death of Christ looms large in that chapter. But let us not forget that it contains many other details of what He was and what He did. As to the fourth verse and its precise meaning, surely the safest guide to its exact interpretation will be found in Matthew's use of it in his Gospel. And what does Matthew say? Christ healed the sick, he declares (8:16), and in so doing He "fulfilled" this particular prophecy in Isaiah 53:4. It was by His ministry of healing while living, not when He died that He "took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." There is no mention by Matthew of our Lord's death or atonement in this connection.¹³⁰

The attractive feature of this view is that it uses Scripture to interpret Scripture. It abides by the "safest guide" when it assumes that Matthew's inspired use of it in the context of Jesus' healing ministry settles the meaning it was intended to have when used in Isaiah 53. If there were no other factors to consider, this would be perhaps the best approach to this text.

However there are some factors that need consideration. It requires a great deal of mental manoeuvring to attempt to fit the context of Matthew 8:17 into the context of Isaiah 53. In our preceding study into the context of Isaiah 53:4-6 we saw that the kind of rejection that the Servant had to endure from men who considered Him "stricken, smitten of God and afflicted" is only compatible with the rejection that Jesus endured on the

cross. The verbs “bear” and “carry” in Isaiah were used in the same context (vv 11-12) for the vicarious bearing of sins. Furthermore the literary context (poetry) requires us to understand the three verses as one unit, expressing the same idea. This puts “sicknesses” and “pains” in the same semantic field as “transgressions” and “iniquities.” When all these things are carefully considered, the task of fitting the context of Matthew 8:17 into Isaiah 53, may seem to be well nigh impossible.

But we would save ourselves this perplexing situation if we considered whether Matthew’s use of prophecy was really rigid in application. Only then would we see that there is a distinct probability that Matthew deliberately used the verse from Isaiah in a different context altogether for illustrative purposes.

The view that there are two different events in Isaiah 53:4-6 unfortunately assumes a rigid definition of the “fulfilment” of an Old Testament passage. This assumption tends to trap any interpreter into agreeing with this view.

By comparing these two alternative views for interpreting the passage under study we come to understand a little better, the reason why the figurative interpretation of the words “sickness” and “pains” in our text is the most accurate and consistent with context, grammar, principles of OT quotation in the NT, and overall theology.

It now behoves us to consider some of the implications of this interpretation.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE INTERPRETATION OF ISAIAH 53:4-6

In regard to the doctrine of healing, it can be concluded categorically that Isaiah 53:4-6 cannot be used as a basis for the Faith Healing Movement’s teaching of “Healing in the Atonement.” Jesus Christ only bore our sins on Calvary, and not our sicknesses. Healing is not a right that believers have, even though they may have the assurance of salvation based on the complete work of atonement that Jesus made.

This of course implies that Christians cannot expect to be kept free from all sickness, or to be spared from all pains, or to be healed of all diseases. Warfield provides an interesting description of this:

When typhoid germs find lodgement in a body, even though it be the body of a Saint, they will under favourable conditions, grow and produce

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all the dreadful effects, with the same certainty with which the seeds of corn which you cast into the ground grow and bring forth their harvest. The same laws on which you depend for the harvest of corn, you may equally depend on for the harvests of disease which you reap year after year. We live then in a complex of forces out of which we cannot escape, so long as we are in this world, and these forces make for disease and death. We are all left here, like Trophimus at Miletum, sick. And if we insist on being relieved of this sickness we can expect only the answer which was given to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you."¹³¹

God's provision for these circumstances however, is the glorious hope of our future resurrection. But following the injunction given in James 5 Christians should also entreat God's mercy to heal them.

It is also implied that God has a purpose for withholding from us any right for us to expect healing. He did not choose to deal with our sicknesses as He did with our sins because as Paul says, "when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor 12:10b). Sickness tends to build the virtues of humility and dependence upon the Lord. For many saints sickness has afforded opportunities for proving their faith in God as well as God's faithfulness to them. There is a certain blessedness that comes from enduring sickness: "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (Jas 5:11).

Ultimately it implies that we should not be concerned so much with seeking physical healing and personal comfort as we should be concerned with seeking God Himself. If the passage of Isaiah 53 is studied merely to fathom the benefits that we have through the Servant's sufferings, then the whole thrust of its message would be lost. We would have missed that sense of awe and wonder at beholding with amazement the Lord of glory laying aside His heavenly estate to descend to the very depths of human experience, despised, rejected, esteemed as one stricken, smitten of God and afflicted, wounded and bruised, oppressed and yet silent against His oppressors. We would have missed the realisation of our Saviour's wonderful love for us that was willing to bear the awful wrath of God upon our sin and enduring the death we should have endured.

Why should we be disappointed that God has not provided us healing in the atonement, when He has provided us with a great loving Saviour who will be with us always through every "valley of the Shadow of Death" experience in life? May Jesus Christ be praised! Amen.

NOTES

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³ Peter Masters, *The Healing Epidemic* (London: The Wakeman Trust, 1988), 12.

⁴ D R McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 7, 15.

⁵ Arthur E Steele, "Contemporary Theology II," unpublished lecture notes, Far Eastern Bible College, 1989, 42-78.

⁶ Kenneth E Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness and Spiritual Death*, 2nd ed (Oklahoma: Faith Library Publications, 1988), 14.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Kenneth E Hagin, *Healing Belongs to Us* (Oklahoma: Faith Library Publications, 1989), 14, 15.

⁹ Ibid, 25.

¹⁰ Kenneth E Hagin, *Healing Belongs to Us*, 30.

¹¹ T J McCrossan, *Bodily Healing and the Atonement* (Oklahoma: Faith Library Publications, 1986), 10.

¹² Ibid, xiv.

¹³ Ibid, 11.

¹⁴ Ibid, 12.

¹⁵ Ibid, 17.

¹⁶ Cited in B B Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1918), 175.

¹⁷ See William Nolen, *Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle* (New York: Random House, 1974).

¹⁸ Edward J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1949), 204.

¹⁹ Ibid, 205-10.

²⁰ Ibid, 220.

²¹ Alfred Martin, and John A Martin, *Isaiah: The Glory of the Messiah* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 134.

²² ZPEB, sv "Isaiah."

²³ Herbert M Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 12.

²⁴ ZPEB, sv "Isaiah."

²⁵ Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, 14.

²⁶ Young, *Old Testament*, 220.

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²⁷ Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, 39-41.

²⁸ Ibid, 46-9.

²⁹ EBC, 6:21.

³⁰ Ibid, 6:13.

³¹ Isa 49:5,6.

³² Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, 51.

³³ EBC, 6:254.

³⁴ Ibid, 6:7,18.

³⁵ Ibid, 6:18.

³⁶ Ibid, 6:300.

³⁷ Some ancient Hebrew scholars have compared the strophes to the books of the Pentateuch. See Martin and Martin, *The Glory of the Messiah*, 134.

³⁸ EBC, 6:300.

³⁹ Cited in Walter C Kaiser Jr, *Towards an Exegetical Theology* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981).

⁴⁰ Ibid, 216.

⁴¹ Ibid, 219-223.

⁴² Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, 55.

⁴³ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁴ Kaiser Jr, *Exegetical Theology*, 123.

⁴⁵ The ancient Jews, before the coming of the Lord Jesus, took the passage as messianic. Ryrie mentions that the view of Israel as the Suffering Servant did not arise until the twelfth century. See Martin and Martin, *The Glory of the Messiah*, 132.

⁴⁶ R N Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, NCBC (England: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1975), 135f, 171f.

⁴⁷ Acts 8:30,32,34,35. See also Matt 8:17; John 12:38; 1 Pet 2:24.

⁴⁸ Timothy Tow, *The Gospel Prophets* (Singapore: Christian Life Book Centre, nd), 121.

⁴⁹ Edward J Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, (Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 3:345.

⁵⁰ Mark 15:25,27-30.

⁵¹ Ps 41:3,4, emphasis mine.

⁵² Hos 5:13.

⁵³ Jer 6:7; 10:19, emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ Isa 1:4,5, emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ TWOT, sv “יָרָא,” by Carl Philip Weber.

⁵⁶ Ibid, sv “יָרָא,” by John N Oswalt.

⁵⁷ Jer 30:15.

⁵⁸ Lam 1:18.

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⁶⁰ Isa 33:24, emphasis mine.

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⁶³ John Calvin, *Isaiah 33-66* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 8:115.

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⁶⁶ Alva J McClain, "Christ Punished For Our Diseases?" *Grace Journal* (Spring 1965): 4.

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⁶⁹ Albert Barnes, *Isaiah* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1950), 2:268.

⁷⁰ *New Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*, sv "Bruise."

⁷¹ Isa 6:10, emphasis mine.

⁷² Isa 19:22, emphasis mine.

⁷³ Isa 30:26, emphasis mine.

⁷⁴ Isa 57:17,18, emphasis mine.

⁷⁵ Ps 147:3, emphasis mine.

⁷⁶ Jer 3:22, emphasis mine.

⁷⁷ Hos 14:4, emphasis mine.

⁷⁸ Mal 4:2, emphasis mine.

⁷⁹ Barnes, *Isaiah*, 2:269.

⁸⁰ MacArthur Jr, *Charismatics*, 56.

⁸¹ Allan A MacRae, "Does this Passage Promise Physical Healing to All Believers?," article.

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⁸³ Young, *Old Testament*, 205.

⁸⁴ H L Wilmington, *Wilmington's Guide to the Bible* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981), 182.

⁸⁵ Brenton, *Septuagint*, 889.

⁸⁶ H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ (London: The Trinitarian Bible Society, nd), 14.

⁸⁷ EBC, 8:205.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 27.

⁸⁹ Mayhue, *Divine Healing Today*, 50.

⁹⁰ A T Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1930), 1:67.

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- ⁹² EBC, 8:142f.
- ⁹³ Ibid, 8:93.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid, 8:205.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid, 8:206.
- ⁹⁶ Calvin, *Isaiah 33-66*, 115, emphasis mine.
- ⁹⁷ H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ, 435.
- ⁹⁸ Luke 8:2, emphasis mine.
- ⁹⁹ Matt 13:15, emphasis mine.
- ¹⁰⁰ Heb 12:12,13, emphasis mine.
- ¹⁰¹ Lev 16:34, emphasis mine.
- ¹⁰² TWOT, sv “כָּפַר,” by R Laird Harris.
- ¹⁰³ Lev 17:11.
- ¹⁰⁴ *New Bible Dictionary*, sv “Atonement.”
- ¹⁰⁵ Matt 26:27b,28, emphasis mine.
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- ¹⁰⁷ Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, 175.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁹ McClain, “Was Christ Punished for Our Diseases?,” 5.
- ¹¹⁰ Rom 8:19-23.
- ¹¹¹ 2 Cor 4:16; 5:1,2.
- ¹¹² Lev 13:29,30,46.
- ¹¹³ Exod 15:26, emphasis mine.
- ¹¹⁴ MacArthur Jr, *Charismatics*, 149f
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- ¹¹⁹ Victor Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God* (England: Evangelical Press, 1985), 115.
- ¹²⁰ Justin Martyr, cited in McCrossan, *Bodily Healing and the Atonement*, 53.
- ¹²¹ Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, 25.
- ¹²² Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God*, 120f.
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- ¹²⁴ George Mallone, *Those Controversial Gifts* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 113.
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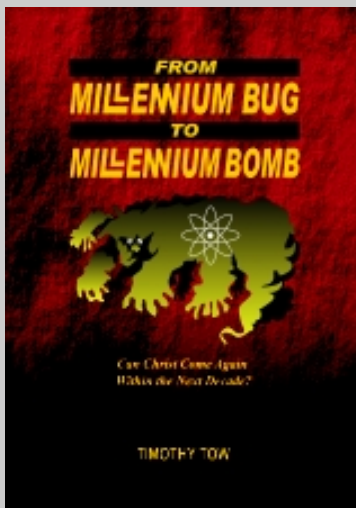
¹²⁸ Masters, *The Healing Epidemic*, 66.

¹²⁹ MacRae, "Does this Passage Promise Physical Healing to All Believers?"

¹³⁰ McClain, "Was Christ Punished for Our Diseases?," 4.

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Rev Charles Seet is assistant pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, and lecturer in Biblical studies at Far Eastern Bible College.



From Millennium Bug to Millennium Bomb: Can Christ Come Again Within the Next Decade?

Timothy Tow

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TAKING ADVANTAGE of the unknown factor of the Y2K Bug, many Doomsday Preachers in America played on the simple-minded the almost certainty of the coming of Armageddon. Doomsday colonies were set up in mountainous countries where there were caves to hide. Those who fell to the ruse of these holy tricksters gladly surrendered their wealth to them, to their great loss.

Of course Christians are to be always ready for Jesus' Second Coming. But we are not that foolish as to follow these false Messiahs. For the Scriptures has forewarned us against false Christs and false prophets. Jesus says, "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many" (Matt 24:5).

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST'S BLOOD IN THE ATONEMENT

Prabhudas Koshy

INTRODUCTION

All through the history of the Christian Church, the doctrine of salvation through the blood of Christ has been a precious and important doctrine. Many favourite hymns of the Church have the blood of Christ as their theme. For example, "Are You Washed in the Blood?," "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood," "There is Power in the Blood," "Nothing but the Blood," and "Saved by the Blood."¹

However, there seems to be a subtle undermining of this cardinal doctrine of Christ's atoning blood today. Some say that "blood" is always a reference to "violent death" in the Bible, and therefore it is not the blood but the death of Christ that saves from sin. John F MacArthur Jr who advocates this view wrote, "*it is not His blood but His death that saves us.*"² MacArthur also said that "Jesus did not bleed to death."³ According to him, the term "blood" is symbolic, a metonym for the death of Christ.

"Blood" is the common term used by the writers of the NT to refer to Christ's work of atonement. It occurs nearly three times as often as "the cross" of Christ, and five times as frequently as the "death" of Christ.⁴ Thus it is clear that "the blood" was absolutely essential as far as the NT writers were concerned.

It is highly significant that "the blood of Jesus Christ" is used so often with reference to the atonement. This paper seeks to study the various New Testament occurrences of Christ's blood in an effort to propound that both the blood and the death of Christ are necessary elements in the Saviour's redemption of man.

JESUS' STATEMENTS ABOUT HIS BLOOD

John 6:53-56

According to John 6:53-56, Jesus told the Jews that if they do not partake of His “flesh” and “blood,” they cannot have eternal life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, *Except* ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and *drink his blood*, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and *drinketh my blood*, *hath eternal life*; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and *drinketh my blood*, *delleth in me*, and *I in him*.

Though some have taken these sayings of Jesus as a reference to the elements of the Lord’s Table,⁵ the context testifies to the “perpetual eating by faith”⁶ of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

A comparison of the two verses (v 40 and v 54) found in this passage (6:41-59) helps us to see how one can “eat” His flesh and “drink” His blood.

John 6:40			
a	Every one which seeth the Son	b	and believeth on him
c	may have everlasting life	d	and I will raise him up at the last day
John 6:54			
a ¹	Whoso eateth my flesh	b ¹	and drinketh my blood
c ¹	hath eternal life	d ¹	and I will raise him up at the last day

The literary structure of the above two verses shows parallelism, and thus one can conclude that the recipients of these promises are the same. “Beholdeth” [a] and “believeth” [b] (6:40) are parallel to the “eateth” [a¹] and “drinketh” [b¹] (6:54).⁷ Jesus is therefore talking about the importance of one’s faith in His shed-blood and cross-work in order to obtain eternal life.

Jesus said in verse 56 that “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.” The present participle form of the Greek terms for “eateth” (τρώγων) and “drinketh” (πίνων) implies that one’s faith in the blood and death of Jesus must be a continuing one. In other words, only the soul which continually feeds on the atoning power of Christ’s blood and death can enter into union with Him. Christ’s flesh and blood offered on the cross is life-giving to the soul of every believer.

In this passage, Jesus offered eternal life to all who would place their trust on His redemptive work on the cross where His body was sacrificed, and His blood shed. So according to Jesus, it is the faith in His blood sacrifice that gives eternal life.

Jesus' words as recorded in John 6 emphasise the importance of faith in His blood for obtaining eternal life. In verses 32-50, Jesus introduced Himself as the "bread of life," and the necessity of believing in Him for eternal life. Then in verse 51 He said, "... the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Jesus was referring to His sacrificial death that will provide life eternal for all who believe. But the Jews were confused about His saying, and asked, "how can this man give us His flesh?" (v 52). Then Jesus answered them, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of God and drink His blood, ye have no life" (v 53). By introducing the "blood" together with the "flesh," He was revealing to the Jews that His own atoning sacrifice involved His own flesh and blood. As it is with any Jewish sin offering, the "blood" is crucial in Christ's own sacrifice also. It is His bloody death that brings eternal life to believers. The terms "blood" and "flesh" are used literally and not figuratively. Jesus literally shed His blood, and sacrificed His body. It is not the sacrifice, but the eating that is spiritual.

Matthew 26:28

In Matthew 26:28, while Jesus was instituting the sacrament of the bread and wine, He said, "For this is *my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*" (Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25-27).

The word "blood" is not a reference merely to "death" because a specific *sacrificial* death is required. This is obvious because the phrase, "my blood" (τὸ αἷμα μου), matches "my flesh" (τὸ σῶμα μου, v 26), and all that indicates the reality of them. "Body" and "blood" are distinguished because in the sacrifice the blood flows out and is separated from the body. Jesus was identifying His own blood with reference to its significance in His atoning sacrifice.

Jesus cited two important aspects of His blood in the above verse. First, His blood was shed to establish a new covenant between God and man; and second, His blood was shed also for the remission of sins.

The word “testament” (διαθήκη) is used in the Septuagint about 270 times for the Hebrew word “covenant” (בְּרִית). The usage of the word in both Old and New Testament Scripture especially with relation to God and His people suggests a one-sided action.⁸ It is an exclusively divine action whereby man is brought to God as His people. While God’s covenant draws people to Him, all those who are outside God’s covenant remain His enemies.

Both the old and new covenants involved blood. When God made covenants with Noah and Abraham, those covenants were ratified with blood (Gen 8:20; 15:9-10). When the covenant at Sinai was ratified, “Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words’” (Exod 24:4-8). The old covenant was sealed with the blood of an animal sacrifice. This blood typified the blood of Christ under the new covenant (cf Heb 9). Lenski commented,

The old covenant could be written in animal blood because it consisted of promise; the new testament could be written only in the blood of the Son of God because it conveys the complete fulfilment of the promise, the actual purchase of our redemption.⁹

In other words, it was impossible to make a new covenant without the shedding of the blood of Christ. The shedding of the Messiah’s blood was the divine design for the redemption of His new covenant people.

The genitival relationship between τὸ αἷμα μου (“my blood”) and τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης (“the new covenant”) is one of description; and therefore “the new covenant” describes the significance of Christ’s blood which is shed for many. In essence Jesus was saying, “My blood which ratifies and seals the new covenant is shed.”

The Apostle Paul reports Christ’s words as “the new testament in my blood” (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ... ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι) [1 Cor 11:25]). The preposition (ἐν) is used here as a preposition of agent or instrument, thus giving rise to the thought that the new covenant is brought about by means of Christ’s blood. In other words, without His blood there can be no new covenant. The only means of establishing the new covenant was through the shedding of Christ’s blood. This was why Paul said the Corinthians who partook of the Lord’s table unworthily were “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor

11:27). It must be noted that both the body and blood were specifically mentioned by Paul as he warned the Corinthians concerning the need to regard the Lord's table as holy.

The fact that Jesus attached "new testament" with His blood, instead of His broken body, testifies that His suffering and death alone was not enough to fulfill God's plan for the new covenant. The shedding of blood was absolutely necessary.

Why is Christ's blood necessary to establish the new covenant? The Most Holy God cannot enter into a covenant relationship with those who remain in sin and in its judgment. Before people can be brought into His covenant, they must be purged from all sin. When Jeremiah prophesied about the new covenant, he said,

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant ... this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (31:31-34).

Therefore, the forgiveness of sin must be obtained before people can be brought into the new covenant. According to God's law, for sins to be forgiven, blood must be shed (Lev 17:11). It is in this perspective that Jesus said in Matthew 26:28, "For this is my blood of the new testament, *which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*"

The second significant aspect of Christ's blood according to His own statement is that it "is shed for many *for the remission of sins.*" In the Greek text we read, "... τὸ αἷμα μου ... τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν." The preposition *περὶ* usually takes the meaning of "concerning" or "in regard to," thus giving the idea that the pouring out of Christ's blood was for the benefit of many.¹⁰ However, it would be better to understand its meaning in this context as, "on the behalf of."¹¹ This can be supported by the fact that Mark and Luke used the preposition *ὑπὲρ* instead of *περὶ*.¹²

Lenski notes that *εἰς* often means "over," and in a large number of cases the resultant idea is that of substitution, "instead of."¹³ However, the second preposition, *εἰς* (which is translated as "for" in the KJV), is used here as a purpose clause. So Jesus was in effect saying, "my blood of the new testament was shed on the behalf of

many for the purpose of the remission of sins.”

The word for “remission” is ἄφεσις, a derivative of ἀφέναι which literally means “let pass, passing over.”¹⁴ Out of 50 appearances in the Septuagint, it is found 22 times in Leviticus 25 and 27 with reference to the year of Jubilee, and five times in Deuteronomy 15:1-9 with reference to release from debts in the year of Jubilee. In general, it is used for the release of the captives and slaves (Isa 61:1; Jer 34:8, 15, 17; Ezek 46:17), and once it is used in the sense of forgiveness (Lev 16:26).¹⁵ In the NT, it is used 15 times with the sense of forgiveness (cf, Mark 1:4; Luke 1:77; Acts 2:38; Heb 9:22), and twice to refer to a release from captivity (Luke 4:18).¹⁶ The word, then, conveys the idea of forgiveness as a release from the bondage of sin and its punishment. It is to forgive and to free us from all our sins that Jesus shed His blood.

APOSTOLIC TEACHING ABOUT THE BLOOD

In the epistles, including Acts of the Apostles and Revelation, there are more than 20 references to the blood and its significance in the atonement. It occupies a central position in apostolic thought. In the epistles we see phrases such as, “the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:2); “the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10; 19; I John 1:7), “the blood of Christ” (1 Cor 10:16; Eph 2:13; Heb 9:14), “the blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27), “the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14; 12:11). They also used various terms to describe the significance of Christ’s blood in His atoning work, such as “purchased,” “redeemed,” “justified,” “cleansed,” “made nigh,” “made peace,” “propitiation,” “covenant,” etc.

Purchased by Christ’s Blood (Acts 20:28)

Paul told the Ephesian elders that God has purchased His church “by his own blood.” (v 28: ἦν περιποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου).

Περιποιήσατο is aorist middle indicative of the root word περιποιέω which means “to acquire or gain for oneself.”¹⁷ The Septuagint uses the same word in Genesis 31:18 to denote the acquisition of animals by Jacob while he was with his uncle Laban in Padanaram. Its noun form περιποίησις is used in Ephesians 1:14 (“the redemption of the purchased possession”) as an equivalent to the

redemption acquired for us by Christ. The noun form is also used in both the Old and New Testaments to denote God's people (cf, Mal 3:17; 1 Pet 2:9).¹⁸ By using the word, "purchased," Paul was referring to the Church as a peculiar people whom God has gained for Himself.

The peculiarity of this acquisition is in the fact that God has purchased His people "with his own blood." The preposition *διὰ* expresses means; this blood was the price with which the Church was purchased.

The price was "his blood." Whose blood? The personal pronoun "his" (*ἰδίου*) refers to "God" (*θεοῦ*) of the previous clause. It was the blood of God incarnate, the God-Man—Jesus Christ. Jesus is fully God and fully man. The Church was bought by the shed blood of Christ—the Son of God.

Propitiation in Christ's Blood (Rom 3:25)

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:25 that God has set forth Christ "to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

The context of the above verse is about God's wrath against sin and His justification of all who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom 1-3). In this verse Paul explains how the sinner is justified. Paul is saying that we are justified by faith in Christ's shed blood because He is our propitiation.

Concerning the meaning of the word "propitiation" (*ἱλαστήριον*) both in the Septuagint and the Greek text of the NT, Leon Morris writes, "The word is a member of the word-group we have been examining in the OT and which we have seen to denote *the turning away of wrath*."¹⁹

The verb, *ἱλάσκομαι* "to propitiate," occurs twice in the NT, in Luke 18:13, when the publican prayed, "God be merciful (*ἱλάσθητι*) to me a sinner;" and Hebrews 2:17, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation (*ἱλάσκεσθαι*) for the sins of the people." The noun *ἱλασμός* "propitiation" is found in the expression "propitiation for our sins" twice. 1 John 1:1-2, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the

Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation (ἱλασμός) for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Romans 3:25 says that God set forth Christ “to be a propitiation (ἱλαστήριον) through faith in his blood ...” This same word is found in Hebrews 9:5 where it is translated as “mercy-seat.” The word ἱλεως is found in Matthew 16:22 in an idiomatic usage, “be it far from thee,” and in Hebrews 8:12, “I will be merciful (ἱλεως) to their unrighteousness.” The above survey shows that we have only four texts in the NT that use this word with reference to the death of Christ.

The word for “propitiation” (ἱλαστήριον) appears only twice in the NT (Rom 3:25 and Heb 10:5). In its second appearance in Hebrews 9:5, it is translated as “mercy seat.” The (ἱλαστήριον) of the OT referred to in Hebrews 9:5 was actually the cover of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies; in English it is called the mercy seat. It was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice made annually on the Day of Atonement.

Propitiation, then, must be understood from its scriptural usage as God’s merciful provision that removes His wrath against sin. Morton H Smith comments on the work of Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice,

To deny the propitiatory character of the sacrifice of Christ is to deny the essence of the atonement. For the atonement means that Christ bore our sins. He who knew no sin was made sin for us. How can we think of him carrying our sins, without bearing the judgment for those sins? Sin and judgment are inseparable in the Scriptures. Thus to bear the sins, is to bear the judgment. That is the significance of the death of Christ.²⁰

Christ is our propitiation because He bore the wrath of God against our sins. But how is Christ’s blood connected to our propitiation? Paul said, “Whom (ie, Christ) God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Rom 3:25a). We will understand the above statement of Paul, if we know how the mercy seat (*kapporeth*) is related to the propitiation of the sins of the people in the OT. Once a year, on the day of Atonement, the Jewish high priest took the blood of the sacrificial animal and went into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle it on the *kapporeth*—the cover of the Ark of the Covenant (ie, the mercy seat)—in order to atone for the sins of the whole nation. In the Ark were deposited the stone tables of the law which condemned the sins of the people. The *Kapporeth* (mercy seat)

covered the judgment (the law) of God. It is only when the mercy seat was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrificial animal that it effectively covered the sins of the people from God's judgment. The blood of the animals sprinkled upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant is an illustration of what the blood of Christ does when applied to believing sinners, "for the remission of sins" (Rom 3:25).

In short, if Christ's blood was not shed, there would never be a way to avert God's wrath against our sins. In the death of Christ we have the demonstration of God's mercy and justice because He took the initiative to send His beloved Son into the world to shed His blood in order to cover us from His wrath.

Justified by His Blood (Rom 5:9)

Apostle Paul wrote, "Much more then, being now *justified by his blood*, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom 5:9).²¹ Concerning the scriptural usage of the word, "justified" (δικαιωθέντες), Morton H Smith writes,

The NT uses the word justify in the judicial sense ... In reference to our relation to God, we are recognized in his sight as free from condemnation and as having had all the requirements of his justice satisfied.²²

We are declared righteous not because of our moral uprightness, but because Christ has suffered the punishment of our sins thus removing the condemnation we face. When Paul said in Romans 5:9 that we are "justified by His blood," (δικαιωθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι), he was actually saying that Christ's sacrificial death on the cross has become the ground of our justification. Lenski commented on Romans 5:9, especially on the significance of the preposition "by" (ἐν), as follows,

It seems artificial to call (ἐν) instrumental, for Christ's blood is not an instrument that is used in the forensic act of declaring righteous. The dogmatists call Christ's blood the *causa meritoria* of our justification, which is to the point. Ἐν is to be understood in its original meaning: "in connection with." In his act God takes Christ's blood into consideration and our faith relies on the atoning power of that blood.²³

It must be noted that Paul writes "his blood" and not "his death" although he has twice written that Christ died for us. "Death" does not necessarily denote sacrifice. Deaths may also take place without any shedding of blood. "Blood" is specifically used to denote a sacrificial

atonement death. So Paul's statement in Romans 5:9 teaches us that in order to bring about the justification of sinners Jesus died by shedding His blood. He could not have died in any other way if His death was to have a redemptive quality.

Redemption through Christ's Blood (Eph 1:7)

In Ephesians 1:7 Paul wrote, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." He likewise wrote to the Colossians, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:14).

The word, "redemption" (ἀπολύτρωσιν), was part of the language of the ordinary people in their ordinary everyday life. It was a vivid word and effectively conveyed an important truth on the doctrine of salvation.²⁴

Leon Morris explains the word, "redemption," as follows:

The term as used in the all-pervasive Greek culture of antiquity had its origin in the practices of warfare ... one of their happy little custom was that, when battle was over, the victors sometimes rode round the battlefield rounding up as many of the vanquished as they could. Then they took them off as slaves. It meant a tidy profit and an increase in the spoils of war ... When they got them back home and looked them over, they sometimes found there were important people included in their haul. These were men of rank, men who counted for a good deal in their own country, but those upbringing and manner of life made them not particularly suitable for hard menial labour and the kind of work that was the common lot of slaves. But if they were not much good as slaves, they were valued in their own homeland. Then the victors let it be known back in the land of the vanquished that they were ready to release such-and-such captives, always, of course, on receipt of a consideration. The home folk ... when they had the required amount, send it over to the land of the victors and buy back their brothers. This is the process that the ancients called 'redemption.' They used the verb 'redeem' for it and anyone who carried it out was a 'redeemer.' The sum of money was called 'ransom.'²⁵

This buying of prisoners of war back from their captivity was the basic idea in redemption. This word was also used of setting slaves free.²⁶

The phrase "in whom" (ἐν ᾧ) refers to the one in whom is the redemption. He is the only source of redemption. In verse 1, Paul identified Him as Christ. Christ is the Redeemer. He becomes our Redeemer because "through His blood" (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ) He

redeems us from sin. Christ's blood is the means of our redemption. In other words, His blood was the ransom paid for our redemption.

By the words, "His blood," Paul meant Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. He could not have died by any other kind of death. To pay the ransom He had to go through a "bloody" death. His blood was a needed payment. So Peter said, "For as much as ye know that ye *were* not *redeemed* with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But *with the precious blood of Christ*, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet 1:18-19).

Peter says, "Ye were redeemed" (ἐλυτρώθητε) not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. In other words, the ransom paid was something of infinitely greater value than silver and gold. It was the precious blood of Christ. Precious metals are perishable, but not the blood of Christ.²⁷ All the treasures of the world cannot redeem a single man, and save him from his sinful nature. No corruptible ransom can save a sinner from a corrupt life. Only Christ's blood can be the ransom because it is "precious" (τιμίω). Lenski comments,

The word (τίμιος) is already significant, for animal blood would scarcely be called "precious." Precious fits the idea of ransom, for ransom prices are high, a cheap ransom is out of the question, even silver and gold do not suffice. The fact the precious "blood" was paid as the ransom price for the readers at once suggests that someone died in their stead. Peter surely has in mind Matt 20:28: (δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν), "my life I lay down in behalf of the many." When Peter says, "with precious blood," he undoubtedly means sacrificial blood shed in a sacrificial, expiatory death ... We construe together: "with precious blood as of a lamb blemishless and spotless." This combination brings out completely the thought that sacrificial, expiatory, substitutional blood is referred to."²⁸

Commenting on the Peter's words concerning the preciousness of Christ's blood, John Calvin said,

We know how dreadfully sacrilegious it is to hold the blood of the Son of God cheaply. There is hence nothing which ought to stimulate us to the practice of holiness more keenly than the memory of this price of our redemption.²⁹

Forgiveness in Christ's Blood (Eph 1:7, Col 1:14)

There is another aspect of the significance of Christ's blood in the atonement as taught in Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14, namely, the "forgiveness of sins" (τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων). In Ephesians 1:7 we read, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, *the forgiveness of sins*, according to the riches of his grace." Colossians 1:14 says, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even the forgiveness of sins*."

In both verses Paul also said that we are redeemed by His blood. William Hendriksen wrote,

These two—a. redemption by blood and b. forgiveness of trespasses—go together. Redemption would not be complete without procuring pardon. Even Israel in the old dispensation understood this. On the Day of Atonement the blood of one goat was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The other goat, over whose head the people's sins had been confessed, was sent away, never to return. Now here in Ephesians 1:7 this idea of complete removal of sin constitutes the very meaning of the word, used in the original, rendered forgiveness (or remission).³⁰

The shed blood of Jesus Christ not only guarantees our eternal redemption (ἀπολύτρωσιν) from the punishment of sin, but also the complete forgiveness (ἄφεσιν) of our sins.

Made Nigh by Christ's Blood (Eph 2:13)

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:13, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off *are made nigh by the blood of Christ*" (νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγενήθητε ἐγγὺς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ). The Ephesians were once "far off" (μακρὰν) because, as Paul said in the preceding verses, they were Gentiles and not considered God's people. They were not a part of the commonwealth of Israel. But now in connection with Christ (νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) they "are made nigh" (ἐγενήθητε ἐγγὺς)³¹ to God. It is by means of the blood of Christ (ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ) that they are brought near to God.

Concerning the importance of "the blood of Christ" in making us nigh unto God, Lenski says,

The blood of Christ is the objective means ... Christ shed His blood for the whole world of men, and in the gospel its efficacy was now being proclaimed to all nations. Thus these Ephesian believers had been brought to saving faith. ... The blood is to be considered together with 'his flesh'

(v. 15) and with 'the cross' (v. 16). The blood = the sacrificial, expiatory death which "cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). It brings us "near," into union with God, by removing our sins. Like his cross, the blood of Christ is comprehensive, and we consider it a mistake to eliminate the idea of price or to reduce it to the idea of sprinkling the mercy seat. Paul thinks of the blood in all its effectiveness but does not give details. ... It is always the blood shed in sacrifice, the blood of the Lamb of God, the blood by which Jesus laid down his life for us. It is the ransom, the price, is substitutionary, effects the (ἀπολύτρωσιν) or ransoming on which rests the (ἄφεσιν) or remission of sins (1:7)."³²

Once again, in Ephesians 2:13, Paul illustrates how the blood that Christ shed in His sacrificial death becomes our means of salvation. As it remits our iniquities which separates us from God, it becomes the means to our nearness or access to Him.

Made Peace through Christ's Blood (Col 1:20)

In Colossians 1:20 Paul says that Christ's blood reconciles us to God, "having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself ..."

The Greek word for "made peace" (εἰρηνοποιήσας) concerns "bringing about a cessation of hostilities,"³³ and thus means "to make peace or reconciliation." As sinners, all men live as enemies of God. The cessation of enmity between God and man is Paul's subject of discussion here.

In His sacrificial death Christ has removed God's enmity against us, because He has paid the price of our redemption by means of His blood. The blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on the cross is the means (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος) of our reconciliation. The preposition, διὰ, is used with the genitive τοῦ αἵματος to denote the means by which Christ has attained the peace.

Is "blood" a mere metaphor or a metonym³⁴ for "death" in this verse? John MacArthur Jr in his commentary on Colossians and Philemon says "blood" is a metonym for violent sacrificial death.³⁵ He also says,

There is nothing mystical, however, about the blood of Christ. It saves us only in the sense that His death was the sacrificial death of the final lamb. It was the death that reconciled us to God ... the blood has no ... saving power.³⁶

MacArthur in his attempt to refute the teaching that Christ's blood is still physically kept in heaven and is literally applied to our body or heart,³⁷ goes to the other extreme by saying that the "blood" is not a reference to His literal blood but merely His death. In his mind, it was not the blood, but the death of Christ that reconciled us to God. He thus questions the atoning power of Christ's actual, literal blood shed on the cross.³⁸ He confuses the whole issue by saying that blood equals death, and does not see that the two can be distinguished.

The apostle Paul, in fact, made separate references in the passage to Christ's blood and death when He wrote "the blood of his cross" (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, v 20b), and "His fleshly body through His death" (νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου, v 22a). Every aspect of Christ's life and death is important for our reconciliation. His sufferings, cross, blood, and death are collectively and individually significant for our salvation. All of them constitute the plan of God for our atonement in Christ. Christ's blood is as significant as His death for man's reconciliation to God. Just as they together fulfill God's will for man's reconciliation, each of them individually accomplishes God's plan concerning the redemptive work of the Messiah. Therefore it is wrong to conceive that "blood" merely represents "death," and does not have its own peculiar significance in the atonement. It must be said that Christ's shed blood is as significant as His sacrificial death on the cross in our reconciliation to God. They individually and together constitute our redemption.

Purging of Conscience by Christ's Blood (Heb 9:12-14)

The author of Hebrews while explaining the excellence of Christ's sacrifice in contrast to the animal sacrifices under the Old Covenant said, "How much more shall *the blood of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, *purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*" (Heb 9:14).

The author of Hebrews in verses 12-14 contrasts the blood of animals with the blood of Christ. The blood of animals cannot save, only the blood of Christ does. The blood of Christ purges our conscience. The word καθαρίζει is translated in 1 John 1:7 as "cleansing"—"and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son *cleanseth* us from all sin." In both Hebrews 9:14 and 1 John 1:7 the word has the idea of

cleansing.³⁹ God requires the sprinkling of the blood for the remission of sins. While commenting on Hebrews 9:13-14, Philip E Hughes explains how Christ's blood cleanses our conscience from sins,

What he (the author of Hebrews) is concerned to emphasize at this point is that this ritual *sprinkling of defiled persons*, whether with blood or with the water for impurity, effected no more than the *purification of the flesh*, which is contrasted with the purging of the conscience effected through the blood of Christ. ... The argument proceeds *a fortiori*: if the blood of these animal sacrifices served for the cleansing of persons defiled in his external sense, *how much more shall the blood of Christ* achieve the radical inward cleansing of the conscience. ... Animals are not moral creatures; the unblemished condition of those victims offered up was merely external and superficial in character for the purposes of ritual symbolism. ... By contrast, Christ, the incarnate Son, is a fellow human being, partaking of our own human nature (2:14), and therefore, as man, fully qualified to stand in for us as our substitute, and as one without blemish, that is as a man morally perfect with an undefiled conscience before God (4:15; 7:27), competent to offer up the completely efficacious sacrifice of his own unblemished person in satisfaction for our sins and for the purifying of our consciences.⁴⁰

Entering into God's Presence by Christ's Blood (Heb 10:19)

The ultimate purpose of the atonement in Christ's blood which was shed in His sacrificial death is the boldness believers now have "to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb 10:19).

Under the Old Covenant, no one was allowed to enter the inner sanctuary, except the high priest, and even that was done only once a year with an animal sacrifice. But now in Christ and by means of His blood that purges our conscience from all sin we can enter into the presence of God with boldness.

"Boldness" is the rendering of *παρρησίαν*, a term occurring four times in Hebrews (3:5, 4:16, 10:19, 10:35). Although the word is probably best translated "boldness" or "confidence," it denotes not primarily a subjective attitude but something objective.⁴¹

Homer A Kent Jr comments on the believers' "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" as follows:

It is the believer's freedom of access to the sanctuary (τῶν ἁγίων). Now that expiation has been permanently made, believers are not restricted to the outer courts as in the earthly tabernacle, but have full rights to the

heavenly residence of God Himself. This is not through any merits of their own, but by the blood of Jesus (ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ). By virtue of Christ's sacrificial blood given once-for-all at Calvary, believers may enter the presence of God without hindrance and without need for further sacrifices.⁴²

The blood of Jesus Christ counts for all our sins, and as we trust in His atoning blood we can also come with complete boldness before God, claiming all the promises and blessings, even heaven. The primary basis on which we can draw near to God in faith is the blood of Jesus.

The New Covenant in Christ's Blood (Heb 10:29)

In the book of Hebrews the blood of Jesus Christ is referred to three times as the "blood of the covenant" (10:29) or "blood of the everlasting covenant" (13:20). The author of Hebrews is actually reaffirming what Christ has already said about the new covenant in His blood in Matt 26:28. As we have already noticed earlier Christ's blood sanctifies us from all sins that we may enter into a covenant with God. In the Old Covenant only Jews were included. But now in Christ and through faith in His blood, believers, whether Jew or Gentile, are the participants in His new covenant.

Sanctified with Christ's Blood (Heb 13:12)

In addition to the significance of Christ's blood as the means of purging (καθαριεῖ, 9:14), boldness to enter into God's presence (παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων, 10:19), and a new and everlasting covenant with God (τὸ αἶμα τῆς διαθήκης, 10:29; αἵματι διαθήκης αἰωνίου, 13:20), the writer of Hebrews says that it is also the means of our sanctification (ἵνα ἁγιασθῇ διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος τὸν λαόν): "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb 13:12).

The word "sanctify" (ἁγιάσῃ) here means to "render pure" or "make clean."⁴³ This understanding of the word, "sanctify," is enhanced by the expression that Christ "suffered without the gate." Here the author recalls the ritual of the old animal sacrifice. The bodies of the animals, whose blood was used to cleanse and sanctify the people on the Day of Atonement, were burned outside the camp. It portrays the disgraceful character and the removal of sin from Israel. In the case of Christ, He was also persecuted and killed outside the

Jerusalem wall, at Golgotha. Jesus bore away the sins of the people. He bore them outside the gate in order to gain for them entrance into holiness by means of His own blood (διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος).

Cleansed from Sin in Christ's Blood (Rev 1:5)

Revelation 1:5 is another text which highlights the significance of Christ's actual blood in the atonement. It ascribes praises to the Lamb—Jesus Christ Himself—because He has “washed (λύσαντι) us from our sins in his own blood.”

The word for “washed” is λύσαντι (aorist participle of λύω). The Greek word λύω means “loosen what is fast or bound.”⁴⁴ Christ loosed us from the grip of our sins (ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν). Christ has obtained our release from sin by means of His own blood (ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ). Christ paid a great price—His own blood—to free us from our sins.

Washed and Made White in Christ's Blood (Rev 7:14)

At the time of the Great Tribulation, the martyrs will stand before the throne and before the Lamb. The souls of countless men who braved the persecution were before their Saviour when the voice said, “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed (ἔπλυναν) their robes, and made them white (ἐλεύκαναν) in the blood of the Lamb (ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου)” (Rev 7:14).

The word for “wash” (ἔπλυναν) comes from the root word (ἐπλύνω) which means “to wash as garments.”⁴⁵ The original word for “made white” (ἐλεύκαναν) comes from the Greek word λευκός which means white, and therefore, has the meaning “to whiten.” Commenting on Revelation 7:14, John F Walvoord wrote,

In verse 14 the significant detail is given that the martyrs have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Normally one cannot make anything white with blood. The passage is talking, however, of *spiritual purity*. The only way sins can be washed away is through the precious blood of Christ and because of His death and sacrifice.⁴⁶

Bought for God by Christ's Blood (Rev 5:9)

In Revelation 5:9 we have the words of the new song sung by the creatures of heaven (“four beast and four and twenty elders,” v 8) unto the Lamb—the Lord Jesus Christ. In that song of heaven, the angelic beings glorified the Lord by saying “... for thou wast slain, and hast

redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (v 9).

The word translated as “redeemed” in the KJV is from the Greek word, ἡγόρασας, which literally means purchased or bought. It is the aorist form of ἀγοράζω meaning “to buy.”⁴⁷ The price He paid to buy us for God is His own blood. Now believers are God’s possession because He has purchased them with a great price, the blood of His incarnated Son.

Overcame Satan by Christ’s Blood (Rev 12:11)

Satan—the accuser—is charging the believers before God for their sins. But the believers overcame (ἐνίκησαν) his accusations by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:11).

The word “overcome” comes from νικάω which means “to be victorious” or “to prevail.”⁴⁸ Since Jesus through His blood has bought them for God (5:9), washed them and made them white spiritually (7:14), and released them from the grip of sin (1:5), Satan’s accusation had no effect. Thus the believers prevailed over the accusation of Satan through Christ’s blood.

CONCLUSION

According to Jesus’ own words, His blood is as important as the other aspects of His atoning sacrifice (ie, His body, His death, etc). Christ shed His blood to ratify the new covenant for the benefit of His people, and procure the forgiveness of their sins.

Hebrews 9:22, aptly epitomises the apostolic teaching on the significance of Christ’s blood in the atonement: “without shedding of blood is no remission.” The blood of Christ is “precious,” according to Peter, for it has redeemed us from the punishment of sin when nothing else in the world could (1 Pet 1:18-19). The blood that saves is always the blood of Jesus—the Lamb of God—who laid down His life for us. It is the ransom, the price, which effects the forgiveness and atonement of sins. The gospel is no gospel without the blood of Christ.

Therefore, Christ’s blood should not be taken as a metonym for His death, because a death without the shedding of blood cannot atone for sin. It must also be stressed that it was not blood alone that was

required, it was also death. Christ could not simply bleed without dying, neither could He die without bleeding, both were necessary for man's atonement. Thus, the necessity of both blood and death must be held dogmatically. Neither blood nor death can be surrendered without compromising orthodoxy. Christ shed His blood in His death to atone for the sins of His people. Equally vital is the fact that it is the literal blood of Christ that God uses to cleanse His people from all sin.

NOTES

¹ S H Tow, *Revival Hymns and Choruses* (Singapore: Bible-Presbyterian Banner, nd).

² Emphasis added. John F MacArthur Jr, *Colossians, Philemon* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 64.

³ Ibid, 62.

⁴ Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1945), 177.

⁵ See F Davidson, A M Stibbs, E F Kevan, *The New Bible Commentary* (London: InterVarsity, 1967), 878.

⁶ John Calvin, *Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, nd), 170.

⁷ Homer A Kent Jr, *Light in the Darkness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 108.

⁸ R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1964), 626.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 627.

¹¹ Περι is used elsewhere with the same meaning—"on the behalf of" (Mark 1:44; John 16:26; Heb 5:3; Exod 14:14, 25). H E Dana and Julius R Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 109, 114.

¹² Mark 14:24, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ αἷμά μου, τὸ τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης, τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον. Luke 22:20, ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι, λέγων, Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον, ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον. Meyer says, "It must not be supposed that ὑπὲρ which is used by Luke instead of περὶ, is essentially different from the latter; but is to be distinguished from it only in respect of the different moral basis on which the idea contained in it rests, so

that both prepositions are often interchanged in cases where they have exactly one and the same reference. H A W Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1983), 457.

¹³ Lenski cites Robertson's explanation of ὑπερ. Lenski, *Mark*, 627.

¹⁴ NIDNTT, sv "ὑπερ" by Hervart Vorlander.

¹⁵ Ibid, 698.

¹⁶ Ibid, 701.

¹⁷ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG, 1993), 1149.

¹⁸ "Peculiar people" (1 Pet 2:9) literally means a people acquired or purchased to Himself in a unique manner. The Septuagint translates Malachi 3:17, "they shall be to me for an acquisition," ie, a peculiar property—"they shall be mine" (KJV) (see Zodhiates, *New Testament*, 1149).

¹⁹ Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1984), 167.

²⁰ Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 1:386.

²¹ Ibid, 2:457.

²² Ibid.

²³ R C H Lenski *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, nd), 350.

²⁴ Morris, 107.

²⁵ Ibid, 107-108.

²⁶ Ibid, 108.

²⁷ R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 62.

²⁸ Ibid, 64.

²⁹ John Calvin, *Hebrews and I & II Peter* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1974), 247.

³⁰ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 83.

³¹ (ἐγενήθητε)—ingressive aorist : A verb that denotes the beginning of an action. It can also be considered a historical aorist.

³² Lenski, *Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, 435-7.

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³³ Zodhiates, *New Testament*, 521.

³⁴ A metonym is a figure of speech in which the part is used to represent or designate the whole.

³⁵ MacArthur Jr, *Colossians and Philemon*, 64.

³⁶ Ibid, 62-3.

³⁷ Ibid, 63.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Spiros Zhodiatas, 793.

⁴⁰ Philip E Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1977) 356-7.

⁴¹ See excellent discussion in TDNT, sv “παρρεσία” by Heinrich Schlier.

⁴² Homer A Kent Jr, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 198.

⁴³ Zodhiates, *New Testament*, 69.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 931.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 1180.

⁴⁶ Emphasis is added. John F Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 146.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; 2 Peter 2:1; Revelation 14:4 etc.

⁴⁸ Zodhiates, *New Testament*, 1011.

Rev Prabhudas Koshy is pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church, and lecturer in Hebrew at Far Eastern Bible College.

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

George Skariah

INTRODUCTION

Definition of the Doctrine

According to Reformed theologians, the active obedience of Christ refers to Christ's perfect obedience of the law as man's representative.¹ Christ was "made under law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal 4:4-5). Through Christ's obedience the sinner is set free from the curse of law. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner at the point of spiritual birth. In Romans 8:3-4 Paul states,

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.²

The twofold perfect obedience of Christ consists of His active and passive obedience. The active obedience is also known as the "preceptive" obedience of Christ.³ It means Christ's full obedience to all the positive prescriptions of the law. The passive obedience refers to Christ's payment of the penalty of sin by His sufferings and death on the cross.⁴ By this, Christ took upon Himself by legal imputation the penalty of the sins of His people (Isa 53:6; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18). It is also known as the "penal" obedience of Christ.⁵

Problem

There exists a disagreement between covenant and dispensational theologians over the vicarious nature of the active obedience of Christ. Dispensational theologians view Christ's active obedience in a totally different way from covenant theologians.⁶ Binford has this to say,

His obedience to the Law was something that He owed to God as a normal member of the human race. His obedience could not be vicarious.

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Because of His constitution as the God-man, there was no question as to whether He would actually fulfill the law. Christ's righteous work during life was a natural and necessary manifestation of His deity given only to demonstrate man's original potential, not to substitute to [sic] man.⁷

According to Binford, only Christ's suffering and death on the cross was vicarious. It is His death that makes possible the imputation of righteousness.⁸ Ryrie, who holds the same view, says that though the active obedience was real, there was nothing vicarious about it.⁹ In another place he says, "the basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ."¹⁰

The whole problem with dispensational theologians in their understanding of the nature of the active obedience of Christ is in their rejection of the Scriptural doctrine of the Covenant of Works. Binford agrees that if one accepts the Covenant of Works, man is in need of the imputation of Christ's righteousness¹¹ which He accomplished through the perfect obedience to the law during His life. But Binford totally rejects any idea of the Covenant of Works, and its offer of eternal life upon the condition of Adam's obedience.¹² His conclusion is that since there was no offer of life to Adam upon obedience, there was no need for Christ to obey the law on behalf of His people to impute righteousness.¹³ This leads him to say that life was never offered in the law.¹⁴

Purpose

This paper seeks to prove that the active obedience of Christ was vicarious in nature. Through His perfect obedience to the law, He merited eternal life for the sinner. Then, by His passive obedience, He paid the penalty incurred by the sinner. His blood appeased the wrath of God.

The writer's argument will cover (1) the Scriptural basis for the Covenant of Works, (2) the eternal life which was offered by Christ's perfect obedience to the law, and (3) the imputation of Christ's righteousness upon the sinner.

Procedure

This paper will be both argumentative and exegetical. Since the main opponents of the doctrine of the active obedience are the dispensationalists, their main arguments would have to be examined. The key Scriptural passages by which they support their arguments will be evaluated through an exegesis of both the Old and New Testament texts. In order to determine the right meaning of the text, the historical-grammatical-canonical method of interpretation is adopted. This principle of "Scripture

interprets Scripture” is taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*,

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and false sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.¹⁵

Therefore, the meaning of a text will be determined in the light of the whole Bible. This writer will first discuss the basis of the whole doctrine, that is, the promise of eternal life in the Covenant of Works for perfect obedience. He will then focus on the point that when man failed to obey the law, Christ came to meet the requirements of the law. After which he will discuss the vicarious nature of the active obedience of Christ. Lastly he will explain the relation between Christ’s active obedience and His passive obedience.

Presuppositions

This writer sees a continuity in God’s redemptive plan.¹⁶ He believes that God’s redemptive revelation is covenantal in nature.¹⁷ When man failed to obey the terms of the Covenant of Works, God out of His infinite grace and mercy, established another covenant, namely, the Covenant of Grace (Gen 3:15). God then progressively revealed it. Though the covenant was renewed in different stages, there is an organic unity within it; the different stages all point to Christ. This writer totally agrees with Murray who said, “Soteriology is covenant soteriology.”¹⁸

The 66 books of the Bible are verbally and plenary inspired (Matt 5:17-18; 2 Tim 3:16). On this point, the words of John Burgon are noteworthy,

The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him that sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme.¹⁹

The Bible is infallible and inerrant not only when it touches on matters of salvation, but also on matters of science, history and geography.

THE OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW AND THE POSSIBILITY OF LIFE

Introduction

Wayne G Strickland, a dispensationalist, presents his view that the law was never intended to give life.²⁰ This is the common notion of dispensationalists who reject the Scriptural teaching of the Covenant of Works. On the other hand, covenant theologians recognise the existence of the Covenant of Works in the Garden of Eden. Under the Covenant of Works, God offered Adam eternal life based upon perfect obedience to His commandment. This is the basic requirement of salvation for all ages (Lev 18:5; Rom 2:13).

This section seeks to show the Scriptural validity of the Covenant of Works and its offer of eternal life.

The Promise of Life in the Covenant of Works

Dispensational View of the Covenant of Works

Dispensationalists in general reject the doctrine of the vicarious nature of the active obedience of Christ. This is because they assume the non-existence of the Covenant of Works.²¹ Lightner nevertheless admits,

If one concedes that God made a covenant with Adam promising him eternal life for his obedience and if this covenant is the basis for all God's redemptive dealings with man for all ages, then belief in the substitutionary nature of Christ's sufferings in life is a natural corollary.²²

Binford also offers the same line of reasoning as Lightner, saying that if one accepts the Covenant of Works, then he should admit the substitutionary nature of Christ's entire life.²³ Nevertheless, he believes that God's dealing with Adam cannot be called a covenant.²⁴ He further argues that the text does not state that Adam would have lived forever if he had refrained from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.²⁵ Therefore he rejects any offer of eternal life on condition of perfect obedience.

Ryrie takes a more moderate view when he says that the ideas contained in the Covenant of Works are certainly not unscriptural, though these ideas are not systematised and formalised by Scripture into covenants.²⁶

The Scriptural Basis for the Covenant of Works

Although the word “covenant” is not mentioned in the first three chapters of the book of Genesis, the idea of the Covenant of Works is still Scriptural. All the elements of a covenant are mentioned in chapter 2 of Genesis.²⁷ Two parties are named: God and Adam (Gen 2:16). A condition is laid down (Gen 2:17), that, for obedience, life is the reward, and for disobedience, death is the punishment. The Westminster divines called it the Covenant of Works. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.”²⁸ It is called the Covenant of Works because works were the condition on which the promise was made.

The dispensationalists object to this since according to them there was no agreement between God and Adam. There seems to be no evidence that Adam accepted the conditions laid down. Against this objection Berkhof argued,

We do not read of such an explicit agreement and acceptance on the part of man either in the cases of Noah and Abraham. God and man do not appear as equals in any of these covenants. All God’s covenants are of the nature of sovereign disposition imposed on man. God is absolutely sovereign in His dealings with man, and has the perfect right to lay down the conditions which the latter must meet, in order to enjoy His favor.²⁹

Thus this can be true even in the case of God’s first covenant with man.

The idea of a Covenant of Grace implies the existence of a Covenant of Works. Under the Covenant of Grace, Christ placed Himself under the law in order to redeem those who were under the law (Gal 4:4-5). It shows that Christ came to do what Adam failed to do. If under the Covenant of Grace, Christ is carrying out the original agreement which God made with Adam, then the latter must also have been of the nature of a covenant.³⁰ Hodge substantiates this point by saying,

The Scripture knows nothing of any other than two methods of attaining eternal life: the one that which demands perfect obedience, and the other that which demands faith. If the latter is called a covenant the former is declared to be of the same nature.³¹

Another significant Scriptural basis for the Covenant of Works is the representative principle. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul presents both Adam and Christ as heads of a people whom they represent. Here Paul says that

Adam's sin was imputed to all his posterity (v 12). In the Garden of Eden Adam stood as man's representative. In the life-work of Christ, His obedience has gained righteousness for all believers by imputation (v 19; Rom 6:10-11; 4:3-6). Since Christ stood as representative Head because of the Covenant of Grace, "it naturally leads to the conclusion that Adam also stood in covenant relationship to his descendants."³²

The Promise of the Covenant of Works

Although there was no explicit promise to Adam that he should gain eternal life upon perfect obedience, it does not mean that there was no basis for such a promise whatsoever. From the nature of the penalty for disobedience, it is evident that God promised life for obedience. God told Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17). This command reveals that disobedience is linked to death, and that obedience is linked to life.³³

This truth is clearly reiterated in other parts of the Scripture. In Leviticus 18:5 the Lord said, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord" (cf Neh 9:29; Rom 2:13; 10:5; Gal 3:12; Matt 19:17). And Paul in Romans 7:10 states, "and the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." From this verse Brice L Martin observes that "the original purpose of the law at creation was life."³⁴

The life which God promised was not just the continuation of Adam's natural life, but life eternal. Hodge argues that it can be proved from the fact that, firstly, the death in which God threatened Adam was not the mere extinction of existence, but the exclusion of communion with God.³⁵ In other words, it was spiritual death. Adam experienced that death the very moment he ate the forbidden fruit. Secondly, the terms "life" and "death" are often used in the Scripture to mean two opposite spiritual conditions. In John 5:24 Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth ... hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (cf John 6:47; Rom 11:15; Eph 2:1-3).

Francis Turretin addresses this fact by saying that, firstly, the law has the promise of eternal life and was therefore prescribed to Adam.³⁶ He proves this point by quoting Leviticus 18:5, Matthew 19:16-17, and

Romans 7:10. He says that since after the fall of mankind, the law justifies no one, this promise must have had place in upright Adam.³⁷ Secondly, he argues that this fact is confirmed by Christ, as He acquired the reward of eternal life by being made under the law and fulfilling the righteousness of the law (Rom 8:4; Gal 4:5). His argument is that Christ could not have done this unless the law had promised life eternal to the obedient.³⁸

The Condition of the Covenant of Works

In the Garden, God gave a specific command to Adam, saying, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). The first ever covenant which God made with man was a conditional covenant, and the condition was perfect obedience.

Adam was under subjection to obey the law of God. Covenant theologians agree that the law already existed in the garden.³⁹ The *Westminster Confession of Faith* thus states, “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him, and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, ...”⁴⁰ This law was written in man’s heart (Rom 2:14-15). Calvin calls it the law of nature.⁴¹ Berkhof says that the law which was written on the tablets of Adam’s heart was like the Ten Commandments. It was different only in its form. The law which God gave to Moses was primarily negative, because it presupposes a knowledge of sin. But the law in Adam’s heart must have had a positive character, though a negative commandment was added.⁴² Kevan explains clearly,

Had Adam continued in innocence, there would not have been such a solemn declaration of the Law by Moses, for it would have been written in men’s heart. Therefore, though God gave a positive Law to Adam, for the testing of his obedience and the expression of his homage, yet He did not give it to him in this outward and formal way.⁴³

The written law became necessary because of the sins of the people and their hardness of heart (Gal 3:19).

The law in which Adam was subjected to was not just to prohibit him from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁴⁴ It was the condition for eternal life. Boettner states that eternal life was the reward for perfect obedience of the law through a probationary period.⁴⁵ The promise of the covenant demands an obedience to the law. Hodge says, “Upon this

obedience his character and condition for eternity were made to depend.”⁴⁶ If Adam had obeyed for the period prescribed, he would have obtained the reward.

The Significance of the Covenant of Works

Adam’s disobedience did not abrogate the promise and condition of the Covenant of Works. The law of perfect obedience which was originally given to Adam was permanent. The requirement for salvation is always perfect obedience.⁴⁷ It is in perfect conformity with the will and character of God. That is why the Scripture constantly proclaims that perfect obedience to God’s law will lead one to eternal life (Lev 18:5; Rom 7:10; 10:5; Gal 3:12). If that was not the case, God might have withdrawn this promise, but instead, He repeated it several times both in the Old and in the New Testament. Secondly, Christ’s perfect obedience to the law on behalf of the people shows that the Covenant of Works remains in force.

Although the Covenant of Works remains in force, no human being is able to obtain salvation by it. It is because of the total depravity of man. We are all condemned in Adam’s transgression. We are no longer able to keep the law perfectly. Whereas Christ, the Mediator, met all the demands of the law. To obtain the promised life, we must go through Him. By the merit of Christ’s work, man has been freed from the Covenant of Works.

The Promise of Life in the Law

Although the purpose of the Mosaic Law was not to procure salvation, it implicitly promised eternal life to those who could keep it perfectly.⁴⁸ It is in complete relation with the promise and condition of the Covenant of Works. The purpose of this section is to show that the Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testament, teach that perfect obedience to the law of God brings eternal life.

Dispensational View of the Law in Relation to Life

Dispensational theologians argue against any possibility of life under law. Strickland says that “God never intended his law to provide spiritual redemption for his people.”⁴⁹ He claims that Leviticus 18:5 “excludes the possibility of law salvation.”⁵⁰ One of his reasons is that God gave the law to an already redeemed people. So he says obedience to the law only brings physical blessing and long life.⁵¹ Binford also excludes the possibility of life through the law.⁵² According to him, the context of Leviticus 18:5

does not support that one can obtain eternal life if he obeys the law. He thinks that this verse only offers a blessed life on earth.⁵³ He also believes that the law was given to a redeemed people.⁵⁴

Old Testament Proof

Contrary to what dispensationalists might say, we do see that the promise of life in the law being consistently taught throughout the Old Testament.

Leviticus 18:5

Leviticus 18:5 is the key passage in the Old Testament which affirms that a person who keeps God's commands will live. Here the LORD said unto the children of Israel, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD." This verse is quoted once in Deuteronomy (4:15), thrice in Ezekiel (20:11,13,21), once in Nehemiah (9:29), and thrice in the New Testament (Luke 10:28; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12).

Leviticus 18:5 has been interpreted differently among theologians. As noted earlier, dispensational theologians exclude any promise of eternal life in this verse, but offers divine blessing and material prosperity. R K Harrison, though not a dispensationalist, thinks likewise. He wrote, "God addresses His law to a chosen people, and therefore, does not give any indication that salvation is in view."⁵⁵ On the other hand, Laird Harris argues that Leviticus 18:5 teaches that "the Old Testament believers who trusted God and obeyed him from the heart received life abundant both here and hereafter."⁵⁶ According to him, this verse does not require an external obedience to the law, but a command to keep all God's laws by faith and thus attain a full spiritual life.⁵⁷

It should be clarified that the law was given not to a regenerated people, but to an unregenerated people. This point is made clear by Paul in 1 Timothy 1:9-10,

the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless, and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers,

This was the condition of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Exodus 32 describes their unregenerate heart. The incident at Kadesh Bernea is another example, which speaks of the depraved condition of their heart,

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where God vowed that He will not let them enter into Canaan rest, except Joshua and Caleb (Num 14 cf Heb 3:7- 19). So Paul says, the law “was added because of transgressions” (Gal 3:19). Kevan comments,

the Law was made not because of righteous man but because of those who were unrighteous. Had Adam continued in innocence, there would not have been such a solemn declaration of the Law by Moses, for it would have been written in men’s hearts.⁵⁸

The written law became necessary because the people have gone astray from the way of the Lord.⁵⁹ God’s law was given to a people, for the most part, yet unregenerate.

Against the argument that the phrase “shall live” does not refer to eternal life, one finds Jesus and Paul explaining vividly the full meaning of life in Leviticus 18:5, that is eternal life (Luke 10:28; Rom 7:10; 10:5; Gal 3:12). Anyone who keeps the law perfectly will enjoy eternal life.⁶⁰ Calvin said, “The hope of eternal life is therefore given to all who keep the Law; for those who expound the passage as referring to this earthly and transitory life are mistaken.”⁶¹

Deuteronomy 4:1

In Deuteronomy 4:1, Moses again mentions what he had already told the Israelites in Leviticus 18:5. Chapter 4 as a whole is a call to obedience. In Leviticus 18:5, the audience is the same. Moses here openly condemns the rebelliousness of the people.⁶² Man’s whole responsibility is to heed God’s commandments. The promise which Moses here inserted “only invites them to unreserved obedience through hope of the inheritance.”⁶³ God’s Words point the way to eternal life which is this: whoever does them shall live by them.⁶⁴

Ezekiel 20:11,13,21

In Ezekiel 20, Leviticus 18:5 is quoted three times. The theme of this chapter is God’s reminder to Israel of her rebellion against Him. As He reminds them of their failure, He also reminds them that they could have inherited life, if they had obeyed all of His statutes and ordinances. Perfect obedience is the divine standard to attain life. Israel’s judgment was due to her failure to obey the law.⁶⁵

Nehemiah 9:29

In Nehemiah 9:29, Leviticus 18:5 is quoted as a reference to God's covenant relationship with His people. Nehemiah praises God for His faithfulness to His people, even though the people were unfaithful. They continually disobeyed His law. As a result, God handed them over to oppressors (v 27), and even sent them into exile (v 30). The message of Nehemiah is the same as Ezekiel's. Those who keep the ordinances of God will live.

Deuteronomy 6:25

In Deuteronomy 6:25, Moses declares that if one keeps all the commandments and statutes, it shall be his righteousness. The righteousness of a person is connected to the observance of the law. If anyone can observe the law in all its completeness, God will declare him righteous. This righteousness is not founded upon the pharisaic righteousness of works, but upon the earnest striving after the fulfilment of the law.

New Testament Proof

The promise of life in the law is taught not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament. Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 twice (Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12), and Jesus mentioned it once (Luke 10:28). Paul also mentioned the same theme in Romans 2:13, and 7:10.

Romans 2:13

In Romans 2:12, Paul says that those who have sinned in ignorance of the law and those who have sinned with the knowledge of the law will be judged. Though the latter have the privilege to possess the law, that does not mean that they will have some benefit before God. Paul then in verse 13 explains the reason for his statement. It is "not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." Murray has observed that the emphasis in verse 13 is in the difference between "the hearers of the law" and "the doers of the law."⁶⁶ At this point it must be noted that Paul is making a contrast between "justification by faith" and "justification by the works of the law." In verse 13, Paul tells the Judaizers that by the law they are unable to be justified. Bruce comments rightly, "the course of his argument indicates 'doer' of the law, yet since no one does it perfectly, there is no justification that way."⁶⁷ He

even says that Paul may have had in mind Leviticus 18:5 when he wrote this verse.⁶⁸

The criterion of the law for justification is in the “doing,” not hearing. Those who are in the law never go beyond just being hearers of law. They are never in a position of becoming “doers” of it because of their sinful nature. Therefore the promised life through the law is impossible for all men, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

Romans 7:10-12

In verse 10 Paul says, “And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.”⁶⁹ Paul again mentions the original purpose of the law, that is giving life to the “doer.” But when sin entered, the original purpose was defeated, and the law condemned man as sinner and so to death. The self-righteous Jew misunderstands when he thinks that keeping the law would enable him to earn everlasting life. Paul was one of them who thought like that. It only brought a curse to them for “cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10).

In verse 12 Paul draws a conclusion from his preceding argument by saying, “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good.” Murray comments, “the law intrinsically and originally was unto life and therefore directed to the promotions of what is holy, just, and good.”⁷⁰ Paul could see nothing wrong with the law. All problems lie with sin.

Romans 10:5

The use of Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 has been widely discussed among scholars. There are differences in their views and understanding of Romans 10:5.

The most common argument is that Paul used Romans 10:5 as a contrast to Romans 10:6-8 assuming that Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 to state his condemnation of righteousness “by works of the law.”⁷¹ Their argument is that the quotation of Leviticus 18:5 (Rom 10:5) is separated from the quotation of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (Rom 10:6-8) by the particle $\delta\epsilon$. Therefore both stand in antithesis to each other. To support their view, they mention the way Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12.⁷² Robert Badenas rejected this argument by stating that $\delta\epsilon$ is basically a

connective particle, which does not always mean “but.”⁷³ It may also be conjunctive, and means “and.”⁷⁴ On Paul’s quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12, the objection is that the use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians cannot determine its meaning in Romans. Paul can quote a passage and give it a different emphasis for a theological purpose in a different context.⁷⁵

Another view is that in Romans 10:5 Paul is denouncing Jewish legalism.⁷⁶ By citing Leviticus 18:5, Paul is attacking man’s self-righteous attempt to gain a right standing with God through obedience of the law. Schreiner says that Paul is “rejecting the idea that the law is a possible source of life or righteousness, even though the perfect keeping of the law would bring righteousness.”⁷⁷ Schreiner argues for an adversative relationship between Romans 10:5 and 10:6-8. He also sees a parallel between verses 3 and 5, and between verse 5 and Philippians 3:9. He explains that verses 3-4 indicate that the Jews tried to pursue their own righteousness because they have misunderstood the true goal of the law.

The third view is a positive reading of Leviticus 18:5.⁷⁸ Davies says that Romans 10:5 refers to an obedience of the law which is of faith that leads to life.⁷⁹ According to him, this is in accord with what is taught in the Old Testament that the law is the way to life, as long as it is obeyed by faith (Ps 119:93).

The fourth view which the writer believes is the most appropriate is the Christological view. Cranfield writes,

It is possible to understand Paul to be applying the words of Leviticus 18:5, not to the impossible, hopeless task which men set themselves when they think to earn a righteous status before God by their own works, but to the achievement of the one Man who has done the righteousness which is of the law in His life and, above all, in His death, in the sense of fulfilling the law’s requirements perfectly and so earning as His right a righteous status before God.⁸⁰

Cranfield says that verses 5-13 are explanatory of verse 4. “Christ is the goal of the law, for what Moses declares in Leviticus 18:5 is Christ’s obedience and victory.”⁸¹

Moses declared that the law promised life. In order to achieve the promised life, the requirement is to do all the ordinances and judgements of the law (Rom 10:5). A Jewish believer however cannot take Leviticus 18:5 as a legalistic guarantee of eternal life. This is because he is incapable of

doing all that the law commands. It causes tension. Christ broke that tension. In accordance with Leviticus 18:5, Christ, by His life and death, perfectly obeyed all the requirements of the law and so earned a righteous status and eternal life for His people.⁸² So Christ became the fulfilment of the law (Rom 10:4). In verse 5, Paul gives the reasons for his assertion that Christ is the fulfilment of the law. Moses declares that righteousness will come through the law. It will be only by *doing it completely*. The person who can keep it perfectly is none other than Jesus Himself. For that purpose He came to this world (Matt 5:17-18). Then from verse 6 onwards, Paul explains that righteousness can only be obtained by faith in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:12

Paul's quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12 is viewed in several ways by theologians.⁸³ Here Paul says, "The law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them." The problem here is that Paul sets Leviticus 18:5 in antithesis to Habakkuk 2:4, which is quoted in the previous verse (v 11). Is Paul here presenting two different ways of justification?

In order to solve the difficulty, some argued that Paul here refers to the legalistic misunderstanding of the law.⁸⁴ According to this view, Galatians 3:12 does not represent the law, but the misinterpretation of Judaizers for their legalistic motto. It is true that Judaizers appealed to Leviticus 18:5 in order to support their teaching, but this interpretation of Galatians 3:12 will not do justice to its context.

From the context, it can be seen that Paul in verse 12 demonstrates the difference between law and faith. Law is incompatible with faith because both show different ways of salvation. Paul points out that salvation by law and by faith are fundamentally different because one is based on *doing*, whereas, the other is based on *believing*.⁸⁵ In verse 10 Paul has already mentioned that what the law requires is perfect obedience. But no one can keep the law in its entirety. Therefore, in verse 11, he says no one will be justified by the law, but by faith. Verse 10 informs verse 12.

Law does not depend on faith for its basis. It knows only one way to get life, that is one must do it completely. In his polemic against the Judaizers, Paul says that the law cannot justify them since they are unable to keep it perfectly.

Galatians 3:21-22 sheds light to this interpretation of verse 12. Paul asks, "Is the law then against the promises of God?" He answers, "May it never be!" Paul gives the reason, "for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." But the whole problem lies in verse 22, which says, "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin." That means we are unable to meet the requirements of the law. If so, then there is only one way, which Paul mentions, "that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (v 22b).

Summary

The Covenant of Works has Scriptural basis. God established this covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden, and promised life eternal upon condition of perfect obedience to the law of God. Perfect obedience is the divine requirement for eternal life. The teaching of Leviticus 18:5 and other Old and New Testament passages is that life is promised in the law for a perfect doer. The perfect doer of the law is not the sinner but the Saviour, namely, Christ, who has earned righteousness as the second or greater Adam.

THE PERFECT OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to show that though life is promised in the law, the law never brings salvation to anyone outside of Christ. The promise of the law is ineffective because of sin. Sinful man is incapable of meeting all the requirements of the law. Since man has failed, the law has become the revealer of sin, and the schoolmaster to lead him to Christ. In Christ, man finds the perfect fulfilment of the law.

Man's Failure in the Law

Paul in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians states that righteousness will not come through the works of the law, but through faith in Christ (Rom 3:20-22,28; Gal 2:16,21-22). He also states the reason why righteousness will not come through the law.

It is not as what E P Sanders argues. According to him, Paul rejected the works of law as a way of salvation because righteousness was never available through law. He says, "it was never God's intention that one should accept the law in order to become one of the elect."⁸⁶ Schreiner strongly argues against such a view,

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Paul rejected the law as a way of salvation because of human inability to obey it. No one can be justified by the works of the law because no one can obey the law perfectly. If one could do all that law requires, then one would be counted as righteous in God's sight. But since everyone falls short of obeying the law, therefore, righteousness cannot be obtained through the law.⁸⁷

Thus the law could not bring righteousness because it "was weak through the flesh" (Rom 8:3). There is no fault in the law. The problem lies with sin.

Romans 1:18-3:20

In Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul expresses the doctrine of human sinfulness in universal terms. It is called the doctrine of total depravity. Here Paul argues that nobody can be declared righteous before God by the "works of law" (3:20), for Jews and Gentiles are all "under sin" (3:9).

Paul begins by bringing his charge against the Gentile world (1:18-32). They are the ones "who hold the truth in unrighteousness," and will receive God's wrath (v 18). "They are without excuse," (v 20) since God has revealed Himself through His creation.

In Romans 2:1-29, Paul goes on to demonstrate the sinfulness of the Jews. He states that though the Jews possess the law, that does not mean that they will be spared from the wrath of God. They will be spared if they practise the law (v 13). Paul does not deny their advantage of having the law and circumcision (2:17-20). But this advantage does not profit them in any way if they are not keeping the law. And indeed they are incapable of doing so. Therefore he says circumcision is no better than uncircumcision since all have failed to keep the law (2:25; 3:1).

In conclusion, Paul explicitly declares that all are sinners (3:9-20). Paul says in verses 19-20,

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Paul reasons that justification cannot be achieved through the law. The presence of sin in all people prevents them from being justified through the law.⁸⁸ The relation between verses 19-20 affirms the futility of seeking justification by the law. Every mouth has been stopped by the law, and renders the whole world sinfully accountable to God.

Romans 8:3a

This is another verse where Paul discusses man's incapability of doing the law. He says that the law is weak through the flesh. Paul does not deny that the law is unable to justify us. No one can ever fault the law.⁸⁹ The medium in which the law works is the flesh which is man's sinful nature. This makes perfect obedience impossible.

Galatians 3:10-11

In Galatians 3:10-11 Paul stresses the incapability of the law doer to achieve justification before God. In verse 10, he says,

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Having argued for the case that righteousness comes by way of faith (3:6-9), Paul now presents the argument against the possibility of justification by legal works.⁹⁰ Abraham was justified by faith "for" it was impossible for him to receive the righteousness by the works of the law.

Paul here establishes *the reason* why justification is impossible by the works of the law. All who seek righteousness by the works of the law are under the curse.⁹¹ The explicit reason given for the curse is that man failed to do everything that the law commands.⁹² The law demands perfect obedience if man is to escape the curse.⁹³

Paul proves this point by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3:10 to emphasise the *unfulfillable character* of the law.⁹⁴ Schreiner writes,

the idea that Paul is assuming that perfect obedience to the law is impossible in Gal 3:10 is the most satisfactory, for such a view explains most adequately the context and argument of Gal 3:10-14, and it is also in significant agreement with Paul's theology as he expressed it in Romans.⁹⁵

By the standard of the law, every one is "under the curse" because no one is able to keep it in its entirety. No human being has ever obeyed the law completely. Partial obedience is inadequate, because James 2:10-11 states,

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not

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kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

In order not to break the law, one must know all that God has commanded. And even if one does not know all the commands of God, ignorance is no excuse. If one obeys 99% of the law, he is still under the curse. To escape the curse, he must keep the law perfectly. If he breaks any command once, he is under the curse.

The seriousness of the matter lies with the fact that Christ has taught that the violation of the moral law occurs not only in the outward action, but also in the inward attitude. He made it clear in Matthew 5:27-28,

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

If that is the case, then who can keep the law in all its requirements? Absolutely no human being is able to do so. His sin prevents him from fulfilling the law (Rom 3:10, 23). All are under the curse of the law. Therefore, Paul's argument in Galatians 3:10 is that to those who trust in the law for righteousness are cursed for the law only leads them to death.

Then in verse 11, Paul continues, "But that no one is justified by the law before God, [it is] clear, because, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Having presented the thesis of his argument in verse 10, Paul now develops his case in verse 11. Here his argument is that since no one can keep the law in its entirety, then it is impossible for one to be justified by it.⁹⁶ Then how is one being justified in the sight of God? Paul again quotes from the Old Testament, "The just shall live by faith" (Hab 2:4).⁹⁷

Galatians 3:21-22

What Paul made implicit in Galatians 3:10-11, he makes explicit in Galatians 3:21-22. These two verses say,

Is the law then against the promise of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Moises Silva states that Paul here explains his assessment of the law by specifying in what respects the law may be viewed positively and in what respects negatively.⁹⁸ The positive element can be seen from Paul's forceful exclamation μή γένοιτο. It declares that the law is harmonious

with God's saving purposes, that is, with the Abrahamic promise. The negative element is revealed by a contrary-to-fact conditional sentence, which constitutes a twofold denial: (1) the law cannot impart life; and (2) righteousness is not by the law.

The conjunction γὰρ here is causal and indicates why the law would have to be regarded as being opposed to the promises. It is because if righteousness could have been by law, then it would be in opposition to the promise. But in fact, law cannot impart righteousness because of the problem of sin in the doer.

Then in verse 22, Paul states the problem, "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin." People are dead in their sins, and so they are incapable of doing the law. As a result, the law could not be the source of righteousness and life. As mentioned in Romans 8:3, the weakness of the flesh makes the law impotent for salvation.

Purpose of the Law

The original purpose of the law at creation was to give "life," but it resulted in "death" (Rom 7:10) because of sin (Rom 3:9-20). Later God gave the law to Moses in written form. Reformed theologians agree that since no one can ever obey the law perfectly, the promise of the law to save those who obey it can never be fulfilled.⁹⁹ This is the negative aspect of the law. So what is the purpose of God's giving of the law to Moses? The law was given for the following purposes:

Law Reveals Sin

In Romans 3:20b Paul says, "by the law is the knowledge of sin." The law makes man realise the defects of his nature or character. It makes him aware that he is not what he ought to be. When he sins, the law makes him know that he has transgressed the commandment. Romans 4:15 says that without the law there is no transgression. The word παράβασις (transgression) implies "a law or norm which is overstepped."¹⁰⁰ Lenski observes that in Greek it has the sense of walking "beside" the law, and transgression suggests the picture of "a boundary that is illegally crossed into forbidden territory."¹⁰¹ Therefore, the law pronounces the offender, a transgressor.

Law Increases Sin

Paul states in Romans 5:20a that, “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.” The abounding of sin can be both in a quantitative and in a qualitative dimension.¹⁰² In the quantitative sense, it means that law has increased the number of sins, by defining things that displeases God. In the qualitative level, the law makes sin a more serious matter by spelling out in detail the will of God.¹⁰³

Paul explains the purpose of the law in a similar way in Galatians 3:19. If the inheritance will come through Abraham, then he asks the question, “wherefore then serveth the law?” Then he states the purpose of the law, “it was added *because* of transgressions.” The preposition *χάριν* (“because”) is used in two ways: (1) to indicate goal (Tit 1:5; 11; Jude 16); and (2) to indicate reason (1 John 3:12; Luke 7:47).¹⁰⁴ In this context, it is to be taken to indicate goal or purpose.¹⁰⁵ Then the idea is that the law was added to provoke transgressions or to make them increase.¹⁰⁶ It makes sin exceedingly sinful so as to show the sinner that he cannot save himself, and is in need of a Saviour.

Law Leads to Christ

Paul discusses the pedagogical nature of the law in Galatians 3:24-25, saying,

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

The word *παιδαγωγός* which the KJV translates as “schoolmaster” was a well-known figure both in the Greco-Roman world and in Judaism. Historically, he was “a slave, whose task it was to conduct a boy to and from school and to supervise and direct his general conduct.”¹⁰⁷ As the etymology of the word suggests he is a “child-tender.”¹⁰⁸ As a schoolmaster, he was a disciplinarian too.¹⁰⁹

Likewise, Paul is saying that the law functioned as a schoolmaster to lead people to Christ. Hendriksen explains it in right perspective when he wrote that the “schoolmaster” was,

an escort or attendant, and also at the same time a disciplinarian. The discipline which he exercised was often of a severe character, ... that was exactly the function which the law had performed. It had been of a preparatory and disciplinary nature, readying the hearts of those under its

tutelage for the eager acceptance of the gospel of justification ... by faith in Christ.¹¹⁰

As the schoolmaster kept the boy under his care until a certain age, so the law kept the people until they attained their spiritual maturity in Christ.¹¹¹ Christ opened the way of faith to those who were under the law.

Christ's Obedience to the Law

When man failed to obey the law in all its precepts, God, in the fullness of time, sent His Son Jesus to accomplish all the requirements of the law (Gal 4:4). This is known as the *active obedience of Christ*. He was the only person who could obey all of it, since He knew no sin. He was born without inheriting Adam's sinful nature. Christ's coming to fulfill the law was the focal point of world history. The Old Testament had looked forward to that event, and the New Testament leans on it. Smeaton commented that the fulfilment of the law is the second fact in the history of man, as sin was the first.¹¹²

Matthew 5:17

Matthew 5:17-20 is one of the key passages which teaches the active obedience of Christ. In verse 17 Christ says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

The difficult part of this verse is the word πληρώω ("fulfill"). There are many interpretations on what the word "fulfill" means here. MacArthur argues that Jesus fulfilled the law by being its fulfilment.¹¹³ Others, especially Jewish scholars take the verb "fulfill" to mean that Jesus came to confirm the law and to establish it.¹¹⁴

The best interpretation is given by Kent when he said, "Christ fulfilled the Old Testament by obeying the Law perfectly, by fulfilling its types and prophecies, and by paying the full penalty of the Law as the substitute for sinners."¹¹⁵ Hendriksen also gives the same line of interpretation saying that Christ came to fulfill the demands of the law and to validate the prediction of the prophets.¹¹⁶ The word πληρώω has the meaning, "to fulfill a demand or claim,"¹¹⁷ or "fulfilling by doing."¹¹⁸

The law here means all the three aspects of the law: Judicial, Ceremonial, and Moral. Christ's purpose of the incarnation was to fulfill the demands of the law by perfectly obeying every jot and tittle of it.

In what way did Christ fulfill the demands of the law? He fulfilled the law by undergoing the law of circumcision (Lev 12:3; Luke 2:21). He was

presented in the temple (Num 3:13; Luke 2:22-23); He kept the Passover (Exod 34:23; Luke 2:42); and He observed the Jewish feasts commanded by the law (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:3; John 17:10). Jesus in His baptism by John fulfilled the law. According to the law, the Levites, those who were to be priests, had to be sprinkled with water (Num 8:6-7). Likewise, Christ being High Priest forever (Heb 3:1; 4:14; 5:5; 9:11), through the rite of baptism, was set apart as a Priest and a Minister of holy things. As Deuteronomy 6:25 says, “righteousness” involves obedience to the law, Christ in order “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15) met the baptismal demand of the law for a priest in His baptism by John.

Hebrews 5:8-9; 2:10

Christ’s perfect obedience is again shown in Hebrews 5:8-9, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

Also chapter 2, verse 10 says, “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

These verses teach that Christ perfectly obeyed His father till the very end of His earthly ministry. That perfect obedience caused Him to become the Author of our eternal salvation.

Lenski points out that, in Hebrews 5:8, ὑπακούῃν with the article indicates the well-known complete obedience as distinguished from obedience in general.¹¹⁹ As a Son, He naturally obeyed the Father. But His obedience was more than that. He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. It was the ultimate obedience, for as a man, He learned by actually going through the suffering in obedience.¹²⁰ He was the obedient Servant of God (Isa 50:4-9; Phil 2:6-8).

Summary

The law, which was essentially life-giving, brought condemnation to man. It was not because of anything wrong with the law, but because of the sinfulness of man. Man is unable to obey the law perfectly. God gave the law in written form to the children of Israel through Moses. The law reveals sin. The law makes people realise that they have come short of God’s moral standards, and thus are unable to save themselves. They need a Saviour. The law thus leads men to Christ. Only He who was born

without inheriting Adam's sin, who perfectly obeyed all the requirements of the law, could save men from sin.

THE VICARIOUS NATURE OF THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

Introduction

Was the active obedience of Christ vicarious? This has been a matter of dispute between dispensational and covenant theologians. While dispensational theologians deny the vicarious nature in Christ's active obedience, covenant theologians argue that Christ obeyed the law on behalf of man, who had failed to obey the law perfectly. As Christ obeyed the law, He earned righteousness for those who would trust in Him. Therefore, sinners are saved by the imputed righteousness of Christ. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches this doctrine.¹²¹

This section attempts to examine both views. From various Scriptural passages, this writer will show that Christ's active obedience was substitutionary, and we have attained eternal life by imputed righteousness which He has earned for us because He perfectly kept the law.

Dispensational View of the Active Obedience

Present day dispensational theologians agree that Christ actively and perfectly obeyed the law while He was on earth.¹²² However, they do not see how His obedience could be in any way vicarious. Ryrie writes,

The sufferings of Christ's life, though real, were not atoning ... only the suffering of His death and His obedience in being the sacrificial Lamb were atoning. ... It was during the three hours of darkness when God laid on Christ the sins of the world that Atonement was being made.¹²³

So for him, "the basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ."¹²⁴ Lightner who also holds the same position as Ryrie, says that the non-atoning view of the active obedience of Christ is the most Scripturally defensible.¹²⁵ Others who take such view are Binford,¹²⁶ and Connelly.¹²⁷ Binford says,

The passive obedience or suffering of Christ which becomes the basis for salvation is limited to that time on the cross ... The imputation of His active obedience has been denied and therefore, there is no reason to include His life's suffering in the atonement.¹²⁸

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So these theologians deny any possibility of vicariousness in Christ's active obedience. By His death on the cross, His personal righteousness is imputed to Christians.¹²⁹

Then what was the purpose of Christ's perfect life on this earth? Binford answers this question by stating four purposes:¹³⁰ (1) it was necessary for Christ to come as a complete man; (2) the sufferings proved that He was eligible to be the sacrifice for sin; (3) Christ needed to go through these, in order to prepare Himself for the sacrifice and death on the cross; and (4) it was to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies concerning a suffering servant.

Covenantal View of the Active Obedience

Covenant theologians, unlike their dispensational counterparts, uphold the vicarious nature of the active obedience of Christ. Among them, the leading theologians are John Calvin,¹³¹ Francis Turretin,¹³² Patrick Fairbairn,¹³³ George Smeaton,¹³⁴ Charles Hodge,¹³⁵ A A Hodge,¹³⁶ John Gresham Machen,¹³⁷ John Murray,¹³⁸ Loraine Boettner,¹³⁹ Louis Berkhof,¹⁴⁰ J Oliver Buswell,¹⁴¹ Arthur Pink,¹⁴² and William Hendriksen.¹⁴³ Calvin in his *Institutes* commented that Christ obtained our righteousness,

... by the whole course of his obedience. This is proved by the testimony of Paul, "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many made righteous" (Rom 5:19).¹⁴⁴

He also quoted Galatians 4:4-5 to support this view: "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." Another evidence he mentioned was Christ's appearance before John for baptism in order "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:5). So Calvin concluded, "in short, from the moment when he assumed the form of a servant, he began, in order to redeem us, to pay the price of deliverance."¹⁴⁵

Charles Hodge understood this doctrine in the same way as Calvin. He wrote, "the righteousness of Christ is commonly represented as including his active and passive obedience."¹⁴⁶ Hodge states the relation between the law of God and the Scriptural doctrine of the work of Christ in the following ways. Christ obeyed all the precepts of the law, and it was voluntary and vicarious.¹⁴⁷ The law to which Christ was made under was the law given to Adam as a Covenant of Works which prescribed perfect obedience as the condition of life, and the Mosaic law which was given to

the people of Israel. Since Adam failed to obey, it brought a curse. Through Christ's obedience, He fulfilled the condition which God made with Adam under the Covenant of Works. Christ did it on behalf of His people, as their Substitute. If in Adam's disobedience, they were constituted sinners, in Christ's obedience they are declared righteous (Rom 5:19). The Saviour's work was therefore of the nature of a satisfaction to the demands of the law. Those who by faith come to Him will be clothed with His righteousness.

A A Hodge explains this doctrine in detail in his book—*The Atonement*. He says,

Our blessed Lord, having assumed our law-place and, as our substitute, become responsible for all our obligations to the law in its federal relation, has discharged them by his obedience as well as by his sufferings—having, by his sufferings, canceled the claims of penal justice, and by his obedience merited the rewards of that original Covenant of Life under which all men were held.¹⁴⁸

Christ met both the federal and penal sanctions of the law. For its federal sanction, Christ met the condition of Leviticus 18:5. For its penal sanction, He met the penalty of Deuteronomy 27:26.

Hodge explains this in a very systematic way. He distinguishes the three distinct relations between man and the law: the natural, federal, and penal.¹⁴⁹ The natural relation is that every moral agent is introduced to the law by the very fact of his creation, and under which he continues as long as he has being. The federal relation has respect to a period of probation, into which man was introduced in a condition of moral excellence, yet fallible. His subsequent eternal blessedness is made to depend upon his perfect obedience. The penal relation applies when the law has been broken. But by the reason of sin, men are condemned in these relations to the law. The hope of eternal life was suspended by the action taken by the first Adam in the Garden.

However, believers are restored to conformity to the law in its natural relation, by the Holy Spirit regenerating and sanctifying them. But their restoration in its federal and penal relations is accomplished by Christ through His active and passive obedience. He assumed our place, as our Representative and has secured our title to the reward conditioned upon His perfect obedience. On the cross, in our stead, by means of His death, He paid the penalty. So Christ saved us by His obedience as well as by His suffering.

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Machen was one of the 20th century theologians, who gave much emphasis to this doctrine.¹⁵⁰ He taught that Christ by His death on the cross paid the penalty that was inflicted upon disobedient Adam and his posterity. However, if that were all that He did for us, then we would still be in our sins. The Lord did more than just dying on the cross, He earned eternal life for His people by perfectly obeying the law. Machen understood the deep soteriological implication of the active obedience of Christ. So in his last words, he said, "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."¹⁵¹

Loraine Boettner connects the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ with the will and character of God. He states, "We believe that the requirement for salvation now as originally is perfect obedience, perfect conformity to the will and character of God, that the merits of Christ's obedience are imputed to His people as the only basis of their salvation, ..." ¹⁵² The doctrine of the active obedience is therefore based upon the absolute perfection and unchangeable obligation of the law. The law of God cannot be relaxed. Its demand for perfect obedience must continue until it is met.

Berkhof explains the vicarious nature of Christ's obedience by pointing out the relation of the first Adam to Christ, the last Adam. He wrote,

As the last Adam, however, He took the place of the first. ... And when Christ voluntarily entered the federal relationship as the last Adam, the keeping of the law naturally acquired the same significance for Him and for those whom the Father had given Him.¹⁵³

It is by His active obedience that He gave His people a claim to everlasting life.

Concerning the dispensational argument that Christ's perfect obedience on earth was necessary for Him to come as a perfect man to offer a perfect sacrifice on the cross, covenant theologians reply that Christ was a divine and eternal Person, and as such, there was no necessity for Him to obey the law for Himself or for His own benefit.¹⁵⁴ Since He was a divine Person, He was under no obligation to obey the commandments. The law is made for man. God, being the Source of the law, cannot be subject to it, except by an act of substitution.¹⁵⁵ Christ was made under the law so that by His vicarious obedience, He might redeem those under the law (Gal 4:4-5).

The Representative Principle

The representative principle, which is taught in the Scripture is that Adam at the beginning stood as the federal head and representative of the entire human race. Christ, in a similar fashion, stood as a Representative for all of those who were to be saved (Rom 5:12-21). When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he was representing mankind. The entire human race became sinners together with him. When Christ obeyed all the commandments, He was acting in our stead.

Loraine Boettner, in his discussion on “The Representation Principle” points out that in Christian theology there are three separate and distinct acts of imputation.¹⁵⁶ In the first place, Adam’s sin is imputed to all of us, his children. This is known as the doctrine of original sin. In the second place, our sin was borne by Christ and so He suffered in our stead. And in the third place, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us and secures for us entrance into heaven. We obeyed in Him in the same sense in which we sinned in Adam. Just as Adam’s sin was imputed to men and issued in death, Christ’s righteous obedience was imputed to believers and issues in eternal life.

Romans 5:12-21

The doctrine of federal headship is explicitly taught in Romans 5:12-21. As Paul explains the representative principle, he mentions the involvement of the first Adam and the second Adam as federal heads. Adam stands as a federal head in the sense that in him all human beings have sinned. The sin of Adam, therefore, is the judicial ground of the condemnation of all who are in him. Death, which was the consequence of Adam’s sin, became the lot of all men (v 12). By the sin of one man all died. His sin was the sin of all by virtue of the union between them and him. Adam is therefore a type of Christ (v 14). There is an exact analogy in the representative principle. But the analogy is not completely parallel. Firstly, we are condemned in Adam because of our physical relationship to him, but we are justified in Christ because of our spiritual relationship to Him through faith. If by the offence of Adam many die, by the righteousness of Christ many shall live (v 15) (cf 1 Cor 15:22). Secondly, the benefits of what Christ had done far exceed the evils of the other. The condemnation was for one offence, but the justification is for many (v 16). Thirdly, Christ not only saves men from death, He also introduces them into a state of eternal blessedness (v 17).

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Human beings are condemned and became sinners by the disobedience of one man, whereas, many are declared righteous by the obedience of one Man—Jesus Christ (vv 18-19). On the obedience of Christ, Hodge commented,

The obedience of Christ here stands for all his work in satisfying the demands of the law; From its opposition to the disobedience of Adam, his obedience, strictly speaking, rather than his sufferings, seems to be the prominent idea. ‘Paul distinguishes, in the work of Christ, these two elements—doing and suffering.’¹⁵⁷

If Adam’s disobedience to God’s commandment constituted death to men, Christ’s obedience to all God’s commandments, constituted righteousness, and thereby eternal life to us.

Matthew 3:15

In Matthew 3:15, Christ Himself revealed the federal nature of His work on this earth. As He approached John the baptiser, in order to be baptised by him, He answered the queries of John, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” Here Jesus spoke of His relation to His people, to those on whose behalf He was sent.¹⁵⁸

In Jesus’s reply to John, He gives the reason of His coming to him: “for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” The pronoun “us” is significant. Christ did not say “me”, which is personal, but “us.” Christ here identified Himself with those whom He has come to save.¹⁵⁹ This is the federal relationship which is vicarious. He is “to fulfill all righteousness” by His perfect obedience to the law as the Representative of His people (Deut 6:25). Christ, as the High Priest, met the demands of the law for a priest in His baptism by John (Num 8:6-7; Heb 3:1; 4:14).

Made Under the Law

The concept of the vicarious nature of Christ’s active obedience is mentioned in the phrase, “made under the law.” Christ was made under the law for the sake of those who were under law. In order to deliver them from the obligation of keeping the law’s requirements, He kept all, and made them free.

In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul explains this by saying,

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

In this passage Paul explains the whole sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work on earth.¹⁶⁰ He directly answers the Judaizers' claim that one has to keep the law in order to be saved. Paul's answer is that Christ had completed all the work which was necessary for salvation. He obeyed the law on behalf of man, as He was made under the law. He has earned righteousness for His people. Therefore sinners can be saved by simply trusting in Him, for He has done all things that are required for their salvation.

This passage also tells us that God sent His Son at a divinely appointed time to redeem men (cf Eph 1:10). Paul uses το πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου here in the sense of "realistic time" rather than "chronological time."¹⁶¹ Christ's coming was not just by chance. It was the time prepared by God for His definite purpose. All the circumstances were in favour of His coming and mission.

The main clause in this passage is ἐξαπέσταλκεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ("God sent forth his Son"), which is followed by two subsidiary actions: (1) γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικὸς ("made of a woman"), (2) γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον ("made under the law"). Then verse 5, with two ἵνα clauses, explains the purpose of the action that is ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ ("to redeem them that were under the law"); ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν ("that we might receive the adoption of sons").

The first subsidiary action, that is, "made of a woman," explains the true humanity of Christ and His unity with mankind.¹⁶² Although, His human nature was derived from His human mother, He did not cease to be the Son of God. He became the God-Man. As Paul announces here the true and perfect humanity of Christ, it has much significance with His atonement. Smeaton commented,

Christ's derivation of humanity from Adam through His mother is no small or unimportant fact in connection with His atonement: for His fraternity, as our kinsman Redeemer, absolutely depends upon the fact that He derived His humanity from the substance of His mother; and without this He would neither possess the natural nor legal union with His people, which must lie at the foundation of His representative character.¹⁶³

Christ's incarnation was necessary for redeeming man.

The second subsidiary action, that is, "made under the law," speaks of Christ's substitutionary obedience to the law. Having become a man, He was made to be subject to the law.¹⁶⁴ At this point, it is significant to note

that Christ became subject to the law by a special divine constitution.¹⁶⁵ He was under no obligation to obey the law, but it was by appointment. He was made under the law for the sake of those who were under the law (ie, the natural descendants of Adam). What the law required of them, He became obliged to undergo, and perform on behalf of them. He had to satisfy vicariously the law's demand for perfect obedience and to bear its penalty.

The two purpose clauses in verse 5 explain why Christ was made under the law. It was to buy the freedom of those who were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons.¹⁶⁶ Christ's perfect obedience to the law freed man from the obligation of keeping the law, thereby bringing him to the state of sonship on condition of faith. Fung observes that Christ achieved the purpose of redeeming those under the law by bearing the full obligation of the law in life as well as the curse of the law in death (3:13).¹⁶⁷

Christ the End of the Law

Romans 10:4 is another proof text for the vicarious nature of Christ's obedience. In this verse Paul says, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The phrase "end of the law" is one of the much debated subjects among the theologians. The meaning of the word τέλος is the centre of debate. The difficulty of determining the meaning of this word comes from its wide range of lexical usage.

According to BAGD, τέλος has three major meanings.¹⁶⁸ (1) "end," (2) "rest," "reminder," and (3) (indirect) "tax," "customs duties." Under the first major headings "end," BAGD mentions four meanings: a. "end" in the sense of "termination," "cessation," b. "the last part," "close," "conclusion," c. "end" or "goal", "outcome," and d. adverbial expressions. For the meaning of τέλος in Romans 10:4, BAGD puts it under both "end" and "goal," saying, "perh. this is the place for Ro 10:4, in the sense that Christ is the goal and the termination of the law at the same time, somewhat in the sense of Galatians 3:24f."¹⁶⁹

Delling in TDNT gives three major usages of the word τέλος in the New Testament.¹⁷⁰ The first major usage is "fulfilment" (Luke 22:37). The second usage has four categories: a. "goal" (1 Tim 1:5), b. "end result" (Matt 26:58; James 5:11), c. "end" (Rev 21:6; 1 Cor 15:24), and d. "cessation" (Heb 7:3; 1 Pet 4:7). The third major usage is "tribute," "tax." For the meaning of τέλος in Romans 10:4, Delling places it under

“cessation.”

Such uncertainty in the lexical study leaves the theologians to interpret τέλος in Romans 10:4 in different ways. The dispensational theologians understand τέλος as “termination” or “cessation.”¹⁷¹ Ryrie says, “termination seems clearly to be the meaning in this context because of the contrast (beginning in Rom. 9:30) between the Law and God’s righteousness.”¹⁷² They say that Christ brought to an end the Law of Moses. Dispensationalists interpret τέλος in such a way in order to support their view of a discontinuous system between the Old and the New Testament.¹⁷³ They view the Mosaic law as being completely replaced by the law of Christ.¹⁷⁴

It is interesting to note that Chafer, though a dispensationalist, explains Romans 10:4, in this way,

Some see only that He, by His sufferings and death, paid the penalty the law imposed and thus discharged the indictment against the sinner, which is comprehended in forgiveness. Others see that Christ fulfills the law by supplying the merit which the holy Creator demands, which is comprehended in justification. Doubtless both of these conceptions inhere in this passage;¹⁷⁵

This statement shows that he understood τέλος quite differently from the dispensationalists of today.

Some others take τέλος to mean “goal” and “end.”¹⁷⁶ Moo explains that,

He is its “goal,” in the sense that the law has always anticipated and looked forward to Christ. But he is also its “end” in that his fulfilment of the law brings to an end that period of time when it was a key element in the plan of God.¹⁷⁷

Binford cites Matthew 5:17-18 and Hebrews 7:23-25 to support this view. Schreiner disagrees with this view saying that there is no other text in Paul which combines the meanings “end” and “goal” for τέλος.¹⁷⁸

Another prominent view is that τέλος means ceasing to use the law to establish one’s righteousness.¹⁷⁹ Schreiner says that those who believe in Christ, cease using the law as a means of attaining their own righteousness, for they see that righteousness comes through believing in Christ, and cannot be attained by obeying the law.¹⁸⁰ Murray argues from the context that Paul is speaking in verse 4 of the law as a way of righteousness before God and is affirming the fact that Christ has finally accomplished the

law.¹⁸¹

Some covenant theologians take τέλος to mean fulfilment.¹⁸² Kevan observes,

Now the end of the Law to which naturally it inclines its eternal life is to be obtained by a perfect righteousness in man; but the instituted and appointed end, which God the Law-giver made in the promulgation of it, was for the purpose of provoking the Israelites to seek Christ. They were not to rest in those commandments or duties, but to go on to Christ; ... when the Law is taken in its wider sense, it is easy to see that Christ is the fulfilment of its appointed end.¹⁸³

Hodge took a similar view. He said, “Christ fulfilled the law, and by fulfilling He abolished the law.”¹⁸⁴

A dominant view among scholars is that τέλος here means “goal.”¹⁸⁵ Cranfield states, “Christ is the goal, the aim, the intention, the real meaning, and substance of the law—apart from him it cannot be properly understood at all.”¹⁸⁶ His argument is mainly based upon context.¹⁸⁷ He notices that in the present context (9:30-10:13) the statement about the law seems to refer more to its purpose. In this passage, Paul is trying to show that Israel has misunderstood the law. She has failed to recognise what the law was all about. Though the people were unable to meet the demands of the law, they trusted in it for righteousness. If that was the scenario, then a statement from Paul, saying that Christ is the goal, to which all along the law has been directed, was absolutely necessary.

Badenas notices that out of 13 usages of τέλος in Pauline writings, 5 times it has a teleological meaning.¹⁸⁸ His observation is that: (1) twice τέλος means “tax” or “custom” (Rom 13:7); (2) twice it is used an adverbial phrase meaning “fully” or “completely” (2 Cor 11:13; 1 Thess 2:16); (3) three times it denotes the eschatological end (1 Cor 1:18; 10:11; 15:24); (4) twice it means “final destiny” (2 Cor 11:15; Phil 3:19); and (5) five times it is teleological (Rom 6:21-22; 10:4; 2 Cor 3:13; 1 Tim 1:5). Out of these five teleological references, three occur in Romans. He points out that Romans 10:4 has almost the same grammatical construction as 1 Timothy 1:5, where τέλος is unanimously interpreted in a teleological sense.¹⁸⁹

This writer believes that last two views are more pertinent to the context. Since a lexical study brings uncertainty, then theology and context should be made the primary factors in determining the meaning of τέλος.

In this context, τέλος can mean both “goal” and “fulfilment.”¹⁹⁰ As Cranfield notices, Paul here is concerned to show Israel’s misunderstanding of the law (9:30-10:13). The Jews erred in seeking justification from the law, as they were unable to keep all its requirements. In such a situation, Paul reminds them that they can be saved only through the righteousness of Christ. It is because only He fulfilled the law completely. In that sense He was the goal of the law. The law and the whole Old Testament always anticipated and looked forward to Christ. Verse 5 explains this understanding of verse 4. What Moses declared in Leviticus 18:5, which Paul quoted in verse 5, was met by Christ alone. Therefore righteousness will come through Christ by faith (vv 6-13).

Matthew 5:17 which says, “think not that I am come to destroy the law ... but to fulfill,” supports this interpretation of Romans 10:4. Christ’s coming was the realisation of the anticipation. He came to fulfill all righteousness. He came to fulfill all the requirements of the law, all its types and ceremonies, and to satisfy all its preceptive and penal demands. He is the only remedy for men’s desperate condition which the law brings to light (Gal 3:23-29). The righteousness promised by the law becomes available only in Christ.

Imputed Righteousness

The Greek term for imputation is λογίζομαι. It has the meaning “reckon,” “count,” “take into account,”¹⁹¹ “to put into one’s account,” “to charge one’s account.”¹⁹² It is a judicial term. In theological sense, it means that Christ’s righteousness is put into our account. By that act of reckoning, we are justified before God, that is, declared righteous before God. This is known as imputation.

Righteousness is related to the law. In Deuteronomy 6:25 Moses, concerning the law, says, “And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to *do all* these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.” Since Christ has met this demand of the law, “he is made unto us righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30), “He shall be called The Lord our Righteousness” (Jer 23:6). Boettner explains,

By that life of spotless perfection, then, Jesus acquired for His people a positive righteousness which is imputed to them and which secures for them life in heaven. All that Christ has done and suffered is regarded as having been done and suffered by them.¹⁹³

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As Adam's sin is imputed to his posterity, their sin is imputed to Christ. In the same manner Christ's righteousness is imputed to the people and secured for them entrance into Heaven.

Those who oppose the active obedience of Christ think that the righteousness which is imputed upon believers is not the earned righteous deeds of Christ, but the divine attribute of righteousness.¹⁹⁴ Smeaton rejects this view. He says,

That argues a complete misconception of Christ's mediatorial work, which was meant to bring in what was due from man as a creature, and has everything in common with what the first man should have produced. The essential righteousness belongs to God as God, and to the Son of God as a divine person. But the righteousness of which the apostle speaks is that which was required from man as man, and which a Mediator, as our substitute, brought in to meet our wants; and though this could be brought in only by a God-man, uniting the two natures in one person.¹⁹⁵

God, the supreme Law-giver, did not demand from man His own essential righteousness, but that which is efficient to a creature. Adam was capable of producing what God demanded from him, as he was made in the likeness and image of God. But he failed because of his disobedience.

The doctrine of imputation is clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 5:21 where Paul says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Wick Broomall puts this verse in the following way: "The Sinless One became (by imputation) sin for the sinner, that the sinner might become (by imputation) sinless in the Sinless One."¹⁹⁶

In this verse, the apostle declares what God has done for the justification of man. Christ was without sin. This was one of the indispensable conditions of His being made sin for us. He was made sin, by being imputed with our sin. "The only sense in which we are made the righteousness of God is that we are in Christ regarded and treated as righteous, and therefore the sense in which he was made sin is that he was regarded and treated as a sinner."¹⁹⁷ Our sins were the judicial ground of His humiliation under the law and of all His sufferings. And so His righteousness is the judicial ground of our justification. Sinners are declared righteous on the basis of Christ's righteous deeds.

Salvation by Grace through Faith Alone

Those who oppose the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ accuse covenant theologians of narrowing down the significance of the Covenant of Grace by emphasising the significance of the Covenant of Works.¹⁹⁸ This accusation is baseless because Covenant theology teaches that after the fall of Adam no one can ever attain eternal life by trusting in his own merits.¹⁹⁹ It opposes legalism. It proclaims that by grace through faith alone we are saved (Eph 2:8).²⁰⁰ Kevan says,

because of Christ's fulfilment of the Law as Surety for the sinner, a man truly obtained eternal life according to the rule "do this and live," ... There is no reason at all, however to infer from this that eternal life is legally bestowed on the basis of a Covenant of Works, for this righteousness comes to the sinner not by working but by believing.²⁰¹

In Phil 3:9 Paul made it clear that the divine righteousness is imputed to the repentant sinner through his believing in Christ and depending on Him alone for salvation, and not on his good works (cf Rom 3:22).

The Covenant of Grace is seen in God's plan of redemption immediately after Adam's failure (Gen 3:15). God instituted this Covenant assuming that He will send His Son for the redemption of the people, yet without lowering the requirements for salvation, that is perfect obedience. Christ has to meet this requirement. Under the Covenant of Grace, the merits of Christ's obedience are imputed to His people. Thus Boettner states,

Grace, *pure grace*, is extended not in lowering the requirements for salvation, but in the substitution of Christ for His people. He took their place before the law and did for them what they could not do for themselves.²⁰²

Therefore Paul says, we are justified truly by His grace alone (Rom 3:24).

Summary

The study of various Scriptural passages shows that the active obedience of Christ was vicarious. Dispensational theologians have no valid reason to reject this doctrine. Christ obeyed the law for the benefit of His people; He was their Substitute. The representative principle which is explicitly taught in Romans 5:12-21 tells us that in Adam all became the children of disobedience. Adam was our federal head. Likewise, Christ as the God-Man became the Federal Head of His people, and in His perfect obedience, the demands of the law have been met. In order to obey the

law for His people, Christ had to come under the law (Gal 4:4). In that sense, He was the goal and fulfilment of the law (Rom 10:4). In Him the law found its absolute fulfilment. Through His perfect obedience, Christ earned the required righteousness for His people, which they receive by imputation.

THE RELATION OF CHRIST'S ACTIVE OBEDIENCE TO HIS PASSIVE OBEDIENCE

Introduction

The saving work of Christ has two distinctive parts: the active obedience of Christ, and the passive obedience of Christ. By active obedience, it is meant that He vicariously kept all the requirements of the law and has merited the reward of righteousness for His people. By passive obedience, it is meant that He vicariously suffered on the cross, and by shedding His blood, paid the penalty of sin. These two are the two distinct aspects of Christ's redemptive work. The distinctions cannot be separated. Both are inextricably intertwined. This section will discuss how these two aspects are connected to Christ's redemption of His people.

The Two Distinct Aspects of Christ's Obedience

As noted in the previous section, dispensational theologians do not see the two distinct aspects in Christ's vicarious obedience. Their whole focus is on the death of Christ. Only that is vicarious. Binford says,

The passive obedience or suffering of Christ which becomes the basis for salvation is limited to that time on the cross because it was on the cross that Christ suffered the death which was necessary for man's salvation.²⁰³

Against such a view, covenant theologians teach that not only His death on the cross, His entire life was also vicarious. They see two distinct aspects in His vicarious obedience. Murray explains that the law of God has both positive demands and penal sanctions.²⁰⁴ The former is fulfilled by Christ's active obedience, as He kept all the precepts of the law. It is also known as the "preceptive obedience." The penal sanction of the law is fulfilled by Christ's passive obedience. It is also known as the "penal obedience." By this, Christ took upon Himself the curse of the law, and He paid the penalty of the law which had been bestowed upon the people for the transgression of the law. He bore the full judgement of the law. His life He gave as a ransom on the cross. By His suffering and paying the penalty,

the wrath of God was appeased (Isa 53:6; Rom 4:25; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 2:2).

The Inseparable Nature of the Active and Passive Obedience

Although covenant theologians understand Christ's vicarious obedience as two distinct aspects, they carefully explain that the two aspects of Christ's work cannot be separated.²⁰⁵ Both the active and passive obedience are intertwined. The entire life of Christ must be seen as one connected deed, but the obligation was twofold: (1) the perfect obedience in life by keeping the Law, and (2) the sacrificial suffering of death by shedding His blood.

The active and passive obedience of Christ are only the different phases or aspects of the same thing. Berkhof explains this point:

The two accompany each other at every point in the Saviour's life. There is a constant interpenetration of the two. It was part of Christ's active obedience, that He subjected Himself voluntarily to sufferings and death. ... On the other hand it was also part of Christ's passive obedience, that He lived in subjection to the law. ... Christ's active and passive obedience should be regarded as complementary parts of an organic whole.²⁰⁶

In His entire earthly life, Christ was engaged in His passive obedience. While on this earth, He was in the form of a servant. He has gone through humiliation and suffering. It was all part of His payment of the penalty of sin.²⁰⁷ The death on the cross was the highest point of His suffering. By the same measure, His death was the highest point of His active obedience to the law.²⁰⁸ There He willingly surrendered His life to the will of the Father. He became obedient even unto death (Phil 2:8). He paid the penalty of the transgression of the law by His people. By doing so, He became the true righteousness for His people.²⁰⁹

Therefore, Christ's work of redemption, though twofold, are not two divisions of His work. It was one finished work. Every event of Christ's life on earth was a part of His payment for the penalty of transgressions, and every event of His life was a part of the keeping of the law. In so doing, He earned the reward of eternal life for His people.²¹⁰ Hodge explains that Christ's life of suffering cancelled the penalty, and His life of obedience fulfilled the precept, thus securing the promised reward.²¹¹ Together they secured man's complete salvation. Christ accomplished this in His one work of redemption. "It was with reference to both of these conjointly that Jesus is called "the Lord our Righteousness."²¹² Christ's

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active and passive obedience, therefore, does not constitute two satisfactions of the law, but is one complete and perfect satisfaction of the whole law in all its relation.²¹³

Summary

Christ's work of redemption has two distinct aspects, the active, and the passive obedience. These two aspects cannot be divided as two parts of Christ's work. This is because, during the earthly life of Christ, "in every action there was a humiliation, and in every suffering an exercise of obedience."²¹⁴ From His incarnation onwards, Christ was engaged in His passive obedience. As He suffered humiliation throughout His life, He was paying the penalty of sin. The cross was the climax of His suffering. In His suffering, He also actively obeyed. The cross was the highest point of His active obedience (Phil 2:8). These together wrought complete salvation for His people.

CONCLUSION

The active obedience of Christ, though neglected by many contemporary theologians, yet, is one of the cardinal doctrines of soteriology. The primary purpose of this paper was to show from the Scripture that the active obedience of Christ was vicarious and necessary for salvation. The study of various Scriptural passages, both in the Old and the New Testament, shows that the active obedience of Christ was substitutionary. Christ's active obedience (ie, His keeping of the law) merited eternal life for all believers, while His passive obedience (ie, His suffering and death on the cross) fully paid the penalty of sin.

The Scriptural basis for this doctrine is the Covenant of Works by which God offered eternal life to Adam upon the condition of obedience to the law of God. The law was written in Adam's heart. Adam's disobedience did not abrogate the promise and condition of the Covenant. The requirement for righteousness and permanent sonship has always been perfect obedience to God's law.

Leviticus 18:5 supports this understanding of the Covenant of Works. This verse tells us that if a man keeps all the commandments of the Lord, he shall live eternally. It is significant to notice that this verse is quoted eight times in other parts of the Scripture (Deut 4:1; Ezek 20:11,13,21; Neh 9:29; Luke 10:28; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12).

However, the sinfulness of man prevented him from keeping the law

perfectly. Due to this, God sent His Son Jesus as a Representative of His people. He was made under the law (Gal 4:4) to fulfill all its requirements. The first Adam failed, but the Second Adam passed the test. The righteousness He earned is imputed upon all believers (Rom 5:19). Whosoever believes in this wonderful work of Christ will be redeemed from the requirements and the curse of the law. Herein is shown the pure grace of God.

The active obedience of Christ was substitutionary, and therefore necessary for the salvation of man. Machen's words explain the soteriological importance of this doctrine, "I'm so thankful for active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." This doctrine is in perfect conformity with the will and character of God. It speaks of the immutability of God. God cannot deny Himself. His words do not change: "my statutes, and my judgements; which if a man do, he shall live in them." Christ is the Man who fulfilled these words, and therefore, we live eternally in Him. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

NOTES

¹Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), 380. See also A A Hodge, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1867), 250; Loraine Boettner, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), 54; J Gresham Machen, *God Transcendent* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 187-88; John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1955), 19-20.

²See also Romans 10:3-4.

³*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, sv "Obedience of Christ," by R L Reymond.

⁴Berkhof, *Theology*, 381.

⁵*EDT*, sv "Obedience of Christ," by R L Reymond.

⁶William T Binford, "Implications of Covenantism and Dispensationalism upon the Doctrine of the Active Obedience of Christ," unpublished STM Thesis (Texas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985); See also Douglas Connelly, "Christ's Obedient Life and the Atonement," unpublished seminar paper (Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, 1976).

⁷*Ibid*, 32.

⁸*Ibid*, 40.

⁹Charles C Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 282.

¹⁰Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 123. For the same view, see also Robert P Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 92.

¹¹Binford, "Implications of Covenantism," 23.

¹²*Ibid*, 9-11.

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¹³Ibid, 23.

¹⁴Ibid, 25.

¹⁵Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter I, section IX.

¹⁶Dispensationalists believe a discontinuity in God's plan of salvation. See John S Feinberg, ed, *Continuity and Discontinuity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1988).

¹⁷John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1953), 4. See also O Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980).

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Quoted from Far Eastern Bible College Prospectus, 1994-97, 16-17.

²⁰Wayne G Strickland, "The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 232-6.

²¹Robert P. Lightner, "The Saviour's Sufferings in Life," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127 (1970): 30-1.

²²Ibid, 31.

²³Binford, "Implications of Covenantism," 23.

²⁴Ibid, 10-11.

²⁵Ibid, 11.

²⁶Ryrie, Dispensationalism, 183-4.

²⁷Webster's Dictionary defines the word "covenant" as "an agreement between two or more person to do or refrain from doing some act." *The Webster's New Encyclopedia International Dictionary* (New York: The Publishers Guild, Inc, 1974), 233.

²⁸WCF, VII, II. In the *Larger Catechism* question 20 and in the *Shorter Catechism* question 12 it is called the "Covenant of Life," because life was promised as the reward of obedience. It is also called the "Covenant of Nature," because it is founded on the nature of man, or "Legal Covenant," because "the condition on man's part was the observation of the law of nature engraved within him." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol 1 (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1994), 575.

²⁹Berkhof, *Theology*, 213.

³⁰Ibid, 214.

³¹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1982), 117.

³²Berkhof, *Theology*, 214. See also J O Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 1: 310-2.

³³A A Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 1983), 122.

³⁴Brice L Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (New York: E J Brill, 1989), 37.

³⁵A A Hodge, *Confession*, 123.

³⁶Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:583.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid, 584.

³⁹ See Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (Indiana: Alpha Publications, 1979), 34-47; Berkhof, *Theology*, 216-7; Ernest Kevan, *Moral Law* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publications, reprinted in 1991), 25.

⁴⁰WCF, XIX, I.

⁴¹See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, chapter VIII, paragraph 1.

⁴²Berkhof, *Theology*, 216.

⁴³Kevan, *Moral Law*, 25.

⁴⁴Binford, "Implications of Covenantism," 10.

⁴⁵Boettner, *The Atonement*, 55.

⁴⁶Hodge, *The Atonement*, 74.

⁴⁷Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1978), 154.

⁴⁸Douglas Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfilment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *The Law, The Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 324.

⁴⁹Strickland, "A Dispensational View," 232.

⁵⁰Ibid, 233.

⁵¹Ibid, 234.

⁵²Binford, "Implications of Covenantism," 14.

⁵³Ibid, 15.

⁵⁴Ibid, 17.

⁵⁵R K Harrison, *Leviticus*, TOTC (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 185.

⁵⁶ R Laird Harris, "Leviticus," *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 598.

⁵⁷Ibid, See also Glenn N Davis, *Faith and Obedience in Romans* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 191-8.

⁵⁸Kevan, *Moral Law*, 25.

⁵⁹ Willem A VanGemeran, "The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective," *The Law, The Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, 21. See also John Calvin, *Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 198.

⁶⁰ See Calvin, *Leviticus*, 204; A A Hodge, *The Atonement*, 236; Berkhof, *Theology*, 216; A W Pink, *The Atonement* (Swengel: Reiner Publication, nd), 64; See also Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans Edwyn C Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 376; C E B Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 521-2; G J Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 253.

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⁶¹Calvin, *Leviticus*, 204.

⁶²Ibid, 345.

⁶³Ibid, 344.

⁶⁴F Davidson, *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 201.

⁶⁵Nevertheless, Ezekiel 20 still gives Israel hope that God will restore them once again from the exile (vv 33-44). It was only for the sake of God's name and holiness that He had not completely destroyed them (vv 9-10; 14, 7, 2).

⁶⁶John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 72.

⁶⁷F F Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 90.

⁶⁸Ibid. See also William Hendriksen, *Romans*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 95-6.

⁶⁹The literal translation is "And the commandment, which was unto life, this was found by me to be unto death." εἰς θάνατον is antithesis of εἰς ζωὴν. The former refers to eternal death, and the latter eternal life. See H A W Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle of Romans* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1983), 272. Those who take 'live' in Leviticus 18:5 as 'material blessings and long life on this earth' have a greater difficulty explaining Paul's use of ζωὴν and θάνατον in this verse.

⁷⁰Murray, *Romans*, 253.

⁷¹Brice L Martin, "Paul on Christ and the Law," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (1983): 277-8; F F Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 203; T David Gordon, "Why Israel did not Obtain Torah Righteousness?: A Translation Note on Rom 9:32," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 164-6.

⁷²Bruce, *Romans*, 203.

⁷³Robert Badenas, *Christ The End of the Law* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 123.

⁷⁴Very frequently δε is used as a transitional particle, without any contrast intended (BAGD, 171). Robert Badenas observed that an antithetical relation would require the μεν-δε construction rather than γαρ-δε. The γαρ-δε construction is used conjunctively by Paul in other places where similar concepts are discussed (cf Rom 3:21-22; Gal 3:10-11). *Christ the End of the Law*, 251.

⁷⁵Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law*, 119. See Paul's use of Psalm 143:2 in Roman 3:20 and Galatians 2:16.

⁷⁶Thomas R Schreiner, "Paul's View of the Law in Romans 10:4-5," *WTJ* 55 (1993): 124-34.

⁷⁷Ibid, 133.

⁷⁸Davies, Faith and Obedience in Romans, 191-8.

⁷⁹Ibid, 198.

⁸⁰Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:520-21; See also Barth, *Romans*, 376-7; Hendriksen, *Romans*, 343; R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul's Epistles to the Romans*

(Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 646-8; A Berkeley Mickelsen, "Romans," in *Wycliffe Bible commentary*, ed Charles F Pfeiffer and Everett F Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 12-4.

⁸¹ Cranfield, *Romans*, 522.

⁸² In a same line of thought, Bandstra has proposed that one interprets Romans 10:5 in the light of Philippians 2:10. He takes ὁ ποιήσας as not referring to the believer, but to Christ. "Ἀνθρώπος refers to Christ, who 'did' the righteousness of the law, and therefore 'he lives.' In the same manner, Romans 10:4-5 does not refer to what man cannot do, but to what Christ has done. The parallel verse is Romans 5:18. Bandstra, *Law and the Elements*, 102-10. Quoted by Robert Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law*, 120.

⁸³ For different views see Strickland, "Dispensational View," 255-6; Moises Silva, "Is the Law Against the Promise? The Significance of Galatians 3:21 for Covenant Continuity," *Theonomy, A Reformed Critique*, editors W S Barker, and W R Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 163-6.

⁸⁴ Strickland, "Dispensational View," 255.

⁸⁵ Thomas Schreiner, *Law and Its Fulfilment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 60. One must notice that Paul has a positive view of the law, regarding that the law leads to life (Rom 2:13; 7:10).

⁸⁶ E P Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 46.

⁸⁷ Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfilment*, 44. See also Heikki Raisanen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 94-101. Ernest Kevan noted that the Puritans also understood the law in such a way, saying, "The difference between Law in itself and Law as it is experienced arises from the sin of man. It is sin which makes the Law to be contrary to the promise, ..." Ernest F Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, reprinted 1993), 82.

⁸⁸ Schreiner, *Law and Its Fulfilment*, 65.

⁸⁹ Cranfield says, ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκὸς depends on θάνατος, and was added in order to make clear that the fault was not in the law but in man's fallen nature. *Romans*, 2:379.

⁹⁰ R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 141.

⁹¹ Commentators agree that the anarthrous κατάραν has the effect of curse, which is quite the opposite of Abraham's blessing mentioned in verses 8-9, 14. Hendriksen, *Exposition on Galatians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 127; Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 122.

⁹² See Hans Hubner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, translated by James C G Greig (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984), 18-9; Douglas Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfilment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," 333-5; Thomas Schreiner, "Is Perfect Obedience to the Law Possible? A Re-examination of Galatians 3:10," *JETS* 27 (1984): 151-60.

⁹³ The genitive ἔργων νόμου here is the objective genitive, which means the works

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demanded by the law. This phrase is used in its legalistic sense. It denotes that divine law made up of statutes, and on the basis of obedience or disobedience, men are approved or condemned. Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1988), 163.

⁹⁴ F F Bruce, *Commentary of Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 159. See also Heikki Raisanen, *Paul and the Law*, 94-6.

⁹⁵ Schreiner, "Is Perfect Obedience to the Law Possible?" 160.

⁹⁶ Like in the previous verse, νόμος here is used in the legalistic sense. Ἐν νόμῳ means "in the sphere of the law," thus corresponding with "continueth in," in verse 10. Marvin R Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol 4 (Virginia: Macdonald Publishing Company, nd), 117. Compare this with 2:17, where Paul uses ἐν Χριστῷ to refer to Christ as the sphere within which the Christian lives.

⁹⁷ In order to understand the relation of Paul's argument in verses 10 and 11, see Frank Thilman, *Paul and the Law* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 125-9; Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfilment*, 44-60.

⁹⁸ Moises Silva, "Is the Law Against the Promise?," 158.

⁹⁹ See Calvin, *Leviticus*, 204; A A Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 257; Moises Silva, "Is the Law Against the Promise?," 165.

¹⁰⁰ Lenski, *Galatians*, 167.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Moo, "A Modified Lutheran view," 340.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ BAGD, 877.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. See also Bruce, *Galatians*, 175; Brice L Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul*, 37-39; Lenski, *Galatians*, 167.

¹⁰⁶ Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul*, 37-9. See Galatians 3:13;23; Romans 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; 7:5; 7:7-25; 1 Corinthians 15:56.

¹⁰⁷ Johnnes P Louw, and Eugene A Nida, *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1: 36.5.

¹⁰⁸ Richard N Longenecker, "The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19-4:7," *JETS* 25 (1982): 53.

¹⁰⁹ Hendriksen, *Galatians*, 148.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Bruce, *Galatians*, 183.

¹¹² George Smeaton, *Atonement According to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, nd), 110.

¹¹³ John F MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1985), 256. See also D A Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 143-4.

¹¹⁴ Mentioned by Carson. See his commentary on "Matthew," 142.

¹¹⁵ Kent, "Matthew," in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 937.

¹¹⁶ William Hendriksen, *Exposition on Matthew*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 290. See also H A W Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of Matthew*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1983), 120.

¹¹⁷ TDNT, sv “πληρώω,” by Halle Gerhard Delling.

¹¹⁸ BAGD, 671.

¹¹⁹ Lenski, *Hebrews*, 165.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ See Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter VIII, Section V.

¹²² See Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, 93-4, Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 282.

¹²³ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 282-3.

¹²⁴ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 123.

¹²⁵ See Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, 92-3.

¹²⁶ Binford, “Implications of Covenantism,” 46-50.

¹²⁷ Connelly, “Christ’s Obedient Life,” 1-18.

¹²⁸ Binford, “Implications of Covenantism,” 49-50.

¹²⁹ Connelly, “Christ’s Obedient Life,” 18.

¹³⁰ Binford, “Implications of Covenantism,” 50-1. See also Lightner, *Theology*, 94.

¹³¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter XVI, Paragraph 5. See also his commentary on *Romans*, 95-6; 212-3; 256. It is observed that Calvin did not use the phrase “active obedience,” but he taught the substance of the doctrine.

¹³² Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol 2.

¹³³ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (Indiana: Alpha Publications, 1979), 214-52.

¹³⁴ Smeaton, *Atonement*, 107-15.

¹³⁵ Hodge, *Theology*, 2:493-6; 612-3; 3:142-65.

¹³⁶ Hodge, *The Atonement*, 248-64.

¹³⁷ Machen, *God Transcendent*, 187-96.

¹³⁸ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 19-24.

¹³⁹ Boettner, *The Atonement*, 54-66.

¹⁴⁰ Berkhof, *Theology*, 379-81.

¹⁴¹ Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, vol 2:110-113.

¹⁴² Pink, *The Atonement*, 2-8.

¹⁴³ Hendriksen, *Romans*, 343.

¹⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book II, Chap XVI, Para 5.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Hodge, *Theology*, 3:142.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 2:612, 493-4.

¹⁴⁸ Hodge, *The Atonement*, 248.

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¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 72-7.

¹⁵⁰ Machen, *God Transcendent*, 187-90.

¹⁵¹ Ned B Stonehouse, *J Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 508.

¹⁵² Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine*, 154.

¹⁵³ Berkhof, *Theology*, 380-1.

¹⁵⁴ Hodge, *The Atonement*, 260.

¹⁵⁵ Hodge, *Theology*, 2:613.

¹⁵⁶ Boettner, *The Atonement*, 76.

¹⁵⁷ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 173. See also Hendriksen, *Romans*, 182.

¹⁵⁸ Pink, *The Atonement*, 82.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Jeffrey Khoo, “An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians,” unpublished lecture notes (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 1995), 38.

¹⁶¹ “Chronological time” means events happen just as a mere accidental sequence of occurrence; history regarded simply as chronology. “Realistic time” means the events which happen are appointed by God and decisive for man. It is a time of opportunity and fulfilment. James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, Studies in Biblical Theology (Naperville: Alec R Allenson Inc, 1962), 25. Quoted by Jeffrey Khoo, “An Exegesis of Galatians 4:4-5,” unpublished research paper (Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, 1990), 7.

¹⁶² Ronald Y K Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 182.

¹⁶³ Smeaton, *Atonement According to the Apostles*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ The participle *γενόμενον* comes from the verb *γίνομαι* has the meaning “to be,” “to become” (KJV “made”).

¹⁶⁵ John Brine, *The Certain Efficacy of the Death of Christ*, quoted by Arthur Pink, *The Atonement*, 75. Some theologians call it as the Covenant of Redemption. See Berkhof, *Theology*, 265-71.

¹⁶⁶ The two *ἵνα* clauses, which are structurally parallel to each other is to be taken as co-ordinate statements of the negative and positive aspects of the purpose. The latter clause complements and interprets the former.

¹⁶⁷ Fung, *Galatians*, 182.

¹⁶⁸ BAGD, 811.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ TDNT, sv “τέλος,” by Halle Gerhard Delling.

¹⁷¹ See Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 302-3; Strickland, “Dispensational View,” 266-70. See also Raisanen, *Paul and the Law*, 53-6.

¹⁷² Ibid, 303.

¹⁷³ Strickland, “Dispensational view,” 266. For their whole argument on discontinuity,

see John S Feinberg, ed, *Continuity and Discontinuity* (Illinois: Crossway Publications, 1988).

¹⁷⁴ Ryrie, *Theology*, 303-5. For a refutation of this view, see Timothy Tow, *The Law of Moses and of Jesus* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1986). This author takes the view that only the judicial and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law were done away, but the moral law still applies.

¹⁷⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol 3 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 81.

¹⁷⁶ Binford, "Implications of Covenantism," 34-41; Moo, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 206-8; A Berkeley Mickelsen, "Romans," in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 1214.

¹⁷⁷ Moo, "The Law of Moses," 207.

¹⁷⁸ Schreiner, "Paul's View of the Law in Romans 10:4-5," 120.

¹⁷⁹ Schreiner, "Paul's View of the Law" 121-4; Lenski, *Romans*, 645-6; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1988), 379-81; Murray, *Romans*, 49-51; H Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol 2 (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1877), 417; James Denney "Romans," in *EGT*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted 1988), 669.

¹⁸⁰ Schreiner, "Paul's View of the Law," 121.

¹⁸¹ Murray, *Romans*, 50.

¹⁸² Kevan, *Moral Law*, 71-3; Hodge, *Romans*, 335-7.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 72.

¹⁸⁴ Hodge, *Romans*, 343.

¹⁸⁵ Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:515-20; Hendriksen, *Romans*, 342-3; Berkhof, *Theology*, 380; Barth, *Romans*, 374-6; Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law*, 112-8; Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans*, 185-9.

¹⁸⁶ Cranfield, *Romans*, 519.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Badenas, *Christ the End*, 78-9.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 79.

¹⁹⁰ Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Theodoret, etc held this view. For detailed list, see Cranfield, *Romans*, 516-7. Cranfield though takes τέλος as "goal," admits that "the statement that Christ is the fulfilment of the law and the statement that He is its goal are indeed correlatives: they express the same essential truth but describe it as seen from different angles, ..." Ibid, 519.

¹⁹¹ BAGD, 475.

¹⁹² Louw and Nida, 1:57.227.

¹⁹³ Boettner, *The Atonement*, 6-7.

¹⁹⁴ See Binford, "Implications of Covenantism," 20.

¹⁹⁵ Smeaton, *Atonement*, 53.

¹⁹⁶ Wick Broomall, "2 Corinthians," in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 1272.

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¹⁹⁷Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, reprinted 1983), 525.

¹⁹⁸ See Binford, "Implications of Covenantism," 12-3; Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 112-3.

¹⁹⁹ See Westminster Confession of Faith, chap VI, sect IV.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, chap. VII, sect III.

²⁰¹ Kevan, *Moral Law*, 73.

²⁰² Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine*, 154.

²⁰³ Binford., "Implications of Covenantism," 49.

²⁰⁴ Murray, *Redemption*, 21.

²⁰⁵ See Hodge, *Atonement*, 249-64. See also Machen, *God Transcendent*, 190-1.

²⁰⁶ Berkhof, *Theology*, 379-80.

²⁰⁷ Machen, *God Transcendent*, 190.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Smeaton, *Atonement*, 115.

²¹⁰ Machen, *God Transcendent*, 191.

²¹¹ Hodge, *Atonement*, 250.

²¹² Ibid, 213.

²¹³ Ibid, 264.

²¹⁴ Smeaton, *Atonement*, 58.

George Skariah is a lecturer at Jubilee Memorial Bible College in India.

THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Jack Sin

THEOLOGY

The term “Judgement Seat of Christ” occurs only twice (2 Cor 5:10, Rom 14:10), but is alluded to many times in the Scriptures (eg, Col 2:18, Gal 6:7-10, 1 Cor 3:13-18, Rev 22:12, 2 John 8). The doctrine of the Judgement Seat of Christ is a much neglected doctrine today. Christians cannot afford to be ignorant of their judgement to come. We will study what the Bible has to say about this.

What is a *bema*, or “judgement seat?” The term refers to a platform on which was placed a seat for an official. The judgement seat was a platform from which orations were made (Acts 12:21), or a tribunal where judges heard their cases (Acts 18:12,16, 26:6,10,17).¹ For example, Pilate sat on his judgement seat when he tried Jesus (Matt 27:19: John 19:13).²

So, what is the Judgement Seat *of Christ*? Before we talk about what the Judgement Seat of Christ is, we will deal with what it is not. Then we will look at the purpose of the Judgement Seat, and when it will take place.

What the *Bema* is Not

Not for the Unbeliever

The Judgement Seat of Christ is not the Judgement of the Great White Throne (Rev 20:1-15). The latter is meant only for the unregenerate who “are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). That is the final judgement which will take place after the millennium (Rev 20:6). Believers, on the other hand, will appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ. The privilege of standing before the Judgement Seat of Christ comes from being born again.

Not for Condemnation

There is no penal condemnation at the Judgement Seat of Christ. We are justified by faith through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has paid the penalty of our sins. We have been declared righteous and shall never lose this state of justification. This fact is well expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith (11:5),

God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, although they can never fall from their state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance restored unto them until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon and renew their faith and repentance.

The very fact that those who appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ can stand before the almighty God and will receive from Him a reward shows that they are believers and are saved. They are not judged for sins but for works. Addressing Christians in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, Paul said,

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Lehman Stauss explains the metaphor of the Judgement Seat,

In the large Olympic arenas there was an elevated seat on the which the judge of the contest sat. After the contests were over the successful competitors would assemble before the Judgement Seat of Christ to receive the rewards or crowns. The Judgement Seat of Christ was not a judicial bench where someone was condemned. It was a reward seat. Likewise, the Judgement Seat of Christ is not a judicial bench. The Christian life is a race and the divine umpire is watching every contestant. After the church has run her courses, He will gather every member before the Judgement Seat of Christ for the purpose of examining each one, and giving the proper reward to each.³

The thought of the Judgement Seat of Christ has for the Christian a peculiar solemnity. This is not meant to rob God's people of future blessedness but to act as a stimulus to live a Christian life that is marked by faithfulness and fruitfulness. The tribunal of Christ serves the purpose of absolute justice. It vindicates the holiness and impartiality of God. In it is a reminder to the Christian that though it is true that he has been justified by

faith (Rom 5:1,8), he is still accountable to God for how he lives his life on earth. C S Williams comments,

The impartiality of Christ's tribunal is stressed by the assurance that each individual will receive his own the things done in his body according to what he did whether it be good or worthless. It is important to see that the purpose of this tribunal is not positively penal but properly retributive involving the disclosure of not only what has been worthless, but also what has been good and valuable in this life. The judgement pronounced is not a declaration of doom but an assessment of worth with assignment afterwards to those who because of their faithfulness deserve them and the losses or withholding of rewards in the case of those who do not deserve them.⁴

Not Purgatory

The Judgement Seat of Christ is not a place of intense torment and suffering. It is not purgatory—a place where a person is subjected to intense suffering and pain for sins committed in life. The Roman Catholic view of purgatory teaches that believers have to atone for their sins for a period of time before they can be fully admitted into heaven. Loraine Boettner writes on this subject of purgatory,

The Roman Catholic Church has developed a doctrine in which it is held that all who die at peace with the church but who are not perfect must undergo penal and purifying suffering in an intermediate realm known as purgatory. Only those believers who have attained a state of Christian perfection go immediately to heaven. The great mass of partially sanctified Christians dying in fellowship with the church, but who nevertheless are encumbered with some degree of sin, go to purgatory where, for a longer or shorter time, they suffer until all sin is purged away, after which they are translated to heaven.⁵

1 Corinthians 3 is often used in support of this doctrine of purgatory. This is inconsistent with the biblical teaching that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). The blood of Christ has cleansed us from all sin. The penalty of sin has been paid in full by Christ. We need not to atone for sins at all.

Not Merely for Commendation

Is the Judgement Seat merely an awards ceremony?⁶ Will there be no loss or regret. What does the Bible say?

First, every Christian is required to stand before the Judgement Seat.

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Paul says that all believers must appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). All believers will be evaluated before the Most High God based on the merits and demerits of all his deeds on earth. No Christian can escape from this.

Second, the Judgement Seat will reveal what a believer has done in his life on earth. According to Paul, these deeds will be displayed whether they be good or bad.

Third, the Judgement is a time of recompensation. The Judgement Seat involves the requital for works done in life (2 Cor 5:10, Col 3:25). Carl Johnson Plummer wrote,

We shall not be judged en masse or in classes but one by one in accordance with individual merit. Paul does not say merely that he shall receive according to what he has done in the body, but that he shall receive the things done. The very selfsame things he did; they are to be his punishment.⁷

What the *Bema* Is

A Judgement of Works

Having established that it is not a legal bench to ascertain whether one's salvation is secure or not, it is clear that anyone who comes before the Judgement Seat of Christ must be saved or he cannot be present. Samuel Hoyt explains this well,

The use of the Judgement Seat of Christ is not a question of sin to be punished but rather a question of service. The believer's life will be examined and evaluated with regard to his faithfulness as a steward of the abilities and opportunities which God has entrusted to him. Faithfulness will be graciously rewarded while unfaithfulness will be unrewarded. Thus the primary purpose of the Judgement Seat of Christ is to reveal and to review the Christian's life and service and then to reward him for what God deems worthy of reward. Not only is the purpose of this event a future manifestation, but it also should serve as a present motivation for contemporary godly living (and service).⁸

It is worth stating here that this passage also demonstrates that there is an essential agreement between the teaching of Paul and that of James on the subject of faith and works. It is true that justification is by faith in Christ and not by works, but the invisible root of true faith must bring forth the visible fruit of good works. This fruit is expected of by Christ. It brings glory to the Father and is a testimony to the world of the dynamic covenant

of divine grace. It is especially in the bearing of much fruit that the father is glorified.

Samuel Hoyt adds,

The element of remorse, regret and shame cannot be avoided in an examination at the Judgement Seat of Christ, but this sorrow must be somewhat relative because even in the finest of Christians there will be some things worthy of unceasing remorse in the light of God's unapproachable holiness. This would mean that the finest of Christians could be sorrowful throughout eternity. However this is not the picture of the church that goes to heaven. The overwhelming emotion is joyfulness and gratefulness to them although there is also the underlying measure of remorse or regret. This is not the overriding emotion to be experienced throughout the eternal state. ...⁹

A Time of Reward

The Judgement Seat of Christ is essentially a platform for awards and commendation. It is a glorious time for believers who have served their Master faithfully and selflessly for they would be rewarded at this time. As the psalmist has aptly said, "So that a man shall say, Verily, there is a reward for the righteous: Verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth" (Ps 58:11). Looking forward to the Judgement Seat of Christ with an expectant heart for blessing and reward is legitimate and laudable.

Will the thought of future rewards cause God's people to serve Him for payment? Ernest Kevan, quoting Obadiah Sedgwick, a puritan, answers,

To dismiss all love of reward as "mercenary love" is unjustifiable, for there is nothing unspiritual about hoping for a reward that God has promised. It is therefore "not to be doubted but that the faithful may encourage themselves. In their well doing, by looking on to the reward set before them, for whatsoever God promised as an encouragement or reward, on that the soul may most lawfully fix the eye."¹⁰

To belittle or to deny that rewarding act from God is to deny the righteous judgement of God for the believers. Even in the secular world we can conceive of rewards made to deserving individuals. The National Day celebration each year is accompanied by an awards ceremony where citizens who have made notable contributions to the country are recognised and rewarded. Such are decorated with public service medals, letters of commendation, and awards of different ranks or degrees. The Judgement

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Seat of Christ is likened to such an occasion. Faithful and well deserving believers will be recompensed for their good works and will receive crowns commensurate with their work done for the Lord.

Louis Berkhof explaining the justice of God used the term “remunerative justice” which manifests itself in the distribution of rewards to men. He intimates that the remunerative justice of God falls under the distributive justice of God which is used to designate God’s rectitude in the execution of the law as it relates to the distribution of rewards.¹¹

A Time to See the Master’s Face

The Judgement Seat of Christ is a time for those who have been faithful and diligent to receive that commendation, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of the Lord.” It is a fitting end to a life of service where one will reap according to what one has sown. The verse in Galatians 6:7-9 should rightly appeal to the believer, “Be not be deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Samuel Hoyt rightly compared the Judgement Seat of Christ to a commencement ceremony,

At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better or work harder. However at such an event, the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping (except for tears of joy) because they did not earn better grades. Rather they are thankful that they graduate and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To overdo the sorrow aspect of the Judgement Seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential.¹²

Another analogy of the Judgement Seat of Christ is the annual appraisal done by human employers in earthly institutions. Generally speaking, the employee would not lose his job if he has not done so well. The purpose of the whole exercise is usually to determine the quantum or degree of merit increment or promotion (or the lack of it). Some may just get a normal increment, others may receive a double or triple quantum bonus for their performance during the year. The whole idea of bonuses and increments is to reward and remunerate deserving employees who have been working hard for the company.

Negative Aspects of the Judgement Seat of Christ

Since, the Judgement Seat of Christ is solely for believers, there is a tendency for us to look only at the positive aspects of judgement. This results in an unbalanced approach to the understanding of the Judgement Seat of Christ. It must be noted that the negative aspects are as significant as the positive.

Saints Must Give an Account

According to the Bible, Christians will one day stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ to give an account of the works they have done as Christians (Rom 14:10, 1 Cor 3:9-15, 2 Cor 5:10). Paul expresses this in no uncertain terms when he says, "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Rom 14:12). Even preachers and servants of God are not spared according to Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

The Lord also taught that the rewarding process will be an open one. Jesus said, "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt 6:3-4).

There are a number of Scripture texts which teach the negative aspect of the Judgement Seat of Christ. One of the texts is Romans 14:10-12,

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

That was the basis he used for chiding the Roman Christians for judging one another unnecessarily. The reason is that one day we will all be judged by the Supreme Magistrate. That fair and righteous judgement will inevitably reveal many negative things in our lives which we need to explain to Christ.

Another text is Colossians 3:23-25,

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;
Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance:

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for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

Paul warns that the Judgement Seat of Christ will not only include inheritance of rewards but also judgement for wrongs done in this life. Paul unmistakably says that not only will obedient servants receive their reward of the inheritance but also those who do wrong will be repaid for the wrong done and there will be no partiality. God is impartial and unprejudiced towards His saints at the Judgement Seat of Christ, and He will judge all the redeemed fairly and justly according to their deeds.

The next text is none other than the key text of 2 Corinthians 5:10 which reads, “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” It is unthinkable that an unfaithful and careless believer would receive the same commendation from the Lord as John Calvin, John Knox, Martin Luther, John Tyndale and a host of other Reformers and martyrs who died for their faith during the 16th and 17th century Reformation. Will a worldly or carnal believer receive the same rewards as Spurgeon, Latimer, Whitefield, and Edwards? Dr Carol answers this well,

The world has a foolish idea of “Going to heaven when we die;” that it is an indiscriminate Heaven of unvaried bliss, into which all Christians are swept irrespective of all else. Grace to such is merely another word for irresponsibility. Forgiveness wipes out everything, character, injustice, cruel and continuing wrongs; and leaves all to the dead level of no responsibility and no accountability. It’s all right for we go to heaven; nothing else really matters. Let us fear lest we conceive the same folly in our hearts: man is never irresponsible. Grace does not relieve him of accountability. We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ.¹³

Testimony of Human Experience

The truth of reward and recompense at the Judgement Seat of Christ is not only delineated clearly in the Scriptures, it is also suggested by the testimony of daily human life. First, it may be observed that all Christians are not equally happy on earth. While all believers are regenerated and justified it does not mean that all will experience the same level of blessedness in the Lord. The extent of blessing is largely contingent on one’s relationship, fellowship, communion, and obedience to God. The believer who draws near to the Lord daily and obeys His Word will always

experience the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:6). But another who indulges in his own selfish pleasures will experience much loss of joy in his Christian walk. The differences in the quality of life experiences between a spiritual Christian and a carnal one can be seen on earth. If this is so, why should it be thought incredible that such differences would also be found in heaven? Not all will be equal in heaven.

Second, all matters are not being judged righteously on earth. Paul Helm puts it this way,

The human systems of justice are at best systems of rough justice. No human judge has all the facts. No jury is completely unbiased, even though every effort may be made to reduce bias. Show trials, retrials, appeals against sentence, perversions of justice, mistaken identity, these are the features of human judicial systems that testify to the fact that humans and human arrangement are fallible.¹⁴

It would be necessary for all believers to be judged in heaven for they have not been judged equitably here. Many questions have to be answered and wrongs righted. For example, was it right for Jonathan Edwards to be dismissed from his pastorate by his members after he had served them most faithfully and sacrificially? Was it right for the committee of hyper-Calvinist Baptists to rule against William Carey in his going to preach the Gospel in India in 1792? Was it right for Charles Haddon Spurgeon to be censured by that vote of the Baptist Union of Great Britain for opposing the inroads of modernism in the Downgrade Controversy? What about J Gresham Machen who was a defender of the truth against the modernistic Presbyterian Church of USA? God will vindicate His servants on the day of the Judgement Seat of Christ. John Sproule puts it this way,

In its future sense the Judgement Seat of Christ stresses the accountability of every believer and the certainty that justice will finally triumph over all apparent inequities which are part and parcel of the Christian life here and now. Faithfulness will receive its just reward. However, faithlessness also will receive its just reward.¹⁵

The justice of God at the Judgement Seat of Christ will make right all unjudged and misjudged matters between or among believers.

Third, all Christians are not equally faithful. Though the most faithful servant is still an unprofitable servant, the differences among Christians in faithfulness are such that a righteous God will inevitably have to take note of them. Think of the difference in carrying out the doctrine of separation. The Christian who is not separated from the world but is indulging in the

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sins of the flesh and in compromise with false teachers, will he receive the same reward as one who is separated from the worldly pleasures and ecumenical apostasy of this world? In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 we are reminded that a steward will be judged for his faithfulness and we have to give an account of ourselves as stewards of the Lord. A real spiritual joy awaits the faithful steward and the separated Christian, but it will be denied to those who have dirtied their clothes in the world (1 Pet 4:10; 2 Cor 6:17,18) .

In concluding his treatise on the human life, Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 12:14, “For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether they be good, or whether it be evil.” It speaks soberly to the saints of their great accountability for every thought and deed committed on earth. One of the clear principles that is emphasised throughout the Scriptures, that concerns God’s judgement, is His impartiality. God is no respecter of persons (Deut 1:17, 16:17 Jas 2:2-6; Rom 2:11; 1 Pet 1:17; Acts 10:34). The disobedient believer is told in Colossians 3:25 that he will receive without partiality from the hand of the Lord the consequences of the wrong that he has done. To suffer loss means a great deal more than we could imagine or think. Although the discipline administered at the Judgement Seat of Christ must take on a form different from what the believer will experience in this life, we must not overlook the reality and severity of such a loss. Its severity is revealed in 2 John 8 which says, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” In other words, if a believer has not been careful about his motives and his works, he might lose a portion or all of his rewards.

Although the process of judgement will not be a pleasant experience for many believers, the NT indicates that the outcome of the Judgement Seat of Christ is a different matter. The picture the NT gives of the believer in heaven after the Judgement Seat of Christ is one of completeness and fulness of joy (Eph 5:27; Col 1:22; 1 Thess 3:13, 5:23; Jude 24). Nevertheless, the results of the judgement will still be evident throughout eternity. Some believers will have varying degrees of authority, while others will have none. Some will enjoy the rewards they have obtained, while others will have no rewards to enjoy at all. Though the tangible results of the Judgement Seat of Christ will continue for eternity, the emotions of regret, sorrow and disappointment experienced during the process of judgement will certainly not remain with the believer. Carl Johnson puts it this way, “When the event is over, he will enter into the other purposes of

Christ with fullness of joy because he knows that the Judge of the earth has done rightly.”¹⁶

Judgement Seat of Christ and Unconfessed Sins

Some view the Judgement Seat of Christ to be a time when Christians will be publicly faced with unconfessed sins. Mason said,

... the scene will not be individual and private, but of all and public. How much better to go and make things right now so that we will not hang our heads in shame at Christ’s judgement seat. Secret sins will be public scandal in heaven.¹⁷

Is the Judgement Seat of Christ a time for condemnation of sins? On the basis of what Christ did for us at Calvary, no believer will have to pay for his sins, confessed or unconfessed, at the Judgement Seat of Christ. All our sins past, present and future are paid for in full by Christ’s death on the cross. Chafer affirmed, “It cannot be too strongly emphasised that the Judgement Seat is unrelated to the problem of sin: it is more for the issuing of reward than the rejection of failure.”¹⁸

Samuel Hoyt also comments ably,

Scripture teaches that Christ’s death was all-sufficient, completely satisfying God’s wrath toward sin in the believer. The question of sin in regard to God’s justice has been forever satisfied in the mind of God by the all-sufficient sacrifice of His Son. The penalty for the believer’s sins has been fully paid for by Christ, the believer’s Substitute. The Christian has been in court, condemned, sentenced, and executed in his substitute, Jesus Christ. God cannot exact payment for sins twice since payment has been fully paid. The believer is seen by the Father as clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God can therefore find no cause for accusing the Christian judicially any more than He can find cause for accusing Jesus Christ. Therefore, at the judgement seat of Christ forensic punishment will not be meted out for the believer’s sin.¹⁹

However, lest we go away with the notion that there is no accountability at all at the Judgement Seat of Christ, we are reminded by the wisest man of Israel in Ecclesiastes 12:14, “For God shall bring every thing into judgement with every secret thing whether it be good or whether it be evil.” An unfavourable verdict will be passed on some of our works, and we will suffer loss depending on the motive of our actions. But the Lord delivers judgement without vindictiveness. By way of illustration, a certain father had two sons. One son worked hard and did well in school,

and was rewarded with a prize. The other son was lazy and did not perform well, and was disciplined. Although one is rewarded and the other is not, they are still his children and continue to live with him. Yet, the danger of falling short at the Judgement Seat of Christ should not be easily dismissed.

Hence, the doctrine of the Judgement Seat of Christ issues a clear warning to believers to be careful of their words and actions, and be prepared to account and answer for them one day. Though it may not be a life and death situation in that it will not alter our eternal state of salvation, it is nonetheless a solemn and sober day of holy judgement not to be trifled with or taken lightly. It should rather be contemplated fearfully and reverently.

Eschatological Time Frame of the *Bema*

In order to grasp the time frame of the Judgement Seat of Christ with regard to the end times, we need to understand briefly the basic prophetic order of events for the end of the world as revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. The OT prophets, the NT apostles, and the Lord Jesus describe a seven-year period of great tribulation that will come upon the face of this earth. This period is known by many synonyms including the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” the “seventieth week of Daniel,” and the “day of the Lord.” It is commonly called the “Great Tribulation.” Jesus described the last three and a half years of this period as brimming with great calamities, judgement, and devastation not seen on planet earth before. The Scriptures also reveal to us that at the end of this tribulation, Christ will come and set up an earthly kingdom for a period of 1000 years (Rev 20:6). During this time Christ will rule the earth from Jerusalem.

The second coming of Christ will be in two phases—first the Rapture, then the Second Advent. The Rapture, mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, is a special event when the Church will be caught up into heaven. At the Rapture, Jesus Christ will appear out of heaven and there will be a great shout followed by the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God. Those who know Christ as Saviour and Lord, but are no longer alive will be raised up from their graves with new incorruptible bodies. Then all believers will be instantly changed and be given incorruptible bodies. The Resurrection of the saints and the Rapture of God’s people are one and the same event. Both OT and NT saints will be caught up into the clouds to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess 4:13-18). The Rapture delivers the Church

from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10). So we should expect the Rapture to precede the period of wrath in the tribulation period (Matt 24:15, Rev 6:17).

When will the Judgement Seat of Christ take place? According to Scriptures, the Judgement Seat of Christ will take place between the Rapture and the return of Christ to earth.²⁰ Jesus will be conducting His judgement of the saints in heaven. Since the Rapture can take place at any moment, the Judgement Seat of Christ is also imminent. It may take place tomorrow. We must therefore be vigilant, watchful, sober, being prepared all the time. The Judgement Seat of Christ is close at hand for every believer who loves the Lord and His appearing.

Positive Aspects of the Judgement Seat of Christ

Within the church today, there exists considerable confusion and debate regarding the exact nature of the examination at the Judgement Seat of Christ. The expression, “the Judgement Seat of Christ,” has caused some to draw the wrong conclusions about the nature and purpose of this judgement. A common misconception is that God will mete out some form of retributive punishment for sins committed.

Far from this retributive purpose, however, the Bible is replete with references on the teaching of future rewards for believers in heaven (Matt 5:12; 5:46; 6:1,2; 10:41, 21; 9:41; Luke 6:23, 25; Acts 1:18; Rom 4:4; 1 Cor 3:8, 14, 9, 17, 18; 1 Tim 5:18; 2 Pet 2:13; 2 John 8; Jude 11; Rev 11:18, 22). The concept of reward is naturally related closely with the concept of judgement taken over from the Jewish tradition. The Bible speaks of rewards because God is holy and just. The concept of rewards and punishment emphasises the moral demands made on man by a holy God, thereby establishing in the believer a sense of responsibility and accountability to God. God’s judgement is in full correspondence with man’s conduct. Hence, He will reward the righteous according to their deeds. There will also be particular rewards for disciples who are approved and faithful in days of persecution and conflict. Matthew 5:12 says, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” Luke 6:23 says the same, “Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.”

In the Pauline epistles, the twofold idea of reward and loss is undoubtedly present. In 1 Corinthians 3:8 Paul writes, “Now he that

planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.” Similarly, Galatians 6:7-9 speaks of believers receiving rewards commensurate with their works.

In the Johannine writings, the apostle speaks of not losing one’s reward in 2 John 8, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” That the judgement is a matter of works is attested by numerous passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Galatians 6:4; 1 Corinthians 9:1; Romans 2:2; Philippians 1:22, and 2:12.

Rewards at the Judgement Seat Of Christ

What form will the rewards take and what is the nature of these rewards? The nature of the believer’s rewards is never specifically stated in the Bible though the figure of crowns is used (cf, 1 Cor 9:25; Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10, 3:11). What then will be the nature of these crowns received by believers at the Judgement Seat of Christ? This writer agrees with Walvoord’s conclusions concerning this matter. He writes,

The probability is that faithful service on earth will be rewarded by a privileged place of service in heaven. According to Revelation 22:3, “His servants shall serve him.” Believers will find their highest fulfillment in loving service for the Saviour who loved them and who gave Himself for them.²¹

The Scriptures speak figuratively of five crowns. These crowns may not be literal crowns. In all likelihood, they are figurative expressions of eternal and precious rewards in heaven. Let us look at them one by one.

Runner’s Crown

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor 9:24-27).

It is possible that Paul had in mind the ancient Isthmian games here. The word “striveth” has the idea of “engaging in an athletic contest with great might.”²² A wreath crown is given to the victorious athlete. Joe L Wall describes,

The wreath crown was awarded at the Pan-Hellenic games such as the Olympics. When a person won his race, he received the winner's reward, a garland of wild olive leaves, pine needles, laurels of parsley. Such a crown carried a great deal of significance for the winner. It was a medal of honour, the gold medal, the blue ribbon, the first place trophy. It was the very best award you could win. It not only meant that you had won, but that you would also have many special benefits coming to you when you returned home.²³

The contestants in the Greek games brought themselves under complete control and abstained from many things that would be hindrances to their success in the race. It was a very disciplined and diligent effort. Like a winning athlete, a believer must likewise strive tenaciously if he is to receive a prize from God at the Judgement Seat of Christ. Harrison describes,

the champion came to the Judgement Seat where the Umpire sat and received from his hand a wreath of laurel leaves. To them that was the sign of honour; and dignity was bestowed upon them in the parade. They were champions. The populace did not know the worth of the material composing the wreath. They only saw the worth of the men who were worthy to wear those honours.²⁴

Paul says that such athletes go through a great deal to be crowned with the perishable wreath which is but a fleeting honour. If that is so, how much more should Christians be willing to suffer in order to obtain that imperishable prize from his Lord? This is a spiritual fight and the believer must have the full armour of God (Eph 6:10-17). The contestant must gird up his loins (Eph 6:14) and keep his eyes on the goal. He must run with tenacity and enthusiasm, keeping all the rules of the game. That is the only way to win the runner's crown.

Soul Winner's Crown

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." Paul is talking about those he has won for Christ. He declares that in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming, those whom he had ministered to with the Gospel of salvation will be his crown of rejoicing. This is one portion of the Scriptures that suggests to us that we will recognise and know one another in glory. The immeasurable value of a human soul in the sight of God is clearly spelt out in Luke 15:10, "I say unto you, there is joy in the presence

of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

Solomon said in the book of Proverbs, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise” (Prov 11:30). God’s Word places a lot of emphasis on evangelism and missions. The Great Commission is given by Christ to all Christians. It belongs to us to be witnesses for the Lord, and to win souls for Christ. Those who do that will receive a reward on that day. The soul winner’s crown is rightly a crown of rejoicing when we see those who have accepted the Lord through our ministry of the Gospel. Like Andrew we should bring the gospel of Christ to our loved ones and friends (John 1:41). Jesus told the demon possessed man after he was saved, “Go and tell them how great things the Lord has done for thee and had compassion on thee” (Mark 5:19). And what pleasure we shall have when we see that they too have been used as instruments to reach others! Surely the thought should encourage us to be responsible stewards of the message of redemption, to preach the Word, and to be instant, in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:5). The sheer joy of meeting in heaven believers that we have ministered to in life is in itself a great jubilation and honourable delight to all saints.

Lover’s Crown

James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried he shall receive a crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” The suffering saint is to remain strong and brave under whatever pressure or circumstance in life. It is a special award for those who have lovingly suffered for their Lord without murmuring. This is indeed a very difficult reward to get. Yet church history has countless stories of godly men who ceased not to glorify God despite being persecuted for their faith, and burned at the stakes. In the first century, the Apostles must be the most shining examples of those who have earned this special award. There are also many unsung and unknown heroes and heroines who have died for their faith in Christ. Shall we speak of John Hooper, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, John Tyndale, and John Rogers, the Marian martyrs? How about all those Protestants who were massacred in 1572 on St Bartholomew’s Day by the wicked king of France, and the 40,000 killed in 1641 in the Great Irish Massacre? To them, Jesus promised, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt 5:12). To them and many others belong this

special prize and award of the crown of life.

Shepherd's Crown

A crown awaits all faithful shepherds of the flock. Peter says in 1 Peter 5:4, "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." This unfading crown of glory is only given when the condition as outlined in the previous verses (vv 2-3) are fulfilled. Pastors are to shepherd the flock of God carefully. They are not to do so for personal gain. They are not to be dictators over them. He has a grave duty to lead, direct and guide the flock, and he must do so with holiness and humility. He must be a godly model for the sheep to follow. The reward is a crown of glory at the appearance of the Chief Shepherd. Jesus Christ our Chief Shepherd will reward His undershepherds who have been faithful to Him in their pastoral ministry.

Watcher's Crown

The Apostle Paul charged young Timothy in a letter from prison, But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim 4:5-8).

Because of a life lived so gloriously for the Lord, Paul was able to say with confidence that a crown of righteousness is laid up for him by the Lord. This crown, says Paul, will not only be given to him, but also to those who love His appearing. This is a particular reward and blessing for saints who are yearning and looking forward to Christ's return. The NT, no less than 40 times, warns us that Christ will come suddenly, catching men unawares. To the vigilant and alert Christian, God promises the reward of a crown of righteousness. Paul Helm makes an insightful comment here,

When the idea of judgement to come occupies its rightful place at the center of Christian understanding, it imparts a seriousness and a watchfulness to life that nothing else can. For it is recognised that life, however else it is viewed or valued, does not end with death of the body but that the whole life is lived with the final, divine assessment in mind.²⁵

HOMILY

What is the purpose of the Judgement Seat of Christ? Theodore Epp answers,

The first purpose or reason is that the believer must be vindicated. The second purpose of the judgement seat is to stimulate Christians to faithfulness. Thirdly, it is the examination of the lives and service of believers, and the rewarding of them for what God considers worthy of recognition. And finally it is to give assignment in the kingdom. There are degrees of rewards in the language employed by our Saviour when he talks about those who are the least in the kingdom and those who are greatest. Some will rule over a few cities and some over many. Others again though saved, will not reign over any cities at all.²⁶

So, the Judgement Seat of Christ is a judgement of believers unto rewards. How will we be judged? The Bible does provide us with clues as to what could be important elements in the judging process. We could call these the factors of divine assessment of the believer and his works. Hereunder is a helpful checklist on the criteria of judgement.²⁷

How We Treat Other Believers

Hebrews 6:10 says, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” In another passage, the Lord told His disciples,

He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward (Matt 10:41-42).

From this we can derive that Jesus will reward those who have blessed and ministered to others in a special way that is pleasing and acceptable to Him.

How We Exercise Authority over Others

Hebrews 13:17 exhorts, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” In another place we read, “be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jas 3:1). Those in leadership—pastors, elders, deacons, etc—will be judged by a different

standard.

How We Employ God-given Abilities

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are to use our spiritual gifts in a godly manner, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ... But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will. ... That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.”

In 1 Peter 4:10, we are reminded by the Apostle Peter to be a good steward of the manifold grace of God. As stewards we need to be found faithful in the use of the gifts with which God has blessed us. We will be appraised for our faithfulness one day at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

How We Use Our Money and Resources

The Holy Scriptures have much to say about the way we ought to employ the resources God has entrusted to us. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, Paul tells the Corinthians,

But this I say, ‘He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

This same teaching is taught in 1 Timothy 6:17-19,

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Consider the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-26), and the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-29). Both speak of the need to use our talents and money faithfully for the work of the ministry.

How We Spend Our Time

God has given to us time. Time is precious. We are accountable for the way we use our time. In Psalm 90:12, Moses prayed the Lord to teach His people to number their days so that they may apply their hearts unto wisdom. In Ephesians 5:16, Paul advised the people to redeem their time because the days are evil. Peter in a similar vein commanded in 1 Peter

1:17, “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” If we use our time wisely for the Lord to do His will we will be rewarded.

How Much We Suffer for Jesus

Believers who suffer on earth will receive much joy in heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 5:11-12,

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Paul reckons in Romans 8:18 that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” This is because “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17). Hence, there is a clear teaching that our affliction for the sake of our faith and the gospel will not go unnoticed and unrewarded by our Lord.

How We Run the Spiritual Race

A prize awaits if we run the spiritual race lawfully. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:24, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.” (cf Phil 3:14, Heb 12:1,2). God has certain standards and rules, and He expects us to keep them. The race can be won only if we run by the rules. If we do not keep them, we will be disqualified. So it is possible to finish the race and yet find ourselves without a prize at the end. Rewards will be given out to those who obey the commandments of God. Disobedience has its consequences. But faithfulness has its corresponding blessing and remuneration.

How We Witness for Christ

The Great Commission is often the Great Omission of many believers. But to those who have been faithfully sharing the Gospel with others, there is a sure and lasting reward. Indeed, a great commendation awaits them. Solomon said, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise” (Prov 11:30). Paul said of the Thessalonian Church, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (1 Thess 2:19-20).

We are all called to be witnesses and preachers of the gospel of Christ, to dispense and propagate the message of hope and redemption. To the faithful evangelist is promised a special reward. His labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Application and Implication

The doctrine of the Judgement Seat of Christ must not be studied merely from a theoretical standpoint. A devotional study of this important doctrine must necessarily affect our Christian lives today. If we truly appreciate the doctrine of the Judgement Seat of Christ we will commit our bodies to Him as living sacrifices transformed by His Word (Rom 12:1-2). We will serve him wholeheartedly, exhibit Christian character worthy of our calling, and display a deep sense of accountability in our daily conduct and works, keeping our priorities right and lives pure, waiting patiently and eagerly for the return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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*Rev Jack Sin is pastor of Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church,
and lecturer in Church History at Far Eastern Bible College.*



"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim 4:1). *Examining and Exposing Cultic and Occultic Movements* by the Rev Jack Sin provides for the Church a timely warning of the dangers of various "doctrines of devils" that pervade the world today. This book is a vital resource for Christians who wish to be warned of the errors and dangers of cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, and occultic movements like the New Age. As the saying goes, "to be forewarned is to be forearmed."

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FROM THE ARCHIVES
**THE WAY TO SUCCESS IN THE
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY**

Timothy Tow

Let me begin by quoting a poem I've gleaned from a booklet I was recently given by Rev M M Myers of Woodland Park Bible Conference, Beckersville, Pennsylvania. It reads,

*"What is success?" I asked a tree,
Standing beside a wall.*

*The leaves looked down at me and said,
"Why success is growing tall."*

*"What is success?" I asked a brook,
Gurgling through the leaves.*

*It laughing, dancing, said to me,
"A river then to the sea."*

*What is success?" I asked a bird,
Singing in the wood.*

*It answered me in lilting song,
"Success is gratitude."*

*"What is success?" I asked a man,
His cheek aglow with health.*

*He answered me with mighty scorn,
"Why, success is gaining wealth."*

*Then on bended knee I asked the Saviour,
"Who on the earth had trod,"*

*And a wee small voice within me said,
"Success is knowing God."*

From this little poem you have the hint that the theme of my message, based on John 21:22, "Follow Thou Me," is "The Way to Success in the

Christian Ministry.” I have preached from this text at this pulpit once before, and the same text has been quoted, you say, for the hundredth time! So, why this text again? Well, let me tell you an anecdote about Dr Harry Ironside. One day, he was invited to speak by a certain church. The message he preached was, “Ye must be born again.” When invited back a few weeks later, Dr Ironside preached on the same theme, “Ye must be born again.” A member of the church asked him, “Why do you preach again, ‘Ye must be bom again?’” Answered Ironside, “Because, ye must be born again!”

Why do I preach, “Follow Thou Me?” from this pulpit again? Is it because you have not been following Him since my last sermon? How often we follow, but reluctantly. How often we go each our own way. We refuse to follow! “The Way to Success in the Christian Ministry” is addressed not only to the graduands, but to us, ministers of the Gospel, to all who are gathered here tonight, to you my brothers and sisters!

Now, “Follow Thou Me” is a very short, simple sentence. It has only four syllables, one syllable shorter than our Chinese text. It is so short that any foreigner without any English can learn in one minute. To follow Christ is to take one step at a time, one step at a time. “Follow Thou Me” is as easy as A-B-C! Yes, the rudiments of success in the Christian ministry are easily learned if you take one step at a time. As the prophet, Isaiah, has said, “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little” (Isa 28:10). See, we have Scriptural authority to require our students not to learn Greek from an interlinear, but by patiently learning their paradigms!

Now, while the rudiments of “Follow Thou Me” are easy, one step at a time, one step at a time; the way to success is a long, long, long, long, long one! It is the journey of your whole life span on earth; as the Chinese saying goes, “It is only after the coffin lid is sealed,” that you can tell of one’s success or failure. That is why, though you’ve come to the successful conclusion of your academic training, we do not call this graduation “completion” or “consummation,” but “commencement.” You are just commencing, just starting out in life. There is a long way ahead of each one of you. (So, don’t throw away your Hebrew grammar and Church History notes yet!)

“Follow Thou Me” to some of my graduate students in Singapore who have returned with higher degrees, seems too elementary a lesson to

learn! They would rather run ahead, holding high keys of their newly acquired knowledge. For, has not Peter been given the keys to bind and loose, to remit sins and to retain sins? Cocksure like Peter before his fall, these soon are found crestfallen from their haughty heights. There was a classmate of mine in China, who studied Greek with me from Huddilston's little grammar. After six or seven weeks of barely learning six or seven paradigms, he began to wax eloquent, correcting the Chinese translation of the Bible. In the homiletics class, he began to point out a mistake here, and an error there. "**My** translation," he said, "is the one and only perfect one!" When will young upstarts begin to "follow?"

Does Peter talk like this to his congregation? to his students? In his First Epistle, see how lowly he conducts himself. Speaking to the whole Church, from the highest to the lowest, he says, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder (he did not assert his apostleship though he could), and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:1-5).

Yes, until we are humbled before God and before one another, we cannot succeed to follow. Calvin, quoting Chrysostom and Augustine, gave three rules on Christian religion. "The first rule," he said, "is humility; the second rule is humility; the third rule is humility!" Humility is the strength that will carry us through life's journey to success in the Christian ministry, and indeed, in any kind of human endeavour.

Now, "Follow Thou Me" is a call the Lord has given Peter; do you know, five times, as recorded in Scripture? Following Christ is of quintessential importance!

I

The first time Peter heard "Follow Thou Me" was when his brother, Andrew, brought him along, and there were John, Philip, and Nathaniel. In taking this first step to follow Jesus, Simon was changed to Cephas, which is the Aramaic for Peter, a stone. Some of you foreign students coming to

this country might have acquired a new name, like me. I got my new name—Timothy—from a classmate—Schuyler Marshall—when Faith Seminary was in Wilmington, Delaware. The reason why he called me Timothy was that there was another Chinese student whose name was Paul. I like the name Timothy because it's the name of a disciple, a lowly person. It is so much easier to live up to Timothy than to Paul!

What I'm trying to say about Peter's change of name from Simon to Cephas is not so much the form as the content. It is his conversion. He was changed from the Simon that he was, from his slimy, sinful self, to a born again Cephas, a stone, a rock!

The trouble with the Christian ministry these days is we have so many professional, unconverted ministers! Is this not reflected in the infamous Auburn Affirmation (Defamation) signed by 1,294 USA Presbyterian ministers in the Twenties, that they were not bound to believe these five fundamentals: the inerrancy of Holy Scripture, the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and miracles? Ministers of Jesus Christ who repudiated His Word and spurned His saving works! I dare say these 1,294 ministers were unregenerate, blind guides of the blind, the unsaved trying to save others, "rice-tubs" in our Chinese expression, or lazy professionals.

I have a graduate student who after some years in your country returned to teach in our college in Singapore. This young man preached a series of sermons from Jesus' parables. When he came to the parable of the Pearl of Great Price, he gave his exegesis, quoting the Greek and referring to Lenski. Then he concluded, "The Gospel is not unique. It is the best of religions." Do you agree to that piece of idle talk? It's the most subtle yet devastating statement against our Lord I've heard in our college. What is the Gospel? It is defined for us in 1 Cor 15:1-4. In substance, the Gospel, if it is to save us, must be none other than the Christ who died for our sins according to the Scriptures, who was buried, and who rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. How then can it be said that the Gospel is not unique, unless he doesn't know what "unique" is? There is one Gospel, and only one, no other. "If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:9).

Coming back to Simon, changed to Cephas, let me make this loving warning again! It is very possible there is one or two or even more unregenerate students right here in this Seminary. How unfortunate to leave

the school of the prophets unsaved, unregenerate still! Are you a Simon or a Cephas?

II

The second step in Peter following Christ to success in the Christian ministry is found in Luke 5. Here we see him discarding his boat and nets to serve the Lord full time. He was overwhelmed by Christ's power to provide so abundantly for him. By today's calculation, the two shiploads of fish could easily fetch \$10,000.

When we are decided to follow Christ, to serve him full time, let us have faith to trust Him to provide. I'm not against taking a secular job, but often we are found blindly struggling and foolishly relying on our own strength and power, not relying on the Lord. If He has called you into full-time service, then one evidence of that call is He'll give you the Word to preach! There are many vacant pulpits in this country. If Seminary students are not beginning to fill them, who will? What's wrong with many of us is that we are still "riding two-legs-in-two-boats," to use another Chinese expression. What we need if we are to succeed is to burn our boats behind us and launch into the deep with Peter at His Word.

III

Thirdly, we see Jesus telling His disciples He must go to Jerusalem to be crucified (Matt 16). Immediately, we have Peter jump up to stop our Saviour. While he didn't want his Master to suffer death, neither did he resign to it himself. He tried to shun the cross. So was uttered this famous saying of Jesus, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:21-26). Following Christ without the cross of sacrifice and suffering disqualifies our discipleship. If you want to serve Christ, He can give you no prospects but a cross. But, we would rather transform that cross into an airplane, into a flying bed of ease. The cross is a yoke, rather, when it is horizontally placed, a yoke for the oxen to carry. In our day-to-day service, this is our lot. The reason why the church has no power today is that the cross is missing. As William Burns, the great pioneer English Presbyterian missionary to China said, "No cross, no crown." Because he was willing to suffer, therefore he achieved great success, yea, even that of a modern St Paul, in China. Will you submit to the cross He has given you to carry? Yes, your own cross (each one has a

specific one) if you examine the text above. This is a most crucial step to success in the Christian ministry.

IV

After this, we see Peter watching the interview between Christ and the rich young ruler. The requirement that the young man give up his riches to follow Christ is a second lesson on a Christian's need to overcome materialism. This emphasis was made to Peter and the Twelve. Praise the Lord, since Peter forsook his boat and nets, he never looked back. He has well succeeded in this step. His avowal that He had given up all to follow Christ was accepted by the Saviour, who blessed him a hundredfold. But, I have seen how many a minister after serving the Lord for five, ten, or fifteen years, comes to the season of drop-outs, like over-ripe fruits. I have known a Filipino minister, a graduate of this Seminary. This brother came through our city one weekend; so I invited him to preach for me on the Lord's Day. He gave a powerful, thrilling sermon on salvation. When I asked him what church he was now ministering to (I had not seen him for 20 years), he said, "No, I'm now manager for a big American firm." O, how good it would be if he should continue preaching full time as he did that Sunday morning. How will you end up, my fellow theologues, five or ten years from now?

V

Lastly, we see Jesus confronting Peter the third time on materialism. "Lovest thou me *more than these*?" The fishes he has caught so plentifully, 153 of them "great fishes," perhaps ten-pounders! Why the third time? Because materialism, money, is of greatest temptation to every one of us.

We are beset with not only the temptation of money, but of sex, of friendship, of associations and alliances. These all pull away from Christ. How can we conquer them? Only by love of our Saviour; by that first, fervent love! But, we have left that first love like Ephesus, and that discourages and dampens our Lord. How often in human relationships we see a third party come into the picture to form a triangle. So that first love between husband and wife is gone. O, the broken marriages we witness today and the broken relationships with our Lord! Even broken marriages in ministers' lives, and the consequence of many fallen by the wayside. What is the reason? Love is lacking. Love is no more. So, Demas has

forsaken Paul, having loved this present world (2 Tim 4:10). Without that first, fervent love, we will not make it to success in our Christian ministry.

As we review the five steps of Peter's following, let us also stress the negative side of following. If we are to follow in the way to success in the Christian ministry, we have plenty to forsake. We must forsake that old self of sinful, slimy Simon; we must forsake the self-reliance in our livelihood. We must forsake that spirit of self-ease and self-security, and embrace the cross of daily suffering with Christ. We must, a second time, be examined in regard to riches, forsake the love of self that smothers the first love we had for Him.

Praise the Lord, Peter, having three times being asked the question, "Lovest thou me," was trebly revived. He followed Christ to the very end. Like Paul who could boldly say he had fought a good fight and finished his course, Peter could refer to his faith and example he had shown his disciples to the very eve of his departure: "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ, hath shewed me. Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (2 Pet 1:13-15). Can you and I follow Christ to life's very end?

*"What is success?" I asked a man,
His cheek aglow with health.
He answered me with mighty scorn,
"Why success is gaining wealth."
Then on bended knee I asked the Saviour,
With Peter by the sea,
And a wee small voice within me said,
"Success is 'Follow thou Me,'"*

A message delivered at the 42nd Commencement of Faith Theological Seminary, USA, May 14, 1979. Reproduced here for the benefit of his students past, present, and future.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE WRITINGS OF THE REV DR TIMOTHY TOW

The Rev Dr Timothy Tow has a prolific pen. The Lord has called him not only to preach and teach, but also to write. Since the beginning of his ministry, he has not failed to produce evangelistic tracts, soul-searching sermons, polemical articles, scholarly treatises, and expository commentaries on the Scriptures for the purpose of extending God's kingdom beyond the four walls of the church and college. He was editor of the *Malaysia Christian*—the journal of the Malaysia Council of Christian Churches and the Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore and Malaya, and presently edits the *Life Weekly*—the Lord's Day bulletin of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church—which enjoys a worldwide circulation. The wealth of theological, pastoral, and historical data contained in those volumes await a much needed indexing work in aid of future research. (Here is a worthy thesis project. FEBC students take note!)

The present bibliography is a selected list of Rev Dr Timothy Tow's works, and is a reflection of the breadth and depth of his writing ministry as pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and principal of Far Eastern Bible College.

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COLLEGE NEWS AND CLASS NOTES

The **new FEBC semester** opened with a day of prayer on January 3, 2000 with 13 new students from 7 countries: From Cambodia: Ny Sambath, Sen Ponnareay, Srun Chivan, Ty Serey Vuth; Indonesia: Aguini, Leni; Kenya: David Mwendwa Mulyungi; Korea: Jun Yoing Il, Kim Jung Nyun, Oh Yeong Uoon; Singapore: Leonard Chong Wei Leng, Chung Wai Ying; and Thailand: Saman Preechawong. Total enrolment is 102.

The **FEBC Gospel Meeting** last semester was held on March 25, 2000, at Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, and the Lord's messenger was Rev Tan Eng Boo of Grace Bible-Presbyterian Church. He preached on "If a Man Dies, Shall He Live Again?" (Job 14:14).

The **Basic Theology for Everyone** night classes for the January-May 2000 semester were: Biblical Anthropology by Rev Dr Timothy Tow, Harmony of the Gospels by Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo, The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament by Rev Das Koshy, The Book of Genesis by Rev Quek Suan Yiew, and Discipleship by Small Groups by Rev Dr Goh Seng Fong.

The new **FEBC Prospectus** (2000-2002) is out. If you wish to have a copy, you can get one either from the FEBC Bookroom or the college office.

The Far Eastern Fundamental School of Theology (Myanmar) under the leadership of **Rev Robert Thawm Luai** has started to print the Falam Chin Bible based on the KJV. The Myanmar government has recently granted the printing licence, and so the new Heidelberg press (donated by Rev Dr Timothy Tow) can now be used for the furtherance of God's kingdom in Myanmar.

Setsuko Takashima (DipTh '84) has joined Miyagiken Bible Distributing Company in Japan. She writes, "I join the evangelical activity to hold Bible verse placards with Miyagiken brothers and sisters at Ikuta Jinjya on January 1-3, 2000. Many Japanese go to worship at Ikuta Jinjya Oshogatsu. Miyagiken brothers and sisters go to Osaka and Nara to hold Bible verse placards and speak Bible messages through tape recorders for those worshippers."

Rev Michael Koech (BTh '87) is the principal of Bomet Bible Institute in Kenya. One of his students, **Jonathan Langat**, has come to FEBC for further training.

Rev Colin Wong (BTh '87) and **Mark Chen** (MDiv student) went to Vietnam and ministered to two churches in Ho Chi Minh city from March 13-17, 2000. They taught the people about the sovereignty of God, assurance of salvation, and biblical separation.

Dr Jeffrey Khoo (BTh '89) was the speaker at the Youth Summer Conference of Grace Christian Church, Manila, Philippines, April 19-22, 2000.

Rev John Ling (CertBS '90), pastor of Kelapa Sawit Bible-Presbyterian Church, Malaysia, was called home to be with the Lord on March 4, 2000. Rev Ling was not only used of the Lord in Kelapa Sawit, but also Air Bemban, Bukit Batu, Kemaman, Kuantan, and Mersing. Surely, he has "fought a good fight" and has "kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).

Rev Nirand Tamee (DipTh '91) and his wife **Jess** (BTh '84) are now ministering in new church premises bought with the help of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore. Their address: 7 Anubarn Road, Lane 6, Chang Puak, Muang, Chiangmai 50200, Thailand. Mailing address: P O Box 198, Chiangmai 50000, Thailand. Tel: 66-53-412701, Fax: 66-53-872216

Chan Sakuljaroenlert (CertBS '93) is a preacher of the Siam Lahu Bible-Presbyterian Church, and runs the Lahu Christian Correspondence Course for pastors, evangelists, and church leaders in Thailand and Myanmar. His address: P O Box 50, Fang, Chiangmai 50110, Thailand. Tel/Fax: (053) 452670.

Elia Chia (BTh '94) married Jenny Megawati on December 4, 1999 at GBIS Kepunton, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia.

Rev Jonathan Lee Young Lyoung (BTh '94), Life Bible-Presbyterian Church's missionary to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, shared these testimonies from his church members. "Nak's aunt, who is 55 years old, said, 'My husband was killed by the Khmer Rouge. When he was killed by them, he did not know the true God, but I know the true God now. I won't turn back from God because I am very happy with my living God. I will follow Jesus Christ forever because I have found the true God clearly. Thank God, my family allowed me to come to the church to worship God.' Visal's mother, who is 45 years old, said, 'I believed a lot of gods before knowing

the true God who is Jesus Christ, because nobody taught me what and who the true God was for my life. Especially in my house, we have no more idols. My family had a lot of problems before, but now we know how to pray to God to solve them.' Tee's mother, who is 35 years old, testified, 'All of my relatives have been accusing me since I have thrown away all the idols from my house. I am being treated like a betrayer from my family line. Whenever I am suffering, my son Tee prays and encourages me so much. Now I know that Jesus Christ is my true God, and I will follow Him forever in my life. Before knowing Jesus Christ, my son was very naughty, and I had a very hard time with him. Now, I never worry about my son wherever he goes. I trust him because he himself has been changed so much by God.'” Pray for Rev Jonathan Lee, and the other FEBC graduates **Rev Moses Hahn Sung Ho** (MDiv '97), **Mrs Hahn Eun Sil** (MRE '97), **Rev David Koo Kyen Hoe** (BRE '98), and **Suresh** (BTh '99) who have been labouring hard for the Lord in the ripe harvest fields of Cambodia. May many more Cambodians come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour through their ministries.

Lee Hong Hee (BTh '98) married Soo Jim on March 25, 2000, at Sa Gik Dong Church, Seoul, Korea.

Errol Dale Stone (BTh '98) was ordained into the gospel ministry under the auspices of FEBC on February 6, 2000 at the 10.30 am service of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. Rev Stone is pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church meeting at St John's Ambulance Hall, 197 Main Street, Osborne Park, Perth, Australia. Tel: 08-9345-4446. Email: edstone@space.net.au.

Robert Tan Hok Tjai (MDiv '99) has joined the lay ministry staff of Barker Road Methodist Church, Singapore. Robert serves in the Indonesian ministry by conducting Bible studies, visiting the sick, and counselling Indonesian students studying in Singapore.

Sim Peng Sin (MDiv student) has established a new Bible-Presbyterian church in Tangkak, Malaysia, after one and a half years of loving labour. Rawang Bible-Presbyterian Church has appointed him as their preacher. He also ministers to the Chinese congregation of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church in Kemaman, Terengganu, on a monthly basis.

Raised up of God ...



... for such a time as this.

When seminaries and Bible colleges everywhere capitulate to the apostasy of the end time, Far Eastern Bible College stands steadfast, unmoveable, securely fastened on the Rock, even our Lord Jesus Christ, and His holy, inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word.

FEBC stands for the “old-time Gospel,” the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” in opposition to the flood of false doctrines now sweeping over the church: Modernism, Ecumenism, Romanism, Neo-evangelicalism, Charismaticism, and New Age Mysticism.

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