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Editor, JODT
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EDITORIAL

The foundational truths with regard to the nature of God, humanity, good and evil, and the meaning and destiny of human life as communicated in Scripture provide a basic worldview for understanding the world in which one lives. Truly, the foundation for any worldview is epistemology. All truth is God’s truth, and it is, therefore, obtained from the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Scripture is foundational for determining truth because it is based in God’s person. The Gospel of John, for instance, is noted for its clear antithesis between light and darkness. The fact that sin exists is indicative of a corresponding standard of truth against which that darkness is contrasted. The immutable nature of God is the ultimate basis for all truth claims. The fact that God has communicated truth to humanity indicates the centrality of the Bible. Although mankind is created in the image of God, and the Fall devastated the direct oneness and intimate fellowship that humanity had with the Creator, the Bible communicates the truth that God used general and special revelation to communicate to mankind. Whereas the general revelation reminds mankind that God exists, special revelation is God’s disclosure of specific truth. Since God has communicated truth to humanity, this indicates that humanity is responsible to live in accordance with revealed truth. For example, John 5:24-29 communicates that choices made in the present will culminate in everlasting destinies. Mankind will either receive the “light” or remain in “darkness.” The fact that there is no intermediate response emphasizes the magnitude of the biblical revelation. Therefore, it is with great joy to begin this issue of the Journal of Dispensational Theology with an article by the president of Tyndale Theological Seminary & Biblical Institute that demonstrates the relationship between the authenticity of the biblical text to authority. Jerry M. Hullinger examined the phrase, “the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart,” from an historical religious perspective. Hullinger’s conclusion that God proved “himself to be the only God” substantiates the centrality of God’s revelation. Readers will appreciate considering the hardening motif, and how it emphasizes the Lord as “greater than all gods.” As Scripture alone reveals the kind of truth necessary for salvation, Gary E. Gilley wrote with a pastoral concern against the distortion of biblical truth as represented by the New Perspective on Paul. Of course, only a risen Savior can actually save. René A. López argued conclusively that Jesus did truly die upon Calvary’s cross, which is important because His death “is a necessary prelude to rising physically.” The editors of this Journal trust that you will appreciate and be edified by the studies herein that expound Scripture truths, with regard to bibliology, theology proper, soteriology, and Christology.

Ron J. Bigalke, M.Apol., M.Div., M.T.S., Ph.D.
editor@tyndale.edu
CONSIDERING HIGHER CRITICISM:
The Relationship of Authenticity to Authority

Christopher B. Cone

John Locke deftly identified the central problem of biblical authority: he explained that if all of holy writ is to be equally considered as inspired of God, then there is much to be questioned regarding the Christian faith;\(^1\) however, if it is not to be so considered, then the authority of the text may be questioned and ultimately undermined, and thus the Christian faith is disintegrated.\(^2\) Quite a problem indeed that Locke explained. If the text is not authoritative then hermeneutic exercises are quite inconsequential for any purposes other than literary appreciation. Therefore, the authority of the text is central at this point. How then does biblical criticism influence the discussion? Furthermore, what can be said of authority after the text has been submitted to the critical processes?

Louis Wallis keenly summarized the rise of biblical criticism, observing correctly that it did not originate in the minds of German scholars, but instead enjoyed a more eclectic genesis. His comments traced progress from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, and their thoroughness and conciseness warrant their full representation here. He described the rise of biblical criticism as follows:

. . . distinctly foreshadowed by a Spanish Jew, Ibn Ezra, the most eminent biblical scholar of the Middle Ages, far back in the twelfth century A.D. The idea was taken up by the English scholar Hobbes, in his book, Leviathan, published in 1651; by the Frenchman L. Peyrere, in his book Pre-Adamites, issued in 1655; and by the Jewish philosopher Spinoza, of Amsterdam, Holland, in Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus, which came out in 1670. In the meanwhile the Frenchman Louis Cappellus in 1650 published his Critica Sacra, demonstrating the imperfect and fallible condition of the Hebrew vowel points. In 1678, Richard Simon, another Frenchman, put forth a

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*Christopher B. Cone, M.B.S., M.Ed., Th.D., Ph.D., president, professor of Bible and theology, Tyndale Theological Seminary & Biblical Institute; and, pastor, Tyndale Bible Church, Ft. Worth, Texas


volume entitled Critical History of the Old Testament, showing that the Mosaic Law was compiled and edited centuries after the time of Moses. In 1753 appeared a work by Astruc, a French writer, identifying the so-called Jehovist and Elohist documents in Genesis. In 1800 was published the Critical Remarks of Alexander Geddes, a Scotchman, who denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. And although German scholars in the nineteenth century did more for biblical interpretation than did the scholars of other countries, they were matched in critical acumen during that period by Renan of France, Colenso of England, and Kuenen of Holland.  

Notably, two of the earlier critics cited by Wallis (viz. Ibn Ezra and Spinoza), built upon earlier traditions. Fred G. Bratton suggested they borrowed from the Talmudists, “who called attention to scores of discrepancies and contradictions in the Old Testament.”

Bratton provided a series of examples, citing observations “by one that the flood was not a world catastrophe but local in character, by another that Moses and Elijah did not ascend to heaven, and by a third that the birds which fed Elijah were human.”

In the ninth century, Hivi considered Bible difficulties, resolving some of them in anticipation of “rationalistic exegesis.” Another scholar, whose name is unknown but whose eleventh century work Schecter described, gave attention to every perceived Old Testament discrepancy. The earlier Talmudists, and these two later textual critics (in addition to Origen and his hermeneutic apologetics), demonstrate that biblical criticism is not simply a modern concern. Nonetheless, modernity gave impetus to such a degree of refinement in biblical criticism that the inspiration of the text—and consequently its authority as a moral support—has been widely doubted.

Writing in the twelfth century, Abraham Ibn Ezra questioned Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch based upon retrospective language that seemed well beyond the years of Moses’ lifetime. Additionally, Ezra was the first to assert plural authorship of Isaiah, citing, for example, that references to Cyrus (as Israel’s deliverer) could not have been penned by

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5 Ibid. 180.
6 Talmudist as cited by ibid. 180.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
the eighth century Isaiah.\textsuperscript{9} Despite his questioning of the text in these specific regards, he had great respect for it, considering it worthy of study. His precise understanding of the Hebrew language allowed him to offer clarifications where others had difficulty; this gave him such a high degree of credibility that he is perceived as having a vital relation between ancient and modern biblical scholarship.\textsuperscript{10}

Hobbes resumed the discussion in 1651 in the thirty-third chapter of his Leviathan,\textsuperscript{11} in which he questioned the authorship of Moses. He discussed a few specific cases which seem to cast doubt upon Moses’ authorship of the Torah. He cited Deuteronomy 34, which includes the account of Moses’ death (i.e. how he journeyed up a mountain to view the promised land which he was forbidden from entering due to a moment of rebellion, how he died, and how God dispensed with Moses’ body and it was never discovered). Hobbes asserted that Moses could not have written his own death and burial account. He cited Genesis 12:6 which uses the phrase “while the Canaanites were in the land.” During Moses’ lifetime, the Canaanites were not in the land, and it was not until the conquest of Joshua’s day that they began to be removed, thus Hobbes declared that Moses could not have written this passage. Furthermore, Numbers 21:14 references the Book of the Wars of the Lord, which Hobbes reckoned to be the writings of Moses, and thus Numbers was written after Moses’ lifetime. Hobbes did not intend to demolish the authority of the text; however, he indicated that all that Moses is said to have spoken that he did indeed say, thus the text is not dishonest, Moses just did not author all that tradition assigns to him.

While Hobbes’ motive was not to redefine God, Benedict Spinoza’s was. He emphasized the immanence of God, holding that God was monistic and impersonal, and that he was revealed in the laws of nature and was to be understood by reason. Spinoza’s critical method is apparent in his \textit{Tractatus Theologico Politicus} (1670), and is characterized by a threefold hermeneutic process, which assumed that scriptures should be studied in the same way as would nature: in light of reason. \textit{First}, he focused upon the linguistic analysis of the time of writing, which involved in-depth analysis of the Hebrew text and developments in the Hebrew language itself. \textit{Second}, he promoted topical and systematic organizations of the text under headers, so that as interlocutors interpret they have other similar and related passages available to them. \textit{Finally}, he concentrated intensely upon

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid. 181.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

the method of textual formation. The final process constituted his primary achievement in biblical criticism as he considered the author’s context, setting, motivation, limitation, education, and a multitude of other factors. Spinoza made textual formation a critical step in the process of ascertaining what the text meant.

As a result of his investigation, Spinoza rejected Mosaic authorship by taking into consideration what he considered retrospective passages and anachronism. He asserted that the Pentateuch, in addition to Joshua and Judges were the work of later redactors, including Ezra the scribe. Spinoza likewise considered Nehemiah to have been penned possibly in the second century BC, Proverbs to have been post-exilic, Chronicles to have been so unreliable as to be undeserving of being included in the canon, Jeremiah to have been the product of plural authorship, Job to have been initially a Gentile poem, and Daniel to have been inauthentic.12

Spinoza identified two kinds of scriptures: (1) prophetic theology, which was beyond reason and could be understood only from the Scriptures themselves; and (2) narrative, of which Spinoza was decidedly critical. He perceived the writers of narrative to have gravely mischaracterized God as essentially a secondary cause rather than the immediate efficient cause. Spinoza argued against the dualism of God and nature, suggesting there was no dichotomy and no distinction: God and nature are one. Therefore, Spinoza also argued there is no beginning or end, that is, no teleology (i.e. no purpose and no cause), and thus his biblical criticism led to (or was based upon) a significant redefinition of God. Taking into consideration Spinoza’s conclusions, Bratton credited him as having immeasurable impact upon the modern understanding of the Bible, particularly in his demonstrating “that the Bible is not one book but many, coming from different periods of history and exhibiting different degrees of inspiration.”13

Spinoza’s conclusion that the text is not univocal is of particular importance in the context of the present discussion, and if the argument is to be made for univocality and consequently for the authority of the text, then Spinoza’s criticisms cannot be ignored.

Richard Simon wrote his Histoire Critique de Vieux Testament from Paris in 1678, which he published as a more complete version seven years later. His Critique consisted of three books, the first was a biblical criticism, focusing upon Jewish historical methods and Mosaic authorship; the second was an account of the various Old Testament translations (he relied upon the Masoretic text and the Greek Septuagint, perceiving previous

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13 Ibid. 184.
Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts so obscure as to make sola Scriptura untenable); and, the third was an account of the major Old Testament commentators. Additionally, he completed three New Testament critiques, but for all his labor his primary unique achievement was in his theory that throughout Jewish history there was a tradition of historical recording and a continuous succession of annalists who fulfilled this task. Simon hypothesized that it was from this group that Moses and other biblical writers borrowed.14

Jean Astruc wrote his Conjectures sur la Genèse in 1753 to counter, in particular, Hobbes’ and Spinoza’s critiques of biblical reliability. Astruc used contemporary methods, including those of Eichhorn and Wilhelm de Wette (father of the historical critical school) in order to offer a biblical criticism of his own. He focused upon doublets (retellings of historical narratives) and the stylistic distinctions between passages that named God as YHWH and those that titled him Elohim, and concluded thusly that there were two authors of Genesis (one of whom was Moses).15 Astruc’s conclusions were formative for Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis which would be forthcoming over a hundred years later.

Julius Wellhausen proposed his documentary theory in his Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels. Based upon Astruc’s considerations of stylistic distinctions, Wellhausen’s hypothesis is regarded as the JEDP theory, an acronym for the distinctive writers that Wellhausen perceived to be involved in the initial transmission of the text. The J is for the Jahwist (JHVH the Latinized transliteration of YHWH), the E is for the Elohist, the D is for the Deuteronomist or the redactor (perhaps the one responsible for the many doublets), and P is for the priestly writer who penned Leviticus, etc. Wallis described Wellhausen’s critique as so influential that “Bible study everywhere took a new start.”16

Therefore, Hobbes’ critiques find their fulfillment in Wellhausen’s theory, and ultimately the prescriptive value of the text—based upon this theory—as anything more than a cultural and (somewhat) historical commentary can be legitimately questioned. While the approach answers one aspect of Locke’s notions,17 in so doing it ultimately undermines the

17 Either the text is completely and equally inspired or not. Wellhausen’s theory concludes it is not, and consequently takes the Bible’s ethical value for granted.
authority of the text. Moreover, biblical criticism advanced beyond Wellhausen. Against the background of World War I, Willis interpreted the role of biblical criticism in the context of social development. In particular, Wallis regarded the biblical text—despite the allegations asserted against it by the textual critics—as a fundamental component in the development of a new social consciousness which would set a precedence, via a democratic mindset (removing interpretive power from the autocracy and giving it to the people), for that war-torn generation to “move onward through the flames of war”\textsuperscript{18} into a brighter era. Wallis’ optimism bears with it an internal contradiction that is notable. He suggested that one does not need orthodoxy but “a conservatism that maintains all the religious values enshrined in the Scriptures,”\textsuperscript{19} yet the biblical criticism which he lauded creates a condition in which the boundaries between truth and falsity in a propositional sense are obfuscated at best.

W. R. Taylor diagnosed the problem, and attempted a remedy, and in so doing really only illustrated the problem. He suggested, “we should be ready to abandon the indefensible and to concentrate our attention on the essential qualities of the sacred oracles as time and research bring them into fuller relief.”\textsuperscript{20} Taylor’s assessment invites several questions. Which values should be maintained, and which discarded? Which are indefensible and which are essential? Without a propositional approach—such as that employed by James Nash—this is a question impossible to answer with any certainty. Taylor suggested that biblical criticism has resulted in the demise of “the belief in verbal inspiration, the inerrancy of the Bible in all its parts in science and history, and its infallibility in morals and religion,”\textsuperscript{21} and that better conceptions of God are now possible.

Taylor’s observation represents a supreme degree of inconsistency that requires a greater degree of faith to bear than is required for accepting the legitimacy of the text as a whole. He suggested that the Bible is not revelation but is simply the record of it.\textsuperscript{22} However, where does the revelation end and the record begin? Taylor argued that though old ideas of what constitutes suitable warrant for authority have ceased, what has emerged should instill confidence in the reader. “In short, we can say that recent research has brought into high relief (a) the Bible’s unique significance in the cultural process, (b) the qualitative superiority of the

\textsuperscript{18} Wallis, “The Paradox of Modern Biblical Criticism,” 49.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. 49.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. 230.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 231.
biblical literature comparatively, and (c) the Bible as a body of sincere and vital documents."\(^{23}\)

Though his three ideas are commonly held, the issue of whether the text is worthy of confidence remains disputed, perhaps in part due to a pervasive inattention to detail on the part of textual-authority-apologists as illustrated further by Taylor’s culminating exhortation: “we must be careful to show that the essential truths which we by our methods reach in the Scriptures can and must be made meaningful to our generation.”\(^{24}\)

Unfortunately for Taylor’s thesis, this generation—like any other—may have difficulty accepting essential truths from a source whose apparently non-essential ones are not truths whatsoever. It seems, then, only consistent (consistency being an important and deciding factor, in this author’s estimation) to either abandon ideas of revelation altogether, and consequently the optimism and even the supposedly better conceptions of God derived from the text if the text itself is devalued, and dismiss the values enshrined in the text as not being suitably warranted from the text, or alternately to consider the text in a *prima facie* manner—interpreting it in the most plain or natural sense—and in response, one may consider the value of the content based upon not only the individual parts but also upon the sum of those parts. Such a consideration is not foreign to those represented in the Bible, and seems to be the expected response the writers sought from their readers.\(^{25}\)

The truth that Moses wrote the first five books, for example, is the representation of the Bible itself and is attested to by earliest interpretive tradition. Joshua 8:31-32 distinguishes between the law of Moses (v. 32) and the book of the law of Moses (v. 31), as the law generally referenced the entire body of the covenantal stipulations, including all six hundred and thirteen commandments (*the mizvot*), and was usually represented by the first ten.\(^{26}\)

Forms of the phrase book of the law (בֵּית הָרֵעָה) are used some twenty-one times in the Hebrew Bible (Deut 28:58; 28:61; 29:20; 30:10; 31:24; 31:26; Josh 8:31; 8:34; 23:6; 24:26; 2 Kgs 14:6; 22:8; 22:11; 23:24; 2 Chron 17:9; 34:14, 15; Neh 8:1, 3, 18; 9:3), and notably the term does not appear until the concluding chapters of Moses’ final book. The

\(^{23}\) Ibid. 239-40.

\(^{24}\) Ibid. 240.

\(^{25}\) See Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena: Introductory Notes on Bible Study & Theological Method* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2007) 111-18, wherein it is argued that the hermeneutic utilized nearly exclusively by biblical characters was a plain or natural sense approach.

\(^{26}\) Probably, it was this shorter list that Joshua wrote on the stones in the events of Joshua 8.
term is later applied by Jesus (Mark 20:26) when He referenced events in Exodus as being contained in the book of Moses (τὰ βιβλία Μωϋσεος) and as “Scripture.” Jesus directly recognized Exodus (cf. Mark 7:10 and Exod 20:12; also Mark 12:26 and Exod 3:6), Leviticus (cf. Matt 8:4 and Lev 13:49; 14:2ff), Numbers (cf. John 3:14 and Numb 21:9) and Deuteronomy (cf. Matt 19:7-8 and Deut 24:1-4) to be Mosaic, and referenced Genesis as genuine and legitimately included in the Hebrew Bible.27

Not only did Jesus consider Genesis genuine, but He also considered it Mosaic. He referred to the Hebrew Bible as “the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44, NASB), a structural parallel to the Masoretic text of Torah (law), Nevi'im (prophets), and Ketuvim (writings, of which Psalms is the first book). Also, in Luke 11:49-51, Jesus detailed a chronology of martyred prophets from the foundation of the world to that point. He referenced Abel as the first and Zechariah as the last. Abel’s death occurs in Genesis (the first book of the Tanakh) and Zechariah’s in Chronicles (the final book of the Tanakh). It seems rather certain that Jesus understood the entire Hebrew Bible to be genuine, and the individual books it contained to be organized as one observes in the Masoretic text. He understood that the Law (or Book of the Law) of Moses—the Torah—was both genuine and Mosaic.

Nevertheless, what of Wellhausen’s refined multi-author theory? Emblematic of an influential tradition of biblical scholarship, Timothy Lin challenged the documentary hypothesis as fallacious and unworkable.28

27 Timothy Lin catalogued Jesus’ affirmations as follows: “He confirmed the genuineness of the first two chapters of Genesis by testifying to the creation of Adam and Eve as a historical fact, and not a myth or legend (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:5-9). When He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees, He mentioned ‘the blood of Abel’ as the beginning of the Jews’ guilt (Matt. 23:35). He confirmed that Noah’s flood was a historical destruction (Matt. 24:37-39) and the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah as God’s judgment (Matt. 11:23-24). He described Lot’s time in Sodom and the judgment of his wife as a historical warning regarding the last days (Luke 17:28-32). In His preaching and teaching, He often spoke of Abraham (John 8:37-40, 56-58) and repeatedly He testified of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Mark 12:26) and their lives before God (Matt. 8:11; 22:32). The above references indicate that Christ testified to the truthfulness of essentially the entire book of Genesis” (Timothy Lin, Genesis: A Biblical Theology, 4th ed. (Carmel, IN: Biblical Studies Ministries International, 2002) 29-30).

28 Lin’s critique is potent and worthy of consideration here: “This hypothesis is far from being workable. For instance, in certain J passages ‘Elohim,’ which is characteristic of E, is present (3:1, 3, 5; 4:25; 7:9, 16; 9:27; etc.), and in certain E and P passages ‘Yahweh,’ which is characteristic of J, is found (17:1; 22:11; etc.). In order to cover this embarrassing situation, the critics cut some
With detailed consideration of internal problems with the hypothesis, Lin argued that the analytic method the textual critics purport to use is not being consistently applied to these passages and that a consistent application of the method would not provide the basis for the multi-author conclusion. Gary Rendsburg critiqued the theory based upon the assertion that it fails to account for chiastic structure and other parallels found in the text, though Marc Brettler, who believes Rendsburg’s assertions fail to adequately resolve all the issues that the multi-authorship theory proposes, dismissed his argument. The worthy considerations by both writers are emblematic of the present debate regarding the conclusiveness of the multi-author theory, that is, the matter is unresolved with regard to identifying what is the genuine outcome of the critical method.

Benjamin Mazar understood Genesis to be “a monumental historiographic composition, the product of rich and variegated material collected, combined, arranged, and worked into one harmonious tract, with the purpose of portraying both the beginnings of mankind and the origins of Israel in the spirit of the monotheistic concept, and with a didactic aim.” Mazar, not unlike Umberto Cassuto, based his criticism of Mosaic authorship not upon literary form but upon a number of historical factors that he recognized as anachronisms in the text and which he believed indicated a much later date than the roughly 1400 BC/BCE date demanded.

verses and clauses out of their context and assigned them to another document. They cut 5:29 out of P and assigned it to J, because the divine name ‘Yahweh’ (which is translated ‘the LORD’) is present. Yet they left 4:25 in J although ‘Elohim’ is in this verse. They separated 7:16b that has ‘Yahweh’ from the midst of P and assigned it to J. However, they left 9:26 and 16:13 undivided in J, but both have ‘Yahweh’ and ‘Elohim.’ Genesis 21:1 is a dilemma to the critics because both clauses have ‘Yahweh.’ According to their theory of ‘doublets’ they should separate them. Yet according to their usage of divine names to designate different authors, they have to place the couplets together. To cut the knot they assigned 21:1a to J and 21:1b to P. How absurd! Genesis 21:33 was assigned to J, disregarding the presence of ‘Elohim’ in 33b. Genesis 22:11, 14 are both assigned to E, yet both have ‘Yahweh.’ Genesis 28:21 is assigned to E, yet ‘Yahweh’ is also found there. These examples are sufficient to show the fallacy of this hypothesis” (Genesis, 27-28).

in the text itself. His thesis is seemingly based in large part on a presupposition that there is no (divinely inspired) prophetic utterance (i.e. that the Hebrew prophets were not speaking on God’s behalf and that there is no legitimate divine revelation). Note the following phrases used by Mazar: “it is within reason” (used twice); “it is then in place to assume;” “[O]ne may, apparently, also count among these . . . ;” “it seems to me;” “in my view, it is much more within reason;” “[O]ne may find in the accounts. . . ;” and, “there is no need . . . to assign it a later date.” Conjecture seems to be a significant influence in his assertions.

He also suggested that the ethnographic similarities between Genesis 16 and Psalm 83 (the date of which he says is reasonably understood to be during the end of the period of the Judges) suggest a later date for Genesis. He noted that the characteristics of the Joseph account “are such as to make us think that the traditions and motifs joined together in this single tableau . . . were given their sophisticated novelistic literary form no earlier than the beginning of the Monarchy.” Perhaps most notably, though, he argued that the Genesis 49:10 blessing of Judah was not prophetic, but that it was a later developed apologetic for Judah’s right to rule (a right that is prominently featured and defended during the early monarchy period). While this is a significant instance of assumed anachronism (as there seems no other basis for it other than the non-prophetic presupposition), aside from these numerous defenses of Davidic kingship, Mazar cited several alleged anachronisms in Genesis. Notably, in context, most are related to Davidic right, and one might wonder if these would be anachronisms at all if Davidic right was indeed a result of prophetic utterance. Nonetheless, these would need to be addressed by any who would defend an early date consistent with Mosaic authorship, and Mazar suggested (without, in this context, any particular explanation

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32 Mazar wrote, “It is within reason that Genesis was given its original written form during the time when the Davidic empire was being established, and that the additions and supplements of later authors were only intended to help bridge the time gap for contemporary readers, and had no decisive effect on its contents of its overall character” (ibid).

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid. 75.
35 Ibid. 76.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid. 77.
38 Ibid. 78.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid. 79.
41 Ibid. 82-83.
of why) that those who have attempted to resolve these issues in light of various external sources (such as Akkadian sources, Mari documents, Nuzi tablets, and variously dated Egyptian sources) have “gone too far,” though he admitted that there is “certainly room for thought and reconsideration of the conflicting views as to the dating of the “patriarchal period” to the first, second, and third quarters of the second millennium B.C.”

To summarize, Mazar’s conclusions are not presented as necessary, though he did (of course) prefer them to the alternative. In any case, it is at least evident from Mazar’s writing that—as is the case with the JEPD hypothesis—the late-date theory is far from a certitude. Also, it would seem that the late-date theory and JEPD seem based upon the presupposition that divine revelation and prophetic utterance are not legitimate possibilities.

Paul Minear recognized challenges for biblical criticism with regard to presuppositions and first principles. Minear suggested, quoting Croce, that in this epoch the prevailing frame of reference, that is, “the heart and brain (of recent historiography) . . . is naturalism.” The pre-commitment to naturalism provides a set of guidelines that cannot be easily discarded. In particular, Minear suggested that biblical historians (few of whom are “avowed naturalists”) utilize a method that is developed from, and, at least, implies naturalism. What result then is to be expected from a naturalistically based method? Certainly the tension between an assumed metaphysic and a method that negates the metaphysic is not conducive to a

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42 Ibid. 76.
43 Ibid.
44 Paul S. Minear observed, “The reflective historian must consciously orient his technical research with an articulate ‘frame of reference,’ a view of history which determines his presuppositions, defines his method and circumscribes his conclusions. Such orientation is particularly important in an epoch when perspectives of thought shift so rapidly. Each successive change in world-view stimulates new conceptions of history, raises new questions for the historian to answer, and provokes new assaults upon prevailing methodology” (“How Objective Is Biblical Criticism,” Journal of Bible and Religion 9 [November 1941]: 217).
46 Minear suggested, “The historian’s function is to establish generalizations applicable at all times and places. The test of his conclusions is their predictive accuracy. Novelty, particularity, becomes a scandal. Confronted by the unique, the historian can only stutter, ‘It can’t be!’ Thus the history that is dictated by a naturalistic world-view ends by negating itself.” (Ibid).
47 Ibid. 219.
high degree of consistency in the end. Nevertheless, it is this tension that Locke (for example) acknowledged as present in the discussion.

Considering, for example, the Deuteronomy 34 account of Moses’ death, one may note that Hobbes perceived this to be evidence against Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch as a unit, yet there are two possibilities worthy of consideration and which may present a resolution to the issue. First, if this was indeed revelation, rather than the mere product of human invention, then theoretically God could have informed Moses of what would occur. Predictive prophecy (if such a possibility is allowed) accounts for nearly a third of the Hebrew Bible (if a plain or natural sense hermeneutic is consistently applied). To dismiss casually the possibility of divine revelation seems more based upon naturalistic presuppositions and an intention to de-mythologize the Bible than in unbiased textual criticism. Second, nonetheless, it is not a necessity for genuineness that Moses wrote his own obituary. There might have been a separate writer (perhaps Joshua) who wrote the Deuteronomy epilogue, and this would not negate Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch as a unit, much in the same manner that Jesus’ reference to the Ketuvim (the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible) as “the Psalms” did not imply that the book of Psalms was the only component of the Ketuvim, and in the same manner that one may refer to the Epistle to the Romans as Pauline, though it claims, in fact, to have been penned by Tertius (as Paul’s emanuensis) (Rom 16:22). The internal evidence of the Hebrew (OT) and Greek (NT) texts considered collectively leaves no doubt that if the texts are themselves genuine, they argue for genuineness and Mosaic authorship of Genesis. The early external evidence likewise introduces no doubt.

The second-century BC pseudepigraphical Book of Jubilees presents a creation account similar (though not identical) to that of Genesis, but unlike Genesis, Jubilees contains a preface affirming the authorship of the creation story.48 The Jubilees account not only asserts Mosaic authorship, but also narrates how he came to write the creation account. In similar fashion, Philo of Alexandria, a notable first-century AD Jewish philosopher, understood Genesis to be of Mosaic origin, extolling, for example, the philosophic prowess Moses demonstrated in beginning his

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48 Jubilees 2:1 reads as follows: “And the angel of the presence spake to Moses according to the word of the Lord, saying: ‘Write all the words of the creation, how in six days the Lord God finished all His works and all that He created, and rested on the Sabbath day and hallowed it for all ages, and appointed it as a sign for all His works’” (R. H. Charles, “A New Translation of the Book of Jubilees. Part I,” The Jewish Quarterly Review 6 (October 1893): 187).
laws with a creation account. To understand that Philo recognized Mosaic authorship is important not just as a consequence of his philosophical assessment of Moses’ motivations, but also because Philo was a pioneer of biblical criticism. He was an important developer of the allegorical hermeneutic, which he utilized frequently in order to resolve aspects of the text that he perceived to be inconsistent with the Hellenistic philosophy of his time. Philo, it would seem, did not consider Mosaic authorship to be troublesome whatsoever. On the contrary, he considered it to be an important fact, and one that connected cosmology with ethical theory.

Though his objectivity as a historian has been questioned, Josephus nonetheless offers an important first-century AD Jewish perspective on many aspects of Israel’s history. He discussed (similarly to Philo) Moses’ unique approach to legislation, recognizing the acumen with which Moses directed minds to God before directing attention to laws. He also spoke of the creation account as being entirely Mosaic. In

49 Philo commented: “But Moses . . . made the beginning of his laws entirely beautiful, and in all respects admirable, neither at once declaring what ought to be done or the contrary, nor (since it was necessary to mould beforehand the dispositions of those who were to use his laws) inventing fables himself or adopting those which had been invented by others. And his exordium, as I have already said, is most admirable; embracing the creation of the world, under the idea that the law corresponds to the world and the world to the law, and that a man who is obedient to the law, being, by so doing, a citizen of the world, arranges his actions with reference to the intention of nature, in harmony with which the whole universal world is regulated. . . . Since, then, this world is visible and the object of our external senses, it follows of necessity that it must have been created; on which account it was not without a wise purpose that he recorded its creation, giving a very venerable account of God. . . . And he says that the world was made in six days. . . .” (Philo, “On the Creation,” in The Works of Philo, ed. C. D. Yonge [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993] 3).


51 Josephus wrote, “Now when Moses was desirous to teach this lesson to his countrymen, he did not begin the establishment of his laws after the same manner that other legislators did; I mean, upon contracts and other rites between one man and another, but by raising their minds upwards to regard God, and his creation of the world; and by persuading them, that we men are the most excellent of the creatures of God upon the earth” (Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, in The Works of Josephus, trans. William Whiston [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987] “Preface,” 21).

52 Josephus commented briefly, “I shall now betake myself to the history before me, after I have first mentioned what Moses says of the creation of the
summarizing verse-by-verse the Genesis 1 creation account, Josephus asserted Mosaic authorship no less than four times ("Moses said," 1.1.29; "Moses says," 1.1.33; "Moses ... begins to talk philosophically," 1.1.34; and, "Moses says further," 1.1.37).  
Josephus, Philo, and the Book of Jubilees represent early external evidence complementing the biblical assertions of Mosaic authorship of Genesis, and they are not inconsistent with more recent views. Moses Maimonides (twelfth century), for example, was unapologetic about Mosaic authorship. He included, as one of his Thirteen Principles, the following: "I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that we have now is that which was given to Moses."  
One mainstream contemporary Jewish encyclopedia argues in favor of singular authorship and challenges certain premises of the documentary hypothesis, including alleged anachronisms, historiographic principles, and doublets. Furthermore, the encyclopedia directly counters textual criticism on seven points: (1) there is no external proof of compilation; (2) interpretations of so-called internal evidence to that end is "unstable and deceptive;" (3) the process leading to the compilation conclusion is complex beyond consistency; (4) even if alleged contradictions and repetitions existed, they would not prove plural authorship, just as this process applied to other single author works would be met with equal failure; (5) the theory is unnecessary and based on multiple misunderstandings of ideas, tendencies, and themes; (6) arguments based on variations of language are circular; and, (7) exegetical mishandling is necessary for the compilation understanding.  
Though the internal and external evidence presented here may not satisfy some readers of the certainty of Mosaic authorship, perhaps there has been shown enough evidence to warrant reasonable consideration of the mere possibility that Genesis is genuinely Mosaic. If the reader is willing to grant this much, then the possibility that the text provides some

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55 "Anachronisms such as various critics allege in Genesis do not in reality exist; and their assumption is based on a misunderstanding of the historiographic principles of the book. ... Nor are there any repetitions or unnecessary doublets" (Benno Jacob and Emil Hirsch, "Genesis, The Book of" [article online] *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1912, accessed 30 January 2010) available from http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6580-genesis-the-book-of).  
56 Ibid.
binding ethical foundation remains. If not, then the discussion needs progress no further, as the Bible would offer nothing of any real ethical value beyond what one might expect from a fable or a legend. As Isaac Abravanel argued, if the biblical text (and the Torah in particular) is presumed to be authoritative, then it must be believed in its entirety and not doubted.57

To assert that the Genesis account is not genuine requires that one dismiss its ethical contribution as authoritative. Therefore, if one would discuss the book as potentially authoritative, one must consider it as, at least, potentially genuine, and if one cannot assent to this potentiality (at least), one may rely upon Callicott’s warning not to miss the point that many Jews and Christians consult the biblical text for ethical guidance.58 One will find, then, that the text is either ethically authoritative, or, at least, a significant number of people perceive that it is—whether with proper warrant or not—and those people will seek to follow the meaningful advice found within its pages. As Henry Morris reminded his readers, Genesis is the foundation of all the biblical books, and is thus the most critical portion of the book “that has exerted the greatest influence on history of any book every produced.”59

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57 Abravanel suggested, “it is not proper to postulate principles for the divine Torah, nor foundations in the matter of beliefs, for we are obligated to believe everything that is written in the Torah. We are not permitted to doubt even the smallest thing in it. . . .” (Isaac Abravanel, Principles of Faith, Rosh Amanah, trans. Menachem Kellner [Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000]195).

58 J. Baird Callicott reminded his readers: “Contemporary Jews and Christians, searching for meaningful advice about how to live in the world in which today they find themselves, will consult the Bible and will inevitably ponder what they read (in translation) in light of their contemporary concerns, their personal experience, and their own locale” (“Genesis Revisited: Murian Musings on the Lynn White, Jr. Debate,” Environmental History Review 14 [Spring-Summer 1990]: 85).

A REEXAMINATION OF PHARAOH’S HARD HEART
WITH REGARD TO EGYPTIAN RELIGION

Jerry M. Hullinger

When one reads the phrase “the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart,” historic images arise regarding the debates between Augustine/Pelagius, Calvin/Arminius, Luther/Erasmus in addition to current day discussions regarding the tension of God’s sovereignty and man’s free will. While this is an important issue,¹ it is the modest suggestion of this article that this theological controversy, while having merit in the arena of theology, has actually obscured the real significance of the hardening motif in the Exodus narrative. It is the purpose of this study to examine Pharaoh’s hard heart from a religious rather than a theological perspective in an attempt to discover what this would have meant in the 15th century BC Egyptian setting.²

¹ One is reminded of the frustration expressed by Luther with regard to Erasmus’ seeming failure to grasp the importance of the issue when he wrote that it is not irreligious, idle, or superfluous for a Christian to know whether or not his will has anything to do in matters pertaining to salvation (Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, trans. Henry Cole [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983] 30). For a helpful discussion of hardening in the Old Testament from a theological and textual perspective, see Robert B. Chisholm Jr., “Divine Hardening in the Old Testament,” Bibliotheca Sacra 153 (October—December 1996): 410-34; and, John Piper, The Justification of God (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

² It is affirmed that the Exodus Pharaoh was Amenhotep II. For support of this date see: Gleason Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 231; John Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 34-39; Joseph Free, Archaeology and Bible History (Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, 1986) 90, 98-99; Eugene Merrill, Kingdom of Priests (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 63; and, William Shea, “Amenhotep II as Pharaoh of the Exodus,” Bible and Spade 16 (Spring 2003): 41-51. Therefore, the time of the Exodus would have occurred during the New Kingdom period of the 18th and 19th dynasties during which time Egypt probably enjoyed its most influential role (Leon Wood, A Survey of Israel’s History [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970] 110-12; and, Clyde T. Francisco, “The Exodus in Its Historical Setting,” Southwestern Journal of Theology 20 [Fall 1977]: 10-11). For an overview of the divisions of Egyptian history, see William Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940) 113-18; and, George Steindorff and
THE GENERAL RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND
OF THE PLAGUE\textsuperscript{3} NARRATIVE

Basic Egyptian Religion\textsuperscript{4}

The Importance of Religion

If one is to understand ancient Egypt, one must understand ancient Egyptian religion. Never has there been a civilization which revolved more around its religious ideas than did Egypt. Montet stated well that “the Egyptians were the most scrupulously religious of mankind. They regarded the gods as the owners of the entire universe and the fount of all prosperity, aware of all human desires and capable at any moment of taking a hand in mortal affairs.”\textsuperscript{5}


\textsuperscript{3} It should be stated at the outset that this study will regard the plagues to have been a direct and miraculous intervention by the hand of God. Such a statement must be mentioned because many give a naturalistic explanation of them (Ian Wilson, \textit{Exodus: The True Story Behind the Biblical Account} [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985] 115-27; Pierre Montet, \textit{Egypt and the Bible} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 94-100; Greta Hort, “The Plagues of Egypt,” \textit{Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft} 69 [1957]: 84-103; Joel Block, “The Ten Plagues of Egypt,” \textit{Religious Education} 71 [1976]: 519-26; and, K. A. Kitchen, \textit{Ancient Orient and Old Testament} [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1966] 157-58. Compare the fine words of Durham: “The effect of Yahweh’s blow is that the Nile turns into blood not into muddy or algae-laden and thus red-looking water the ‘naturalistic’ commentators never tire of suggesting. We simply must never lose sight of the fact that the mighty-act narratives are theological accounts, not phenomenological reports. Yahweh struck the Nile, and instantaneously, before the eyes of Pharaoh and his court, it changed into blood. Whatever the difficulties such an assertion may pose for the readers of another age, they must not be allowed to diffuse or even to alter what the text actually says, for that inevitably either obscures or removes entirely the real point of the narrative in the first place” (John Durham, \textit{Exodus} [Waco: Word, 1987] 97).


The Complexity of Religion

Given the fact that religion so permeated every area of the culture, there is a degree of frustration in attempting to find some cohesion in the system. Therefore, it is important to realize at the outset that this religion is a complex and seemingly contradictory collection of a multitude of gods and goddesses. The complexity is further compounded by the facts that these gods and goddesses were represented in many forms, as well as being responsible for many, often overlapping, areas of responsibility. DeVries noted, “the religion of ancient Egypt is a vast labyrinthine subject. Much of the religious literature appears as a hodgepodge of heterogeneous conflicting statements. In general, the religion may be described as a complex polytheism.”6 In a similar manner, Cerny observed:

> It is impossible to sketch a picture of a belief which is uniform and logical in all its details, and valid for the whole of Egypt, for such a uniform belief never existed. The Egyptian religion is not the creation of a single thinker, but an outcome of local political and cultural divergences and there was never a strong enough force in Egypt to eliminate all local beliefs or to unite them in a general theological system.7

As intimated by Cerny, part of the reason for the complexity of the system was the fact that as people emigrated from one city to another, they brought their local gods with them and erected new shrines for their worship. Oftentimes, the god of a particular locale gained a reputation for some special power due to a supposed miraculous cure or intervention.8

The Gods of the Religion

It appears that the great national deities were thought to be of the highest rank. These were cosmic gods who presided over the forces of nature such

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8 Steindorff and Seele, When Egypt Ruled the East, 134; Charles F. Pfeiffer, Egypt and the Exodus (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964) 21.
as the sun, moon, sky, air, and water. Following these national gods were the many local gods which each particular community venerated. Though lower in rank, these local gods were believed to influence everyday personal life more than did the national deities. Besides national and local gods, the people believed in yet others. Pfeiffer remarked:

In addition to the numerous city gods, an ancient Egyptian was concerned with a multitude of lesser gods, demons and spirits who might either help or injure man. There were gods who assisted women in childbirth, gods of the household, and the gods of harvest. In times of illness, spirits provided healing, and others were particularly active in time of war.

As if this were not enough, any object which assisted the average man in his daily needs might become his god.

THE CONTEST BETWEEN THE GODS AND GOD

The stage for the confrontation between God and the pantheon of Egypt was set when Pharaoh asked Moses: “Who is the Lord that I should obey

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12 For three examples of daily life in which a person is helped by a “god” where a memorial is erected on its behalf, see J. B. Bury, S. A. Cook, and F. E. Adcock, eds., *Cambridge Ancient History*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1928) 2:159. It is also significant that throughout the maze of these gods, four major themes emerged in which the people saw the divine at work. The themes were creation, fertility, resurrection, and kingship. Importantly, all of these were challenged by Yahweh in the plagues (Gary Smith, “The Concept of God/The Gods as King in the Ancient Near East and the Bible,” *Trinity Journal* 3 [Spring 1982]: 29). One of the interesting features regarding Egyptian art was the manner in which these gods were depicted in drawings and statues. Thomas explained, “gods might be depicted in theriomorphic or animal form, in anthropomorphic or human form, or in a therianthropic or hybrid form with human body and animal head. The early animal links were therefore retained either in the god’s shape, in the attributes assigned to him, or in his association with certain animals deemed to be sacred to him” (Thomas, *Egyptian Gods and Myths*, 11). See also, H. M. Tirard, *The Book of the Dead* (London: S. P. C. K., 1910) 108.
his voice to let Israel go” (Exod 5:2)? To the powerful Pharaoh, the God of Israel was simply one god among many gods, and certainly if He did exist, the God of Israel was inferior to the gods of Egypt. Wood noted the significance of this question.

This question is understandable in terms of standards of deity evaluation accepted in that day. Since Yahweh’s people had no land of their own, no army, and no independent status, Pharaoh thought that Egypt’s gods were much greater. But God would not let this thinking stand. . . . People believed that the domain of the gods of a country extended as far as the borders of that country, and measured their strength by the size of it, the victories of its armies, and the degree of prosperity.13

The confrontation motif becomes one of the major themes in the plague narrative. For example, Kyle wrote, “this discrediting of the gods of Egypt is marked at every step of the progress of the plagues.”14 Hyatt remarked, “the story of the plagues is the account of a confrontation between Yahweh . . . and the gods of Egypt.”15 Furthermore, Francisco observed, “the contest between Moses and Pharaoh was primarily a conflict between Yahweh and the gods of Egypt, between the Hebrew faith and the Egyptian religion.”16 The conflict is evident by the repeated emphasis of Yahweh on His divine name (Exod 4:5; 6:2, 3, 7; 7:16); it is also seen by the repetition of the phrase “The Egyptians shall know17 that I am the Lord” (Exod 7:5; 8:10, 19;

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13 Wood, Survey of Israel’s History, 127, note 67; and, Pfeiffer, Egypt and the Exodus, 46. See also John Sailhammer, The Pentateuch as Narrative (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 249, though he questioned whether or not the Egyptian concept of ma’at (the well-balanced system of the universe which was maintained by the pharaoh) is in view (252-53).


17 When God said the Egyptians would “know” that He is the Lord, this did not merely mean they would know about Him, for this could simply put Him as one god among many. Rather, as Brueggemann observed, the idea of the term “know” is that they would recognize or answer to Him (Walter Brueggemann, “Pharaoh as Vassal: A Study of a Political Metaphor,” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 57 [January 1995]: 35-37).
9:14, 16, 29). Furthermore, in the song of the redeemed after the crossing of the Red Sea, the people declared “who is like unto thee, O Lord among the gods” (Exod 15:11)? Finally, Jethro spoke to Moses about the deliverance from the Egyptians and confessed, “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods (Exod 18:11). The confrontation also served as a reminder to Israel of the greatness of their God. As a consequence of this, they were to keep the Passover as a memorial of their deliverance and victory wrought by Yahweh (Exod 12:14). Though lengthy, Jamieson’s words described this conflict well.

They [the plagues] must have produced a profound sensation amongst intelligent and reflecting observers, who could not fail to see the God of the Hebrews asserting his supremacy. . . . It was against this monstrous system of idolatry, the source or the type of all heathen worship in succeeding ages, that the momentous contest in Egypt was waged. . . . It is in this way, as demonstrating the utter helplessness and insignificance of the gods, that the true character and design of those plagues are to be seen. These miracles . . . formed a grand religious triumph where the majesty of God was vindicated in the presence of a people foremost in the rank of civilization.

The purpose of this section has been to give a very general description of Egyptian religion, which will help in making better sense of the specifics given in the next section.

18 Durham suggested that the number of the plagues was for this very purpose. He wrote that Pharaoh was prevented from believing so that Israel could come to a full belief. “The mighty-act accounts are written from faith to faith. They were compiled that the generations of Israel to come might know that Yahweh is, and so know also the redemption of exodus, whatever their bondage” (John Durham, Exodus, 99-100).

19 Robert Jamieson, A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 1:308-313. Consequently, it is easy to understand why no Egyptian records mention these plagues. Aling explained, “the peoples of the ancient Near East kept historical records to impress their gods and also potential enemies, and therefore, rarely, if ever, mentioned defeats or catastrophes. Records of disasters would not enhance the reputation of the Egyptians in the eyes of their gods, nor make their enemies more afraid of their military might” (Charles Aling, Egypt and Bible History: From Earliest Times to 1000 B.C. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981] 103). Bright also commented: “That Egyptian records do not mention it is not surprising. Not only were Pharaohs unaccustomed to celebrate reverses, but an affair involving only a party of runaway slaves would have been altogether of minor significance” (John Bright, A History of Israel [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959] 112).
THE SPECIFIC RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE PLAGUE NARRATIVE

The purpose of the following discussion is to provide some specific background information with regard to ancient Egyptian religion which will further illuminate the significance of Pharaoh’s hard heart.

The Divinity of the Pharaoh

One of the recurring incidents in the plague narrative is the appearances of Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh (believed to be Amenhotep II)\(^{20}\) and the exchange among them. It would be distressing enough to stand before the monarch of the greatest empire on earth with an unpopular request. Add to this the fact, however, that he was not considered to be only a man, or even a mere representative of the gods, but himself divine. It is no wonder that Moses devised several excuses to avoid this confrontation. The Pharaoh was believed to be the incarnation and patron of the falcon-god Horus, and therefore a god in his own right.\(^{21}\) In addition, he was also considered to be the physical son of the sun-god Re.\(^{22}\)

The Pharaoh’s alleged diety is further illustrated by a recorded prayer to Re of Rameses III (second king of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) Dynasty) in which he prayed “I am your son, whom your two arms brought forth. You have set me up as sovereign over every land. For me you have made perfection on earth. I perform your duty in peace.”\(^{23}\) An Egyptian poem further confirms the divine attributes of the Pharaoh.

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\(^{20}\) Finegan observed that even in his youth, Amenhotep II distinguished himself by his strength and valor. He was unsurpassed in rowing, archery, and horsemanship. Furthermore, “when the great warrior’s mummy was found in 1898 in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes, his famous bow, which he boasted no other man could draw, was still beside him. It bore the inscription ‘smiter of the cavedwellers, overthrower of Kush, hacking up their cities—the Great Wall of Egypt, Protector of his soldiers” (Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959] 102-03; for further exploits of Amenhotep II, see Steindorff and Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, 60ff.).


He is Perception which is in (men’s) hearts,
   And his eyes search out everybody.
He is Re, by whose beams one sees,
   He is one who illumines the Two Lands more than
   the sun disc.
He is one who makes the land greener than (does)
   a high Nile,
   for he has filled the Two Lands with strength and
   life.24

As a god, the Pharaoh was able to communicate with all of the gods. Consequently, he became the high priest of every cult, and was the sole officiant in the temple rituals unless delegated to other priests. He was therefore the link between the world and the gods and goddesses.25 Not only did the Pharaoh have these religious duties, he also had social and political duties because of his position. Smith explained, “since the Pharaoh was divine, kingship in Egypt remained a channel through which the powers of nature flowed into the body politic to bring human endeavor to fruition. Thus the maintenance of nature and civilization were dependent on the king.”26 The “divinity of the Pharaoh” can also be explained by the Egyptian belief in world order. They believed that Ma.a.t represented world order and was established in primeval time; it was thought that this order would prevail regardless of adverse circumstances since it was primarily actualized by Pharaoh who was divinely qualified. Bleeker noted the significance of this responsibility.

Though several pharaohs undoubtedly were guilty of abuse of power . . . they were all conscious of the heavy responsibility which they had to bear. For it was their obligation to establish Ma.a.t in their kingdom by a good and wise government . . . . For that reason the pharaoh also acted as high priest. Being a son of a god he could mediate between heaven and earth.27

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The Hard Heart of Pharaoh

One of the best known motifs of the whole exodus account is the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. The concept is normally discussed from a theological perspective dealing with divine sovereignty and human responsibility which seeks to answer the question: who initiated the hardening process? The aspect of hardening is not germane to this study, however, there is a possible cultic belief that forms this idea.

The Myth of Osiris

It was believed that Osiris, a good king, was killed by his wicked brother Seth who dismembered his body and scattered the parts over the earth. The sister and wife of Osiris (Isis) found his remains and erected a monument over each part. When their son Horus grew to maturity, he avenged the death of his father by winning a victory over Seth. Magically, he was able to bring Osiris back to life. Osiris became (among other things) the judge and ruler of the underworld. The Egyptian found solace in this myth for it gave the account of one who had attained life after death. Therefore, they too had the hope of immortality, for Osiris could give eternal life to others because he had been made incorruptible and immortal.

The Hall of Judgment

From this general myth of Osiris, there developed a rather sophisticated belief in the judgment of the dead; it was held that the deceased would

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28 Robert Chisholm Jr. is correct that the Piel stem is used in this instance with a factitive nuance with the idea of “to make rigid, unyielding, resolute, stubborn” (“Divine Hardening in the Old Testament,” 415); this sense will be seen to correspond nicely with the religious background of this concept.


30 Francisco, “The Exodus in Its Historical Setting,” 15; E. A. Budge, The God’s of the Egyptians: or Studies in Egyptian Mythology (New York: Dover Publications, 1969) 141; and, Yves Camberfort, “Le Scarabee dans l’Egypte Ancienne,” Revue de l’Histoire des Religions 204 (Année 1987): 3-46. Before one scoffs at this logic, it is interesting to remember that the Christian religion bases its hope on One because He conquered death. The only difference, of course, is that in the one case this really occurred, however the logic is the same.
enter a great hall of judgment or righteousness. In a sort of balcony in this hall were seated forty-two assessor gods. The deceased turned to these gods and repeated the "Negative Confession." The Negative Confession was a list of various crimes and shortcomings which the deceased denied having committed during his earthly life. The person would repeat some of the following:

I have not blasphemed a god.
I have not made anyone sick.
I have not made anyone weep.
I have not killed.
I have not defiled myself.
I have neither increased or diminished the grain-measure.
I have not seen evil.
I have not defamed a slave to his superior.
I have not committed evil against men.
I have not committed sin in the place of truth.
I put no check on the water in its flow.

31 For a description of this whole ritual of judgment, see Budge, The Gods of the Egyptians: or Studies in Egyptian Mythology, 142-144; Thomas, Egyptian Gods and Myths, 51; Alexandre Moret, In the Time of the Pharaohs (London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1911) 236-37; and, Montet, Eternal Egypt, 303.

32 The Negative Confession was part of chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead (Thomas, Egyptian Gods and Myths, 51). The Coffin Texts, The Book of the Dead, and The Book of Gates, in addition to the whole funerary literature of Egypt is literature regarding the Egyptians’ fear of death, particularly imagined judgment in the afterlife (Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion, 117). Moret observed that the purpose of the Book of the Dead “is to give the key to the essential problems, concerning gods and men, and to meet the wishes of the devout souls who hunger for religious belief, are curious about their origin, and full of anxiety concerning their own destiny” (Moret, In the Time of the Pharaohs, 239). It is no wonder, then, as Moret continued: “the mummmification of innumerable corpses and the countless papyrus scrolls, called The Book of the Dead laid near them for their protection in every Egyptian necropolis. . . . There was therefore, slipped into the collection of the necessary texts. . . . This Book of the Dead is found by the thousands deposited near the mummies” (ibid. 218-19, 221). Moret’s observations are in keeping with the fact that the tombs were filled with objects which would supposedly aid the dead in their trek through the afterlife (cf. Pfeiffer, Egypt and the Exodus, 28). Besides food and drink, furniture and other necessities of life, Wood noted that in early days even servants were slain and placed beside their master’s bodies (Wood, Survey of Israel’s History, 113).
The confession ended by the deceased repeating, “I am pure!” four times.\textsuperscript{33} Also in the Hall of Judgment was a pair of scales similar to that with which the Egyptian was acquainted in daily life. In one pan of the scales the person’s heart was placed since it was thought to represent the thoughts, actions, and conscience of the person.\textsuperscript{34} In the other pan was placed a feather which represented truth and justice. If the heart was heavy with sin, the scales were tipped and the person was condemned. However, if the heart maintained an equilibrium with the feather, the person was passed into eternal life. Thoth, the scribe of the gods, stood by the scale to record the results.\textsuperscript{35} On the standard balance of the scales sat a dog-headed ape, who was the companion of Thoth. The jackal-headed god Anubis examined the pointer to make certain that the beam was exactly balanced. Also by the scales was the half crocodile, half hippopotamus Amait who would turn its jaws toward Osiris and ask permission to devour the newcomer.\textsuperscript{36} After the weighing of the heart, Anubis would relay the result to Thoth who would record the results and declare to Osiris: “The deceased has been weighed in the balance; there is no wrong in him; his heart is in accordance with truth, the balance is exact; there is no doubt; all his members are perfect.”\textsuperscript{37} The deceased would then be granted eternal life by Osiris.

\textbf{The Hardening of the Heart}

As a thinking Egyptian reflected on his eventual appearance in this great hall before the gods and a ravenous monster with jaws agape, there was

\textsuperscript{33} Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 34.

\textsuperscript{34} Budge, The God of the Egyptians, 142. E. A. Budge commented further, “the heart was not only the seat of the power of life, but also the source of both good and evil thoughts; and it sometimes typified the conscience. It was guarded after death with special care, and was mumified separately” (\textit{Egyptian Magic} [New York: University Books, n.d.] 29).

\textsuperscript{35} Veronica Ions, \textit{Egyptian Mythology} (Middlesex: The Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1968) 86. Considered as the scribe of the gods, Thoth was also credited with having written with his own hand all of the wisdom of the world into forty-two volumes (Margaret Murray, \textit{The Splendor that was Egypt} [New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963] 161).


\textsuperscript{37} Moret, \textit{In the Time of the Pharaohs}, 236-37.
one thing which terrified him. In spite of his recitation of the Negative Confession, he knew perfectly well that his confession was not completely true, for no one had perfectly abided by all of the statements. The comparison would be like someone confessing to God that he had not violated the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. Accordingly, there was a fear that in spite of the Confession, the heart would belie its owner and be heavy in the scales leading to his condemnation. As Moret asserted: “the most implacable accuser of man is the heart whose assertions cannot be contested, he himself, his own heart, which is fully aware that often he violated the moral law that he knew perfectly.”

In order to avert this danger, a magic ritual was devised that would give the deceased protection in the world to come by overcoming the forty-two gods and the reading of the scales. During the procedure of mumification, the heart was removed from the body and replaced with a scarab amulet. An incantation was pronounced or even inscribed on the amulet transferring magical powers to it. The process was described by Budge: “The words of it were recited over a hard, green stone scarab, which shall be laid in the breast of the deceased where the heart ordinarily would be. In the description of the amulets which the Egyptians used, both the substance of the amulet and the words which were inscribed upon it possessed magical powers.” Cerny offered the following explanation.

Chapter 30 of the Book of the Dead is another instance of getting around the ethical requirements of sinlessness in the judgment of the

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38 Ibid. 256.
40 The scarab was a beetle which was associated with the life of the sun-god Re. The association had an interesting biological origin: “Ancient Egyptians had observed that the scarab beetle laid its egg in dung and then pushed it around on the ground until it became a ball. The Egyptians imagined that the ball symbolized the sun because it was round, gave off heat, and was their source of life” (Robert Armour, *Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1987) 26).
41 An amulet was something carried or worn. The name was broadly applied to any kind of ornament or jewelry to which supernatural powers were attributed (Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, 25).
dead by a magical incantation; this chapter is addressed to the heart, which the Egyptian held to be the most important factor whose favour had to be sought. This he did with the following words: “O my heart of my mother, O my heart of my mother! O my breast of my forms, O my breast of my forms! Stand not forth against me as witness, combat me not in the assembly (of judges), be not hostile to me before the Keeper of the Balance.” This spell is found carved on the flat bases of large stone amulets the upper part of which is cut in the form of a scarab. . . . It served as a substitute for the heart of the dead and was, therefore, placed on the chest of the mummy on top of its wrappings.

Consequently, this affirmation was regarded as a magic spell which was sufficient to prevent the heart from betraying the soul and thereby deceiving the divine judges.\textsuperscript{43} Since it would be natural for the heart to confess to sin and thus become “heavy” and tip the scales, this scarab magically suppressed this tendency of the heart. The suppression of the heart came to be known as a “hardening of the heart.”\textsuperscript{45} Hermann stated this belief well.

The discrepancy between the insisted incalculateness and the reality is especially expressed with the presence of the two hearts, in which the stone heart is expressly admonished to suppress the natural movements of the fleshly heart in order to receive an acquittal and to stand justified in the judgment. As such, the artificially induced hardness of the heart has to go against the truth in order to verify the harmony. . . . It was the task of the stone heart to help the unruly

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\footnote{Cerny, Ancient Egyptian Religion, 90-91; see also, Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion, 118. Tirard further commented that this chapter of the Book of the Dead was the “most important of this series. . . . If he repeats these words aright the heart will listen to his prayer, and will be found to balance exactly with truth, to weigh neither too heavy or too light” (The Book of the Dead, 71-72, 128).}
\footnote{Ions, Egyptian Mythology, 135-36.}
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corporeal heart so that, in strength and hardness . . . it will be able to
face the moral demands of the beyond.\textsuperscript{46}

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS HARDENING
AND THE PLAGUE NARRATIVE

It was previously stated that the text of Exodus confirms that the purpose of the plagues was to demonstrate to Egypt and Israel that Yahweh was the only true God. The means which God chose to do this was through a mockery of the whole Egyptian religious system. It has become common knowledge that each plague was an attack against specific Egyptian deities, but what is often missed is that in doing this, God took something that was good to the Egyptians and turned it into something bad. A few examples will suffice beginning with the Nile River. The Nile was the “heartbeat” of Egypt,\textsuperscript{47} and therefore was deified, and became one of the earliest and greatest gods which was even reflected in Egyptian hymnology.\textsuperscript{48} When Pharaoh went to the water,\textsuperscript{49} it was turned to blood which resulted in the


\textsuperscript{48} Kyle, “Plagues, of Egypt,” 4:2404; see also, Tirard, The Book of the Dead, 140; Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 372-73 (for the hymn), and Cerny importantly noted that the Nile also had an association with Osiris. One myth communicated that when his body was scattered, all the pieces landed in the Nile. Another suggested that he was drowned in the Nile. Whichever was most widely affirmed, there was still an association (Cerny, Ancient Egyptian Religion, 36). To substantiate this association, the Egyptians viewed the Nile as his bloodstream (Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt, 102). The god who was most associated with the Nile was Hapi (Budge, The Gods of the Egyptians, 44).

\textsuperscript{49} The action was probably on the occasion of a religious ceremony over which he presided, quite possibly occurring on the commencement of the annual rise of the river called the “Red Nile in June” when certain rites were performed to the river god (Jamieson et al., A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical, 1:296; Hyatt, Commentary on Exodus, 105). It was customary to carry the wooden statue of a god in procession from the local temple to the river (Pfeiffer, Egypt and the Exodus, 22; Steindorff and Seele, When Egypt Ruled the East, 139-40). To tamper with the Nile was very serious (as reflected in the Negative Confession) and was punishable by death even as late as Roman times (Tirard, The Book of the Dead, 131) and yet the God of Israel did so to demonstrate His lack of regard for this god.
death of the fish in the river (Exod 7:21). What was divine to the Egyptian ceased to be a source of blessing. Hapi brought stench instead of blessing.

A second example of God changing something good into something bad has to do with the next plague of frogs. Frogs were quite plentiful in Egypt but were not viewed as something loathsome; however, because of their countless numbers were regarded as a symbol of fertility, and consequently, there were a number of toad deities in Egypt, the most popular of which was Heqt of whom the toad was a theophany. It is no wonder then that even the involuntary slaughter of one of these creatures was punishable by death. As with the previous plague, the nauseating multiplication of these creatures was an attack on a god of Egypt. Noth suggested, “the frog, instead of appearing as a representative of the

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50 Many kinds of fish in the Nile were worshiped, the most important being the Oxyrhynchus. Budge noted that it was sacred throughout Egypt and in some places it would not be eaten. The Phagus, or eel, was worshiped in Upper Egypt where mummified eels have been found in small sepulchral boxes (Budge, The Gods of the Egyptians, 382-83). It is also possible that the water affected in the wooden buckets and stone jars is significant. While this may refer only to the extent of the plague, it should not be missed that “wood and stone” usually signify idols in the Bible and the Egyptian priests would wash images of their gods in water every day early in the morning. Possibly even the water poured over the idols turned to blood (U. Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus [Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1983] 99).

51 For an excellent discussion regarding the nature of the duplication performed by Pharaoh’s magicians, see Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt, 89-92.

52 Ibid. 107.

53 Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, 101; Cerny, Ancient Egyptian Religion, 24.

54 As with other Egyptian gods, there are variant spellings suggested. For this particular one, it is also spelled Heket or Hekat. She was believed to have had a role in creation, to have assisted women in childbirth, and to have the ability to bestow life through resurrection (Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, 101; Kyle, “Plagues of Egypt,” 4:2404; Budge, The Gods of the Egyptians, 378; R. Alan Cole, Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985) 91; Ailing, Egypt and Bible History, 106; Hyatt, Commentary on Exodus, 108; Budge, Egyptian Magic, 63.

55 George Rawlinson, “Exodus,” in Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959) 1:214. It is interesting to note regarding the frog cult that “the frog, as a sacred symbol, survived the disappearance of old Egyptian religion. Lamps of early Christian time have been found in the form of a frog, bearing this legend: ‘I am the resurrection’” (Tirard, The Book of the Dead, 86-87).
renewal of life, becomes a fearful plague.” Cassuto averred: “Pentateuchal narrative intends to convey that Israel’s God alone rules the world, and that He only bestows on His creatures, according to his will, the power of fertility, and that these frogs, which were considered by the Egyptians as a symbol of fecundity, can be transformed, if He so desires ... from a token of blessing to one of blight.”

Cassuto’s statement that the frog was transformed from a “token of blessing to one of blight” is the consistent theme regarding the plagues on the dust of the ground, the swarms of flies, the livestock, the blisters, the hail and lightning, locusts, darkness, and the slaying of the

59 Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt, 114; Hyatt, Commentary on Exodus, 111.
62 Jamieson et al., A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical, 1:303-04; Wood, Survey of Israel’s History, 124; John Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt, 128; Ions, Egyptian Mythology, 55; Aling, Egypt and Bible History, 106; Steindorff and Seele, When Egypt Ruled the East, 141.
firstborn.\textsuperscript{64} Again, in every plague, what was worshiped and considered good was turned into a curse and something bad.

Since this is essentially the pattern of the entire narrative, is it not possible, therefore, that the same thing occurred with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart? Something that was good and would lead one into eternal life was turned into something bad and actually led into more judgment through the successive plagues and eventually death in the Red Sea—just the opposite of what was believed. What was supposed to lead to no confession of sin, eventually lead to confession of sin (Exod 9:27, 34; 10:16-17). Surely, this made a mockery of the Egyptian scheme of salvation.\textsuperscript{65}

**SUMMARY**

The hardening of the Pharaoh's heart is normally discussed as a theological issue. While this is valid, this article has made the suggestion that the true meaning of the Exodus narrative (at least in the Old Testament) may be understood better if examined from the religious perspective in vogue when the event occurred. To one of the most religious societies to ever exist, God made it clear that he would prove himself to be the only true God. The way he did this was by turning objects of veneration into objects of cursing and disgust. God turned the entire system “inside out.” In keeping with this motif, the hardening of the heart was actually viewed as something that was positive in Egyptian religion because it would enable the deceased to avoid judgment allowing them to attain eternal life. However, just as with the plagues, this religious concept was also turned to cursing in that it led Pharaoh to more judgment and eventual death. The words of Jethro spoken to Moses are true: “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.”

\textsuperscript{64} Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, 133; Waterson, The Gods of Ancient Egypt, 90.

\textsuperscript{65} The longevity of this cult is incredible. Brandon observed, “this Osirian mortuary cultus remained effective for nearly 3,000 years. It is in fact the longest lived faith in the history of religions. It was already well established by the middle of the third millennium, and it was still being practiced when the pagan cults were suppressed in favour of Christianity in the fourth century A. D.” (S. G. F. Brandon, “The After-Life in Ancient Egyptian Faith and Practice,” Expository Times 76 [1964]: 219).
HAS THE CHURCH MISUNDERSTOOD PAUL?
A Critical Look at the New Perspective on Paul¹

Gary E. Gilley

Lately, there have been numerous attacks upon cardinal doctrines of the faith, which most Christians have considered secure and untouchable for years. Nathan Busenitz summarized the issue well: “It seems like just about every major doctrine of historic Christianity is currently under attack. Theology proper faces the Open-Theism debate; bibliology is still reeling from higher criticism; and pneumatology is split over the Charismatic question. For Christology the issue is the lordship of Christ; for anthropology it’s Christian psychology; and for ecclesiology it’s the Church-growth movement.”²

Not even the Gospel is safe from attacks by those who claim to be part of the church. The foremost battle being waged at this moment is with regard to soteriology. Emergent church leaders are in the forefront as they remove, rearrange, deny, and undercut the gospel message as found in Scripture.³ Emergent church leaders fight this battle largely on the popular front, but underpinning their views is the theological framework of what has been termed the “New Perspective on Paul.” Similar to most novel and complicated doctrinal positions, the New Perspective on Paul is not monolithic. Views among leading components vary, but there are some definite foundational beliefs that will be addressed.

ORIGINS

The impetus for the New Perspective on Paul appears to be various searches for the “historic Jesus,” which was initiated by Albert Schweitzer in the early twentieth century. Schweitzer was a liberal

¹ The article herein originally appeared in the following: The Quarterly Journal 27 (July-September 2007), and is used with permission.


missionary/theologian who concluded that Jesus had tried but failed in His quest to rescue humanity. He further denied the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. In contrast to the Reformers, Schweitzer believed that the foundation of Pauline theology was not justification by faith, but Christ-mysticism, or what he called “being in Christ.” One “got into” Christ through baptism, Schweitzer maintained. He was one of the first to advocate that Paul’s theology was derived from his Jewish roots and not from the Hellenistic culture. Therefore, according to Schweitzer’s way of thinking, Paul’s theology and the rabbinical teachings of the first century were very much in harmony.

Rudolf Bultmann, in the mid-1950s, introduced the second dynamic in this search, arising from skepticism and leading to such modern challenges as the Jesus Seminar. Nevertheless, Bultmann differed from Schweitzer with regard to justification (it was central to Pauline theology), Judaism (Judaism was a works-based religion), and influence (Paul was decidedly Hellenistic).

A third dynamic in the search for this historic Jesus was focused upon attempting to understand the Bible through the studies of Second Temple Judaism (extrabiblical understanding of Judaism from approximately 200 BC to AD 200) and the rabbinical writings of that period. Challenging Bultmann were theologians such as William D. Davies, Ernst Kasemann, and Krister Stendahl, who saw little disagreement between Pauline theology and Judaism. Their contention was that Western thinking had created these differences, and contrary to Bultmann and the Reformers, the Judaizers of New Testament times taught a grace-based faith much like the Christianity Paul taught. Therefore, when Paul came to Christ, he did not experience a spiritual conversion but a vocational call. His call was to take the message that his Jewish brothers already had to the Gentiles, with the addition of the Lordship of Jesus. Paul was a Jewish rabbi who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. What occurred next, with the publication of E. P. Sanders’ Paul and Palestinian Judaism, has been called “the Sanders revolution.” N. T. Wright stated Sanders’ position as such:

Judaism in Paul’s day was not, as has regularly been supposed, a religion of legalistic works-righteousness. . . . The Jew keeps the law out of gratitude, as the proper response to grace — not, in other words, in order to get into the covenant people, but to stay in. . . . Judaism . . . was and is a perfectly valid and proper form of religion.
Paul’s only critique of Judaism, according to Sanders, was that it was ‘not Christianity’ [italics in original].

There are other developers and promoters of the New Perspective on Paul, including James Dunn of the University of Durham, but it is important to note that all of the aforementioned scholars would be considered liberal in their theology and understanding of Scripture. The next influence to consider is N. T. Wright, Bishop of Durham in the Church of England and leading New Testament scholar (author of 43 books), who claims to be an evangelical and is accepted by many as such. Wright has become the primary means through which the New Perspective on Paul teachings have influenced the evangelical church. For this reason, in examining the New Perspective on Paul, it is the writings of Wright with which one must interact, principally his book What Saint Paul Really Said. Phil Johnson summarized what Wright and his followers are teaching.

In a nutshell, they are suggesting that the apostle Paul has been seriously misunderstood, at least since the time of Augustine and the Pelagian controversy, but even more since the time of Luther and the Protestant Reformation. They claim first-century Judaism has also been misinterpreted and misconstrued by New Testament scholars for hundreds and hundreds of years, and therefore the church’s understanding of what Paul was teaching in Romans and Galatians has been seriously flawed at least since the time of Augustine.

BASIC TEACHINGS

Covenantal nomism is an emphasis in the theology of the New Perspective on Paul. Quoting Sanders, Guy Waters provided the following definition: “One enters the covenant by baptism. . . . Once one enters the covenant, then membership provides salvation. . . . Obedience to (or repentance for the transgression of) a specific set of commandments keeps one in the covenantal relationship, while repeated or heinous transgression removes one from membership.”

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According to covenantal nomism, one is a beneficiary of the covenant through the grace of God, although baptism is necessary. One does not earn a place in the covenant through works, except the work of baptism. However, to maintain one’s position in the covenant requires obedience to the laws of the covenant. One enters the covenant by faith, but remains by works. Jack Hughes was correct when he noted: “The similarities to Roman Catholic theology are very striking. Roman Catholic theology teaches that infant baptism places one into the ‘covenant community’ and as long as that person continues to observe the sacraments, he will preserve himself and be saved. That is legalism, salvation by works.”

CORRECTING A FALSE REFERENCE

The New Perspective on Paul proponents regard themselves as the first people since the early church fathers who have rightly understood Paul and his message. They make this assertion because they contend that believers in the past have used the wrong reference through which to interpret the words of Paul, at least since Augustine, and especially since Martin Luther. John Armstrong, once a defender of reformed theology, who has in recent years become an adherent to the New Perspective on Paul, wrote:

Luther understood Paul’s description of the Jews, and their relationship to the law, through the grid of his medieval Roman Catholic experience. By this approach Luther saw Judaism as a religion of merit, a religion in which one earns salvation. Coming to rest in the grace of God alone, Luther believed that Paul’s first-century experience was essentially like his own sixteenth-century one. Justification by grace through faith was really new, or at least the new element of the gospel that had not been clear to Jews of the Second Temple period. In Luther’s view this gospel of grace was the central point of his entire reformation effort. This is why Luther said, “the true Church stands or falls” by this article, sola fide.\footnote{John H. Armstrong, “Do Good People Go to Heaven?” Reformaion & Revival (The Weekly Messenger, 10 February 2003, accessed 1 February 2010) available from http://www.act3online.com/articles.asp?catid=8.}

In other words, Luther read his own experience into the Pauline epistles. Since the Roman church of the sixteenth century was legalistic—seeking

\footnote{Jack Hughes, “The New Perspective’s View of Paul and the Law,” The Master’s Seminary Journal 16 (Fall 2005): 272.}
salvation through merit—so Luther reasoned that Judaism described in Paul’s epistles did the same. However, the New Perspective on Paul leadership assures readers that such was not the case. The church has been misunderstanding Paul for many years. So what was Paul really seeking?

**RACIAL RECONCILIATION**

Wright insisted, "Justification, in Galatians, is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences, as together they wait for the final creation." It is because legalism was supposedly not on “the table” for first-century Judaism that Paul apparently did not discuss the issue of how one is saved, but rather who belongs "at the same table." For Gentiles to be accepted in the same covenant community, it would be necessary for Jewish believers to abstain from their laws concerning foods, circumcision, and holy days and welcome Gentiles on equal terms. The “badge” (a favorite New Perspective on Paul term) of community membership must be shifted from kosher laws to baptism, faith, and obedience to Christ.

According to Paul, justification is more concerned with ecclesiology than soteriology. In other words, Paul was not really concerned about the individual’s standing before God. His concern was with regard to the status of Gentiles who were joining the Jews in the covenant community. Paul abandoned boundary markers for those in the community (the church): badges that tell who is “in,” not requirements for getting “in.” It is because those who practiced Judaism were already in the covenant community, so say the New Perspective on Paul scholars, that the only issue is how to integrate Gentiles into the already-established community.

**SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM**

Essential to New Perspective on Paul theology is E. P. Sanders’ thesis that the Judaism of Paul’s day (often referenced as Second Temple Judaism or Palestinian Judaism) was not a self-righteous, merit-based religion. Long before the Reformation, Augustine had defended the faith against Pelagianism, which taught that salvation was obtained through works. The Reformers, the New Perspective proponents claim, read their struggle with Catholicism into the New Testament texts and assumed the practitioners of Judaism were as Pelagian as medieval Catholics. The Reformers equated

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sixteenth-century Roman theology with Pelagianism and linked both with Second Temple Judaism.

Therefore, in the minds of Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers, Paul addressed first-century Pelagianism found in Judaism much as they were addressing it in Romanism. New Perspective leaders contend that the Reformers misread Paul as a consequence of this faulty connection between Judaism and Pelagianism. For this reason, it is believed that Paul did not so much as even address legalism, for Palestinian Judaism was not a legalistic religion. New Perspective on Paul scholars say that when the primary rabbinical writings are studied they yield a very different understanding of Judaism than that of the Reformers and evangelicals. What these writings yield is covenantal nomism as described previously: a religion in which one enters the covenant by the grace of God but stays in the covenant through obedience.

Responding to the New Perspective on Paul teachings is not easy. There is much disagreement even by scholars who are reading the same texts. Interpretations of the texts are not easy and vary widely; the state and date of the texts are often uncertain; many rabbinical documents were written in the third to fifth century, but are being used to illustrate Jewish teaching in the first century.10

The New Perspective on Paul misrepresents what evangelicals teach. No one is teaching that either Catholicism or Palestinian Judaism were Pelagian in the sense that they were entirely works-based religions; rather, they both were semi-Pelagian, meaning that they both taught that salvation (whatever that might mean to the New Perspective on Paul) is based upon the grace of God and accepted by faith in addition to works. Both Rome and Judaism were semi-Pelagian, that is, God does His part and the rest is the responsibility of humanity (also known as synergism). Consequently, this means that Sanders and the others do not truly understand legalism. Even as they claim that Judaism is not legalistic, they provide quotes from rabbinical sources demonstrating that it clearly is.11 Even the definition of covenantal nomism, as given by Sanders, is a synergetic, and thus legalistic, defining of Judaism.

The New Perspective on Paul places more confidence in rabbinical sources than in the New Testament. The Reformers in the past, in addition to modern evangelicals, have made their conclusions with regard to Judaism primarily from Scripture. It is impossible to study the New Testament and not conclude that first-century Judaism is clearly legalistic.

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11 See Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives, 42-57.
Acts 13:38-39, Luke 18:14, Galatians 2:16, and Romans 3:20 and 9:30-32 would be difficult to refute. One would have to wonder what so disturbed Jesus regarding the Pharisees that He would pronounce them hypocrites who added their traditions to the Word of God if, in fact, they and He had been basically communicating similarly.

William Barrick offered the following critique of Judaism, as analyzed in the Book of Galatians. “Consider the following characteristics of Paul’s opposition:”

- They preach a different (…heteros) gospel (1:6).
- They are “disturbing” Paul’s converts and “distorting” his gospel message (1:7).…
- They are “false brethren” (…pseudadelphoi) seeking bondage rather than freedom (2:4; 5:1).
- They belonged to the “party of the circumcision” (…tous ek peritomēs, 2:12).
- They compel Gentile Christians to live like Jews (…ta ethné anagkazeis ioudaizeit, 2:14).…
- They cause Galatian believers to be spellbound and drawn away from the gospel (3:1).
- The Gentiles must accept their ethic…to be saved (4:17…).”¹²

Barrick continued, “Paul’s antagonists were not simply first-century Jews with a grace perspective practicing so-called ‘covenantal nomism’ nor were they “right wing” Jewish Christians.’ Clearly, they were first-century enemies of the faith and opponents of the gospel in particular.”¹³ Phil Johnson summarized the evangelical position: “In fact, if we allow the gospel accounts to inform our understanding of the Pharisees’ religion, rather than selling out to the scholarship of E. P. Sanders, we must come to the conclusion that the old perspective of first-century Pharisaism is the correct one.”¹⁴

THE GOSPEL

Martin Luther said that the church stands or falls on this one doctrine: justification by faith. If that is so, and conservative Christians throughout the ages have agreed with Luther, then an examination of the New Perspective on Paul’s gospel message should be instructive. In “older

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¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Johnson, “A Defense of the Old Perspective on Paul” [online].
theology,” N. T. Wright tells readers, “the gospel’ is supposed to be a
description of how people get saved,” or how “Christ takes our sin and we
his righteousness,”15 or something similar. According to Wright, this is not
what Paul meant by the gospel. The gospel instead is “the narrative
proclamation of King Jesus.”16 Paul announced, “Jesus is king, not only of
Israel but of all the world.”17 Said with greater clarity, “The gospel is the
announcement that Jesus is Lord — Lord of the world, Lord of the cosmos,
Lord of the earth, of the ozone layer, of whales and waterfalls, of trees and
tortoises.”18

While no thinking Christian would deny the lordship of Christ over
all things, when the gospel itself becomes the message of lordship rather
than the message of redemption and justification, there will necessitate a
seismic change in understanding why Jesus came and died, and what the
church is to proclaim as a result. Wright left no doubt regarding his
desires:

As soon as we get this right we destroy at a stroke the disastrous
dichotomy that has existed in people’s minds between “preaching the
gospel” on the one hand and what used to be called loosely “social
action” or “social justice” on the other. Preaching the gospel means
announcing Jesus as Lord of the world; and . . . we cannot make that
announcement without seeking to bring that lordship to bear over
every aspect of the world. . . . It is bringing the whole world under the
lordship of Christ.19

Of the many things wrong with Wright’s definition of the gospel, two are
crucial. First, it transfers the focus of God’s people from the proclamation of
redemption to social enhancement of the planet. For, as Wright stated, his
gospel is not merely the announcement that Jesus is Lord (which is
something true before the cross), but the rallying point from which the
church is to “bring the whole world under the lordship of Christ.” The
church’s mandate under the New Perspective is not to rescue people “from
the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His
love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of
sins” (Col 1:13-14). According to the New Perspective on Paul, the church’s
mandate is to rescue the planet and ultimately to crown Christ as Lord

15 Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said, 41.
16 Ibid. 45.
17 Ibid. 53.
18 Ibid. 153-54.
19 Ibid. 154-55.
over all earthly systems and structures. God’s people are to establish the
kingdom that Christ began (which is certainly a “kingdom now”
perspective found in postmillennialism, that is, the kingdom is now and the
Christian’s responsibility is to advance the kingdom to the point where
Christ can declare kingship over the earth and ultimately reign in person).

The social agenda is even more evident when vital aspects of the
true gospel are either minimized or eliminated altogether. Therefore, the
second concern is even more serious, for in elevating the social agenda, the
redemption agenda is devalued. Consider the all-important doctrine of
justification, for example. Conservative Christians have agreed that
justification is defined as Christ forgiving and removing personal sin by
granting God’s righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). The New Perspective on Paul
rejects this definition and replaces it with Christ’s eschatological victory
for the nation of Israel. Wright explained:

“Justification” is a law-court term, and in its Jewish context it refers to
the greatest lawsuit of all: that which will take place on the great day
when the true God judges all the nations, more particularly the
nations that have been oppressing Israel. God will, at last, find in
favour of his people: he will judge the pagan nations and rescue his
ture people. “Justification” thus describes the coming great act of
redemption and salvation, seen from the point of view of the covenant
(ISrael is God’s people) on the one hand and the law court on the
other (God’s final judgment will be like a great law-court scene, with
Israel winning the case) [italics in original].

Phil Johnson offered the following summary:

Ultimately, the New Perspective divests the gospel of — or downplays
— every significant aspect of soteriology. The means of atonement is
left vague in this system; the issues of personal sin and guilt are
passed over and brushed aside. The gospel becomes a proclamation of
victory, period. In other words, the gospel of the New Perspective is
decidedly not a message about how sinners can escape the wrath of
God. In fact, this gospel says little or nothing about personal sin and
forgiveness, individual redemption, atonement, or any of the other
great soteriological doctrines. Soteriology is hardly a concern of the
New Perspective — even when they are dealing with the gospel
message.

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20 Ibid. 33.
21 Johnson, “A Defense of the Old Perspective on Paul” [online].
The New Perspective becomes even more complicated for, as the New Perspective leaders seek to foster their new perspectives, it necessitates that they change the meaning of every issue that affects the subject of justification. They begin with the covenant because the primary issue with the New Perspective is being in the covenant. Of course, this presents several questions, foremost of which is how does one enter into the covenant? Amazingly, considering the covenant’s importance in the system, the New Perspective proponents do not like to address how one shares in the covenant. Wright, however, offered a threefold process: “they come to believe the message; they join the Christian community through baptism, and begin to share in its common life and its common way of life. That is how people come into relationship with the living God.”

Therefore, people are to believe the message about Jesus, and remember it is not a message of redemption (Christ dying for personal sins) but a message of lordship, a belief that Jesus is Lord, which is followed by baptism and joining the church. Once in the covenant, as already stated, one remains in the covenant through obedience. Some, such as Sanders, apparently made this a minimal level of obedience, saying that only a “renunciation of God and his covenant can put one out of the covenant.”

While the New Perspective gives insincere respect to faith, it can readily be seen that one enters the covenant by faith plus works (baptism), is sustained in the covenant by involvement in the church, and is maintained in the covenant by obedience. One can understand why many regard the New Perspective on Paul as merely a thinly disguised path to Rome. Under New Perspective theology, a theology that has no credence in sola fide, all who claim the lordship of Christ, whether Catholic, Protestant, or something else, “belong together in the one family.”

In the New Perspective, justification has nothing to do with salvation and everything to do with the church, or community. Declaring that the evangelical church has misread Galatians from ancient times, Wright assured his readers that he and his comrades have discovered what Paul really meant:

The problem he addresses is: should his ex-pagan converts be circumcised or not...? It has to do quite obviously with the question of how you define the people of God: are they to be defined by the badges of Jewish race, or in some other way...? [W]ho belongs to

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23 Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives, 48.
24 Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said, 158.
Abraham’s family. . . Justification, in Galatians, is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences, as together they wait for the final new creation. . . . Justification is not how someone becomes a Christian. It is the declaration that they have become a Christian [italics in original].

In other words, “it was not so much about ‘getting in’, or indeed about ‘staying in’, as about ‘how you could tell who was in’. In standard Christian theological language, it wasn’t so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.” According to Wright, Paul was not even concerned with the works-salvation issue; he was concerned with regard to racial equality in the community. Jewish Christians were insisting that Gentile believers take the “badges” of Judaism in order to join the community; Paul did not say that Judaism was wrong, but that the “badges” have changed. Under the old covenant, the badges were circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath keeping; under the new covenant, it is belief in the lordship of the Messiah, baptism, and joining the community. All who meet these three criteria belong “at the same table.”

According to the New Perspective, the Apostle Paul did not express concern with regard to the subject of salvation in his epistles because that subject was not a major issue. Palestinian Judaism was not a merit-based religion, and, therefore, the Apostle was not wasting his time correcting their theology. Paul’s concern was the barriers keeping Jewish believers and Gentile believers from participating in a single community. What had to be changed was not the means of salvation but the “badges” of salvation in order that followers of Christ would know who was in the community. Paul changed the “badges” from Jewish Torah-keeping, especially circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath-keeping, to faith, baptism, obedience to the covenant, and covenant community involvement. The church would no longer be divided by racial lines, but would be united by the new “badges.”

Therefore, the New Perspective negates the doctrine of sola fide and distorts biblical soteriology by portraying it as a semi-Pelagian, faith-plus-human-merit-based religion. The distortion is the identical error the Reformers recognized and battled. Far from getting it wrong, the Reformers were exactly right because they saw in Roman Catholicism the

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25 Ibid. 120, 121, 122, 125.
26 Ibid. 119.
same error they recognized in New Testament Judaism, that is, both being semi-Pelagian.

The New Perspective on Paul system stands or falls on its understanding of Second Temple Judaism. If the Judaism of Paul's day was acceptable to God, only in need of minor adjustments to accommodate the coming of their Messiah, then Christians have misunderstood Paul for centuries. In the rabbinical writings, the New Perspective scholars regard first century Judaism as a grace-based, non-legalistic religion while, as already stated, other scholars using the same documents disagree. However, the final arbitrator should be the New Testament itself.

Even a casual reading through the New Testament reveals a completely different notion of Judaism—especially the leaders within Judaism—than the New Perspective on Paul portrays. John the Baptist called the leaders of Judaism a "brood of vipers" (Matt 3:7). Jesus described their righteousness as inferior and told His audience, "unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20).

The Gospels record numerous conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders (E. P. Sanders dismissed the ones found in Mark 2:1-3:6; Mark 7; and, Matthew 15 by denying the historical accuracy of the Gospels). In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced eight woes (or judgments) upon the Pharisees, which hardly appears to represent "all things well" in first century Judaism. The Lord even told the Pharisees that they were of their father the devil (John 8:44). One would find difficulty to find even one positive encounter or description of Jewish religious leaders in the Gospels; it was these very religious leaders who led the people in crucifying their own Messiah. In a similar manner, throughout the Book of Acts, one finds the same adherents to Judaism rejecting the gospel and persecuting Christians.

Things do not improve for Judaism in the Epistles. So convinced are the New Perspective theologians that Judaism was acceptable to God that they regard Paul's Damascus Road experience as a call, not a conversion. Paul did not change religions so much as he changed his focus. However, that is not how Paul understood the experience. He accused the Jews of being those who had caused the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (Rom 2:17-24). He said they failed in their pursuit of righteousness because they did not pursue it by faith (Rom 9:30-32). He

\[27\] Robert Thomas, “Hermeneutics of the New Perspective on Paul,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 16 (Fall 2005): 299-300. Thomas’ excellent section on this subject has been paraphrased.

accused them of preaching a different gospel and cursed them for it (Gal 1:6-9). Paul called them false brethren “who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus” (Gal 2:4). In Philippians 3:2-11, the Apostle recounts his efforts while in Judaism as of absolutely no value in gaining the righteousness of God through Christ.

The understanding one receives in the New Testament of first century Judaism is of a religion that had morphed from the teachings of the Old Testament to become a system of merit-based legalism repudiated by Jesus and Paul. That some of the rabbinical writings demonstrate faith being a component of Judaism does not significantly change the problem. Faith plus works is essentially the same heresy as works alone. Both Jesus and Paul condemned first century Judaism because it did not teach salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Somehow the New Perspective misses the fact that “if the Jews in the first century had exhibited the spirituality demanded by the OT, they would not have rejected the Messiah and they would not have been judged by exile and dispersion.”

MISCELLANEOUS VIEWS AND DOCTRINES

In order to make the New Perspective “work,” it becomes necessary to redefine or deny fundamental doctrines of the faith. For example, Wright provided this definition for the righteousness of God: “For a reader of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Jewish scriptures, ‘the righteousness of God’ would have one obvious meaning: God’s own faithfulness to his promises, to the covenant. . . . God’s righteousness is thus cognate with his trustworthiness on the one hand, and Israel’s salvation on the other.” The definition is representative of what Wright does. Actually he believes that the evangelical church has not understood the emphasis of Scripture in numerous ways. Not only was Paul not primarily interested in the doctrine of salvation, but also the church (in general) has misunderstood:

- Judaism;
- the purpose of the covenant;
- the definition of justification;

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31 Ibid. 32.
32 Ibid. 32, 35.
33 Ibid. 33.
34 Ibid. 33-34.
• eschatology;
• the gospel;
• imputation;
• justification by faith; and,
• exclusivism.

Ultimately, the New Perspective is ecumenical in nature. By eliminating and reworking the foundational truths of Scripture, the New Perspective has reduced the requirements to become part of the covenant community to a nebulous belief in Jesus, baptism, and obedience. The reduction allows for a set of doctrines, especially that of justification, with “which Catholic and Protestant might just be able to agree on, as a result of hard ecumenical endeavour . . . and which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong together in the one family.” As a matter of fact, one has to wonder if Wright (in his ecumenism) is considering the legitimacy of universalism.

The point is this: the covenant between God and Israel was always designed to be God’s means of saving the whole world. It was never supposed to be the means whereby God would have a private little group of people who would be saved while the rest of the world went to hell (whatever you mean by that). Thus, when God is faithful to the covenant in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the work of the Spirit, it makes nonsense of the Pauline gospel to imagine that the be-all and end-all of this operation is so that God can have another, merely different, private little group of people who are saved while the world is consigned to the cosmic waste-paper basket.

Robert Thomas, at the end of his article on the hermeneutics of the New Perspective on Paul, offered an excellent summary of their teachings.

First-century Judaism was not a salvation-by-works religion . . . Until the death and resurrection of Christ, by virtue of God’s election, any physical descendant of Abraham is a member of the covenant people and thereby justified . . . Those who maintain the covenantal nomism relationship by obedience are the ones who will be saved . . . Paul

35 Ibid. 34.
36 Ibid. 40-41.
37 Ibid. 98-99.
38 Ibid. 113-14.
39 Ibid. 158.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid. 163.
retained his covenantal nomism after his Damascus Road experience. . . From that point on, his mission was to dispense with circumcision, sabbath observance, and dietary restrictions of the Mosaic law as boundaries that limited who could be a member of the covenant people. . . . Guilt was not expressed in Paul’s writings, but was introduced by Augustine and Luther. . . . Justification by faith and imputed righteousness was read into Paul by Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Calvin because of their contemporary situations. . . . Faith is not the means of justification or of joining the covenant community; it is rather a badge of covenant membership. One joins the covenant community through water baptism. . . . Final justification is based on works of obedience to the Mosaic law so that any justification a person enjoys at present is only preliminary and can be reversed.  

The New Perspective movement offers the appeal of a new idea (Paul’s critique of Judaism has been misunderstood), in addition to the old idea that salvation comes not by grace alone through faith alone, but at least partially through human efforts. The tempting appeal to humanity’s thirst for novelty and the age old pride in one’s own self efforts is as dangerous as any cultic teaching that is disseminated.

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42 Thomas, “Hermeneutics of the New Perspective on Paul,” 315-16.
DID JESUS TRULY DIE?
Death before Resurrection

René A. López

Schonfield wrote, “If the Gospels afforded us no assistance we would have to imagine how Jesus contrived to give the impression of death, and suggest a way in which his body could have been secured by his friends. It is by no means a novel theory that Jesus was not dead when taken from the cross, and some will have it that he subsequently recovered. . . . There is no cause to doubt the crucifixion of Jesus, or that he had an assistant to aid him in his bid for survival.”¹ The Jesus Family Tomb² and The Lost Tomb of Jesus³ claim that Jesus was resurrected spiritually. However, since they claim to possess the ossuary that contained Jesus’ bones, why did no one provide the corpse when the disciples preached His physical resurrection?⁴ That Jesus really died on the cross needs to be established for various reasons. If Jesus did not die—which is a necessary prelude to rising physically—there can be no forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who believe in Him (Rom 6:1–23; 1 Cor 15:12–23). Furthermore, the Old Testament Law illustrated the necessary shedding of blood in order to forgive sins as seen in its sacrificial Levitical system. If Jesus faked His death, the Christian message is void and worthless, since John testified of Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, 32; see also Gen 3:15; Ps 22; and, Isa 53:1–12).

³ The Lost Tomb of Jesus documentary (made by the famous James Cameron) was aired worldwide by the Discovery Channel on 4 March 2007.
One of the best-known books denying that Jesus rose bodily from the grave is *The Passover Plot*, by Hugh J. Schonfield, which has sold over a million copies throughout the years.\(^5\) He argued that Jesus did all He could to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies but that He did not intend to die. Instead He plotted to survive the crucifixion. Though Schonfield’s fictional *Passover Plot* theory was analyzed and found completely wanting,\(^6\) this has not stopped others from making similar allegations.

Another conspiracy theory denying Jesus’ death on the cross is *The Jesus Conspiracy*, by Elmar R. Gruber. He claimed, “A detailed analysis shows that the term used in the Greek original for the thrust of the soldier, *nysssein*, means a light scratch, puncture or stab to the skin, not a thrust with full force, let alone a deep penetration. . . . Even Origen (185–254), who did actually believe Jesus was dead at the time when the blood and water came out from the wounds, pointed out that corpses do not bleed.”\(^7\) Recently best-selling author Michael Baigent claimed in *The Jesus Papers*: “Pilate took steps to ensure that Jesus would survive. He spoke with a member of the Sanhedrin and friend of Jesus, the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea.”\(^8\)

Could these allegations be true? Was Jesus lightly tortured, thereby making it possible for Him to endure the cross? Did He really die or was He resuscitated instead of resurrected? How does one deal with an empty tomb, or was it not empty, after all?

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\(^5\) Hugh J. Schonfield is a British Bible scholar with a doctorate from the University of Glasgow. He has written over forty books. See also Hugh J. Schonfield, *After the Cross* (London: Tantivy Press, 1981).


\(^8\) Michael Baigent, *The Jesus Papers: Exposing the Greatest Cover-Up in History* (San Francisco: Harper, 2006) 126. In summary, the more popular views today are wide ranging: “Jesus never died on the cross; he was connected with the Qumran community; someone else changed his message to fit their own desires; he traveled to various parts of the world during the so-called ‘silent years’ or even after the crucifixion” (Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 69). See also, López, *Jesus Family Tomb*, 253-75.
JESUS TORTURED NEARLY WITHIN DEATH

Before Jesus faced the death sentence of crucifixion, Pilate had Him “flogged/scourged” (Matt 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:25; John 19:16). Even before being flogged, Jesus underwent six trials and in some of them He was beaten to the point of death.

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Before Jesus ever reached the civil trials He was already punched and slapped in His first religious trial, according to Mark 14:65. “Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, ‘Prophesy!’ And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.” When Jesus was finally yielded to the Roman guards to be flogged, He was probably already in some physical pain. What was His condition after the Roman guards finished?

Before a person received a Roman execution, he was given a preliminary legal flogging, (all except women, Roman senators, and

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10 Κολασίζω, which is translated “beat,” means “to strike with a fist” and/or “to cause physical impairment.” The word conveys much more severity than to “slap,” which is a different word, ἰπτόμα, meaning “a blow on the face with someone’s hand” (Walter Bauer, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000] 555, 904).
soldiers). 11 Though Mel Gibson’s movie The Passion of the Christ has Hollywood embellishments, one of the things Gibson got correct was perhaps the most gruesome and bloodiest scene, next to the crucifixion, of the flogging of Jesus. Roman guards would inflict just the right amount of pain without killing the victim facing capital punishment. Victims were forcefully stripped of their clothes and tied to a post, then the guards administered one of the most painful and cruel scourgings ever imaginable. Hebrew law did not allow more than 40 lashes, but the Romans placed no limitation on them (Deut 25:3). The scourging instrument was called a flagrum, which was sometimes called the Cat of Nine Tails because it had nine pieces of leather with pieces of sharp bones and metal attached that would “greatly lacerate human flesh” (see Figure 1, p. 74). 12

The following quotation describes graphically the medical evidence showing the gruesome torture endured by a crucifixion victim.

As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim’s back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and Subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock. The extent of blood loss may well have determined how long the victim would survive on the cross.

At the Praetorium, Jesus was severely whipped. (Although the severity of the scourging is not discussed in the four gospel accounts, it is implied in one of the epistles [1 Peter 2:24]. A detailed word study of the ancient Greek text for this verse indicates that the scourging of Jesus was particularly harsh.) It is not known whether the number of lashes was limited to 39, in accordance with Jewish law. The Roman soldiers, amused that this weakened man had claimed to be a king, began to mock him by placing a robe on his shoulders, a crown of thorns on his head, and a wooden staff as a


scepter in his right hand. Next, they spat on Jesus and struck him on
the head with the wooden staff. Moreover, when the soldiers tore the
robe from Jesus’ back, they probably reopened the scourging
wounds.\textsuperscript{13}

John P. Mattingly observed correctly, “The phrase ‘And they bring unto the
place of Golgotha’ (Mark 15:22a) would also indicate that Christ, unable to
walk under His own power, had to be literally brought or borne along the
place of execution. Thus, the revolting and horrifying pre-cross sufferings
were brought to a close, and the crucifying began” (see Figure 2, p. 75).\textsuperscript{14}

In view of these intense sufferings how could anyone argue that
Jesus survived the crucifixion?

DID HE REALLY DIE?

Since skeptics cite the Koran (Surah 4:157-58) as evidence that Jesus
merely pretended to die on the cross, it is necessary to investigate whether
He actually died.\textsuperscript{15} If He did not die, then He merely resuscitated and was
not resurrected; that is not, however, what the biblical records and
extrabiblical accounts claim.

\textit{Biblical Records}

The Scriptures present several facts with regard to Jesus’ death. \textit{First}, as
already noted, Jesus was critically injured before He was crucified. After

\textsuperscript{13} See “Scourging” [online] available from http://thecrucifixion.org/scourging.htm#2. The picture of the torture instrument and
procedures comes from the latter site, and this writer is indebted to the following
authors for the website where the quotation appears: Ankerberg and Burroughs,
\textit{Big Deal about Jesus}, 136. Interested researchers are encouraged to visit the site in
order to see the complete documentation regarding the quote.

\textsuperscript{14} Mattingly, “Crucifixion: Its Origin and Application to Christ,” 36.

\textsuperscript{15} Surah 4:157-58 states, “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the
Messenger of Allah”—but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made
to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain)
knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not—nay,
Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.” Not only
are there good reasons not to accept such a statement superficially, but even such
an interpretation of this is highly questionable. See David Wood, “The Irony of the
Qur’an” [article online] (Answer Muslims, 22 July 2008, accessed 2 March 2012)
available from http://www.answeringmuslims.com/2008/07/irony-of-
quransurah-4157-158.html.
the flogging, a crown of thorns was placed on His head, which most certainly intensified the bleeding (Matt 27:29).

Second, besides being in serious condition before He was put on the cross, Jesus “suffered five major wounds between nine in the mourning and just before sunset (cf. [Mark 15] vv. 25, 33). Four of these were nails used to fix Him on the cross. We know from remains of Palestine crucifixion victims that these nails were five to seven inches long and about three eights inch square.”16 The knife-size nails would certainly result in death (see Figure 3, p. 76).17

Third, Roman soldiers crucified convicts often. Therefore, the odds of allowing one to survive crucifixion are zero. Indeed, they made certain that the two criminals crucified with Jesus were dead by breaking their legs, which was necessary since the Sabbath day was approaching and Jewish Law did not permit anyone to remained crucified overnight (Deut 21:22–23; Mark 15:42). However, when the soldiers “came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs” (John 19:32–33). Breaking the legs caused a crucifixion victim to suffocate since he could not push himself upward to get air (see Figure 4, p. 77).

As Gary R. Habermas described, “It was typical for a person to hang on the cross for days. However, on occasion when the Romans desired to speed up the process they would employ the crurifragium, the act of breaking the legs with a heavy club or mallet. This would prevent the victim from pushing up and exhaling. The cause of death for a crucified victim was simple—he could not breathe.” Were the soldiers mistaken in thinking that Jesus was dead? “The soldiers had seen hundreds of men executed by crucifixion. It was routine to know when the victim was dead. He was not pushing up any longer for air.”18

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17 Nails of this size driven into the wrist “would crush or server the rather large sensorimotor median nerve. The stimulated nerve would produce excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms” (Edwards et al., “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” 1460).

18 Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004) 102. He noted, “The many physicians who have studied crucifixion over the years have invariably concluded that the major problem faced by victims of crucifixion was breathing, or more precisely— asphyxiation. Once on the cross, the victim would want to take the pressure off his nailed feet. To do this, he would allow the weight of his body to be held up by his nailed hands. However, in this ‘down’ position, certain muscles would be in the inhalation position, making it difficult to exhale. Thus, the victim would have to push up on his pierced feet in order to exhale. However, the first several times he
Furthermore, to insure that Jesus was dead the guards “pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out” (John 19:34). The Greek word νῦσσω ("pierced") does not refer to a mere "light scratch, puncture or stab to the skin," as Elmar R. Gruber argued.\(^{19}\) The degree of the "stab" depends upon the description given in the context not the word itself.\(^ {20}\) In this case, the context clearly attests to Jesus’ death. Pilate also verified this according to the biblical record. "Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time" (Mark 15:44). Therefore, the stabbing was deep enough to penetrate the skin and rupture something since according to John “blood and water came out” (John 19:34) (see Figure 5, p. 78).

Three medical doctors described what the spear did and the medical results of what probably occurred. "Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between His right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge."\(^ {21}\) Gruber also argued that people do not bleed after death. However, this wrongly assumes Jesus was dead for a long time. Jesus was pierced in the “sac” surrounding the heart that contains plenty of blood for a person to bleed even if the heart is not pumping blood.\(^ {22}\)

Fourth, anointing a body with approximately 75 to 100 pounds of spices, then wrapping it tightly in "strips of linen," and placing it in a cold slab tomb-rock would definitely guarantee asphyxiation or some other form of death, if it did not occur on the cross. Imagine the scenario if Jesus had survived the cross? Such is the portrait Habermas presented by

did this would cause intense pain, since it would cause the nail to tear through the flesh in the feet until it enlodged itself against one of the bones. Thus, the crucifixion victim would be seen pushing up quite often and retuning to the down position. Sever muscle cramps and spasms would also make breathing all the more difficult and painful" (ibid. 101). See also, Edwards et al., "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," 1461.

\(^ {19}\) Gruber, Jesus Conspiracy, 249.
\(^ {20}\) Bauer et al., Greek English Lexicon, 682–83.
\(^ {21}\) Edwards et al., "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," 1463.
explaining liberal scholar David F. Strauss’ critique and also decisively refuting the swoon theory.

Strauss’ most convincing point concerned Jesus’ condition upon reaching his disciples. Very few would doubt that he would be in sad physical shape, limping badly, bleeding, pale and clutching his side. He would obviously be in need of physical assistance and, at any rate, would not appear to be the resurrected and glorified Lord of Life! As Strauss pointed out, the disciples would have gone for a doctor’s help rather than proclaim Jesus the risen Son of God! Strauss asserted that even if the swoon theory was conceivable, it still could not account for the disciples’ belief in the risen Jesus. Since they did proclaim him to be the resurrected and glorified Lord, the swoon theory is not able to account for the facts.23

Indeed, there is more to know more with regard to Jesus’ burial than that of any other historical figure of the past. Wilbur M. Smith wrote, “We know more about the burial of the Lord Jesus than we know of the burial of any single character in all of ancient history. We know infinitely more about His burial than we do the burial of any Old Testament character, or any king of Babylon, Pharaoh of Egypt, any philosopher of Greece, or triumphant Caesar.”24 Nevertheless, one does not find anyone questioning whether these individuals died, and the reason is because those who questioned Jesus’ death know those who followed these leaders were not claiming they were resurrected. Therein lies the issue, not whether Jesus died but whether He was bodily resurrected. Therefore, denying Jesus’ death is just another way of refuting His physical resurrection.

People just did not survive crucifixion. “Survival of crucifixion was unknown, just as surviving the firing squad, the electric chair, a lethal injection, or the gas chamber is unheard of today. Because the law had decreed the prisoner’s death, even if a first attempt failed, procedures would be repeated until the decree was carried out. But death from crucifixion was as certain as any modern method of execution. There was no escape.”25

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Extrabiblical Records

A number of sources outside the Bible also attest to the common Roman practice of crucifixion. The cruel form of punishment that was first-century crucifixion is also well documented by scholars. Josephus, Cicero, Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Mara Bar-Serapion, the Babylonian Talmud, and even critical scholars testify regarding Jesus’ death.

Josephus wrote, “And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”

Tacitus described, “Nero fastened the guilt [of the burning of Rome] and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name has its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.”

Lucian of Samosata, a Greek satirist, stated, “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.” Mara Bar-Serapion said, “Or [what advantage came to] the Jews by the murder of their Wise King, seeing that from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them?”

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27 See Hengel, Crucifixion, 8–9.


29 Tacitus, Annals 15.44 (AD 115), cited in Habermas and Licona, Case for the Resurrection of Jesus, 59.

30 Lucian of Samosata, The Death of Peregrine 11–13 (AD 150–175) cited in ibid.

The Babylonian Talmud records, “On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!”

The name Yeshu is the equivalent Hebrew name for “Joshua,” or Greek Ἰησοῦς translated in English as “Jesus.” The Jews believed that if a person “hung on a tree,” the equivalent terminology for crucifixion, he was “accursed of God” (Deut 21:23).

Critical scholar John Dominic Crossan also believes Jesus died on the cross. “That he [Jesus] was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be.” New Testament critic, Gerd Lüdemann said, “Jesus’ death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable.” Even Jesus Family Tomb advocate James D. Tabor concluded, “None of these theories appear to have any basis whatsoever in reliable historical sources. I think we need have no doubt that given Jesus’ execution by Roman crucifixion he was truly dead and that his temporary place of burial was discovered to be empty shortly thereafter.”

THE EMPTY TOMB

Many theories are suggested to explain the empty tomb, such as the “swoon theory” which has been mentioned already. The most persuasive issue that critics of Jesus’ physical resurrection have to address is that of the empty tomb. Since no one was able to produce the body of Jesus, in order for proponents to disprove the resurrection, it remains a primary argument indicating Jesus’ physical resurrection. Hence Smith said, “No man has written, pro or con, on the subject of Christ’s resurrection, without

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33 John D. Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography (San Francisco: Harper, 1994) 145, see also 154–55, 196, 201.
35 James D. Tabor, The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family and the Birth of Christianity (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006) 230 (italics in original). Henceforth, Habermas concluded, “Such strange ‘twists’ to the swoon theory have been virtually ignored by scholars with good reason, for serious problems invalidate each of these theses” (Historical Jesus, 93).
finding himself compelled to face this problem of Joseph’s empty tomb. That the tomb was empty on Sunday morning is recognized by everyone, no matter how radical a critic he may be.”

*Attestation for the Resurrection*

William L. Craig presented eight reasons why the empty tomb gives attestation to Jesus' physical resurrection.

**“The Historical Reliability of the Account of Jesus’ Burial Supports the Empty Tomb.”**

As already mentioned, it is possible to know more with regard to Jesus’ burial than the burial of any other historical figure. How does this relate to an empty tomb and a risen Jesus? First, the disciples would not believe in Jesus’ resurrection if a body lay in the tomb. Second, even if they were deceived, others living in Jerusalem would not be, since a stroll to the tomb would prove that the disciples’ idea was a hoax. Third, the Roman authorities could easily disprove the resurrection by exhuming the corpse. “Thus, you see, if the story of Jesus’ burial is true, then the story of the empty tomb must be true as well.”

**“Paul’s Testimony Implies the Fact of the Empty Tomb.”**

Paul believed in the empty tomb. The statement, “He was buried” followed by the remark “He was raised” refers to an empty tomb. N. T. Wright also defended this point from critics who accused Paul of not mentioning the empty tomb.

The fact that the empty tomb itself, so prominent in the gospel accounts, does not appear to be specifically mentioned in this passage, is not significant; the mention here of “buried then raised” no more needs to be amplified in that way than one would need to amplify the statement “I walked down the street” with the qualification “on my feet.” The discovery of the empty tomb in the

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36 Smith, *Therefore Stand*, 373–74.
gospel accounts is of course significant because it was (in all the stories) the first thing that alerted Jesus’ followers to the fact that something extraordinary had happened; but when the story was telescoped into a compact formula it was not the principal point. The best hypothesis for why ‘that he was buried’ came to be part of this brief tradition is simply that the phrase summarized very succinctly that the entire moment in the Easter narratives.  

Furthermore, Paul’s witness recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 was the earliest creed (like the Apostles Creed). Creeds are pithy ways to transmit oral information that is easy to memorize. Numerous scholars believe three years after Paul’s salvation (AD 33 or 36), or later when he visited Jerusalem and met with James and Peter (Gal 1:18–19), he received this “creedal” information. Even if he received it later, it could not have surpassed AD 51, which is when he first arrived at Corinth. Therefore, he wrote, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received” (1 Cor 15:3a). Habermas stated, “At minimum, we have source material that dates within two decades of the alleged event of Jesus’ resurrection and comes from a source that Paul thought was reliable. Dean John Rodgers of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry comments, “This is the sort of data that historians of antiquity drool over.” Therefore, Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 testify that he believed and incorporated the message of the empty tomb, and they also demonstrate that the earliest creed could not have been “a late legendary development.”

39 N. T. Wright, The Resurrection of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God) (London: SPCK, 2003) 3:321, see also n. 21. Craig said, “Second, the expression ‘on the third day’ implies the empty tomb. Since no one actually saw Jesus rise from the dead, why did the early disciples proclaim that he had been raised ‘on the third day’? The most likely answer is that it was on the third day that the women discovered the tomb of Jesus empty; and so naturally, the resurrection itself came to be dated on that day. In this case, the expression ‘on the third day’ is a time-indicator pointing to the discovery of the empty tomb” (Reasonable Faith, 274).

40 The date one picks depends upon how one dates Jesus’ death. See Harold W. Hohner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 37.

41 Habermas and Licona, Case for the Resurrection of Jesus, 52–53, see also n. 25. See also Craig, The Son Rises, 47–51; and, Habermas, Historical Jesus, 29–30, 143–44.

42 Habermas and Licona, Case for the Resurrection of Jesus, 53.

43 Craig, Reasonable Faith, 274.
“The Empty Tomb Story Is Part of Mark’s Source Material and Is Therefore Very Old.”

If one considers Mark’s source (perhaps Peter) to be early, the inclusion of the empty tomb at the end of Mark’s Gospel that appears to be grammatically and linguistically linked is significant. If one considers Caiaphas’ occupation from AD 18-37, Mark’s source of information comes within only seven years of Jesus’ death. Why would anyone circulate a story of a buried man as opposed to an empty tomb? They would not. Hence this strongly indicates the validity of an empty tomb.


Contrasting Paul’s term “on the third day” (1 Cor 15:3, NASB) are the women who found the empty tomb “on the first day of the week” (Mark 16:2). Since Paul’s “on the third day” creedal statement is accepted to be one of the earliest repeated credos by the church, it seems that if Mark’s account was late and legendary, promoters would want to eliminate any contradictions with these statements. Mark’s creedal statement “on the first day of the week” is perhaps earlier than that of Paul’s, thereby removing any doubt of the authenticity of the empty tomb account.

“The Story Is Simple and Lacks Legendary Development.”

Other than including or excluding various small details because of the Gospel writers’ different perspectives, the four Gospel accounts of Jesus’ burial agree and record a simple and straightforward testimony (Matt 27:57—28:8; Mark 15:42—16:8; Luke 23:50—24:10; John 19:38—20:8). By contrast, the Gnostic Gospel of Peter has embellishments that are obviously legendary; it describes scribes, elders, Pharisees, a number of soldiers, and a huge crowd witnessing “a loud voice in heaven, . . . the heavens opened, . . . two men come down from there in a great brightness and draw night to the sepulcher. That stone . . . started of itself to roll . . . both the young men entered in. . . . And . . . three men come out from the sepulcher, and two of them sustaining the other, and the cross following them, and the heads of the two reaching to heaven, but that of him who was led of them by the hand overpassing the heavens. And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, ‘Hast thou preached to them that sleep?’ and from the cross there was heard the answer, ‘Yea’” (The Gospel of Peter

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44 Craig, The Son Rises, 51–52; Craig, Reasonable Faith, 274–75.
45 Craig, Reasonable Faith, 275.
Death before Resurrection


“The Tomb Was Discovered Empty by Women.”

Women were the first to witness the empty tomb (Matt 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–10; John 20:1–8), yet in Jewish society women were not considered credible witnesses.

But let not a single witness be credited; but three, or two at the least, and those such whose testimony is confirmed by their good lives. But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the lewdery and boldness of their sex, nor let servants be admitted to give testimony on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment. But if anyone be believed to have borne false witness, let him, when he is convicted, suffer all the very same punishments which he against whom he bore witness was to have suffered (Josephus, Antiquities 4.219 [4.8.15.219]).

It is not possible to have a world without either males or females, but happy is the one whose children are males, and woe for him whose children are females (Talmud, bPesahim 65a [5.10.10.1]).

This is the governing principle: Any evidence that a woman is not valid [to offer], also they are not valid [to offer]. Thus any evidence that a woman is valid [to offer], also they are valid [to offer]. Said Rab Ashi, “This is to say that a person who, by their [that is, Rabbinical] standards, is a robber is valid to offer testimony [normally allowed] of a woman” (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 22a [1:8]).

As Rosh Hashanah’s statement demonstrates, the witness of a woman was viewed as no more reliable than that of a thief. Perhaps this provides understanding as to why the Jewish disciples did not immediately

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47 Craig, Reasonable Faith, 275–76.
48 Accordance 7.4 electronic volume: Josephus, Works.
49 Accordance 7.4 electronic volume: Neusner, Babylonian Talmud.
believe the women’s witness of the empty tomb.50 “And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11). Romans too shared contempt toward women. “Whereas men and women hitherto always sat together, Augustus confined women to the back rows even at gladiatorial shows: the only ones exempt from this rule being the Vestal Virgins, for whom separate accommodation was provided.”51

Therefore, if one were to invent the account of the empty tomb, women would not be the best witnesses to use. Why would someone record the most incredible event in history and risk the chance of embarrassment by using questionable witnesses to verify it? Hence Habermas concluded:

If the Gospel writers had originated the story of the empty tomb, it seems far more likely that they would have depicted men discovering its vacancy and being the first to see the risen Jesus. Why would they not list the male disciples Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and avoid the female issue altogether? If the account of the empty tomb had been invented, it would most likely not have listed the women as the primary witnesses, since in that day a woman’s testimony was not nearly as credible as a man’s. Thus the empty tomb appears to be historically credible in light of the principle of embarrassment.52

“The Disciples Could Not Have Preached the Resurrection in Jerusalem Had the Tomb Not Been Empty.”

If the tomb were not empty, a brief stroll to the Jerusalem tomb would have resolved the issue and would have silenced the disciples once for all. However, since no one produced a corpse, the preaching of the disciples was clearly based upon the fact that Jesus’ tomb was empty.

“The Earliest Jewish Propaganda against the Christians Presupposes the Empty Tomb.”

An early skeptic’s attempt to refute the empty tomb appears in Matthew 28:11–15.

52 Habermas and Licona, Case for the Resurrection of Jesus, 73 (italics in original). See also, Craig, The Son Rises, 77–78.
Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.” So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

By the last phrase, “This saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day,” Matthew recorded an effort in his day to try to refute the physical resurrection of Jesus. In the zealous attempt, however, of those who tried to refute the physical resurrection of Jesus, they did not deny the empty tomb because they admitted, “His disciples came at night and stole Him away.” They could not have it both ways: an empty tomb and a non-resurrected Jesus. “The Jewish propaganda did not deny the empty tomb, but instead entangled itself in a hopeless series of absurdities trying to explain it away. In other words, the Jewish propaganda that the disciples stole the body presupposes that the body was missing. Thus, the Jewish propaganda itself shows that the tomb was empty.”53

Furthermore, this theory has many problems. Could the disciples have overpowered Roman guards and stolen the body? Not a chance. Just hours before, they were all scared and abandoned Jesus; and the most fearless, Peter, became fearful and denied Him three times (Mark 14:30, 47 [John 18:10], 50–51, 66–72). In Additionally, how could the guards know who took the body since they were sleeping? The best they could do was say, “Someone stole the body?” Even believing this is problematic. How can anyone sleep through the removal of a rock covering the tomb heavy enough that took a number of men to move? Assuming the thieves were successful, the guards would never claim such a thing because by Roman law they would deserve the death penalty for falling asleep and allowing grave robbers to steal a body on their watch.54

Without answers to all these eight reasons that give attestation to an empty tomb, one must continue to believe that Jesus of Nazareth rose bodily, not spiritually, as the Jesus Family Tomb and the Lost Tomb of Jesus advocates claim.

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53 Craig, Reasonable Faith, 277.
CONCLUSION

Jesus was not casually tortured. He underwent such a severe mode of torture and execution that it would have been impossible for Him to have survived the cross. The biblical records verify Jesus’ death on the cross, and extrabiblical sources do so also. Josephus, Cicero, Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Mara Bar-Serapion, the Talmud, and even critical scholars, all testify regarding Jesus’ death.

Eight good reasons demonstrate that the tomb was empty. The tomb was not empty because Jesus did not die, or because the disciples stole the body. Such theories create more problems than they solve. Indeed, Craig noted that New Testament critical scholar and resurrection researcher, Jacob Kremer provided names of twenty-eight scholars (including his) who acknowledge the empty tomb:

    Blank, Blinzler, Bode, von Campenhausen, Delorme, Dhanis, Grundmann, Hengel, Lehmann, Léon-Duffour, Lichtenstein, Manek, Martini, Mussner, Nauck, Rengstorff, Ruckstuhl, Schenke, Schmitt, Shubert, Schweizer, Seidensticker, Strobel, Stuhlmacker, Trilling, Vögtle, and Wilckens.’ [He adds] I can think of at least sixteen more that he failed to mention: Benoit, Brown, Clark, Dunn, Ellis, Gundry, Hooke, Jeremias, Klappert, Ladd, Lane, Marshall, Moule, Perry, Robinson, and Schnackenburg. Perhaps most amazing of all is that even two Jewish scholars, Lapide and Vermes, have declared themselves convinced on the basis of the evidence that Jesus’ tomb was empty.55

The fact is that Jesus died, and the tomb was empty because He rose physically from the dead, which is verifiable by a number of witnesses and various accounts.

55 Craig, Reasonable Faith, 277–78.
Figure 4. Feet of the Crucified
BOOK REVIEWS


Real Marriage uses the background of the Driscolls’ own marriage—with its numerous struggles—to provide marital advice on a number of topics such as friendship, respect, submission, sin, repentance, and forgiveness. These subjects are addressed in the first section of the book and, essentially, the authors offer no unique insights. The Driscolls do believe in the headship of the husband and submission of the wife but also believe in mutual submission as a result of their misunderstanding of Ephesians 5:21 (p. 64). They also wrongly teach that providing for the family is man’s curse (p. 52), that 1 Peter 3:7 addresses men being better physical fighters than women, and they begin the book with a non-contextual quotation of Revelation 21:5 (p. 3). While much of their advice is biblical, a good portion is opinion based on either statistics or pop psychology; for example, love languages and stereotypical categories (pp. 42-64), such as naming one’s troubled past to be healed (p. 124), selfishness beginning in childhood (p. 158) rather than part of one’s fallen nature, and, most disturbing, “healing of memories” (pp. 127-34, 152). Mark also shows evidence of being influenced by spiritual formation teachings (p. 209). The best chapter in the book, in this reviewer’s opinion, is the second on friendship in marriage, although its title is the suggestive “Friends with Benefits,” which in secular usage simply means sex between uncommitted friends. The authors are also correct by warning readers to guard their hearts rather than following them (p. 30) and they give good teaching with regard to repentance and forgiveness (pp. 88-100) saying “bitter people have a filter through which everything (past, present and future) is viewed negatively” (p. 100).

Known as a “shock-jock,” Mark was relatively benign throughout the book, although he joked at Catholic priests who “wear dresses” (pp. 9-10), and Grace (his wife) reverted to “gutter language” once and then quickly explained herself (p. 76). The most disturbing aspect of Part I, and often ignored by his fans, is the frequency in which God supposedly speaks to Mark, revealing important information. He relayed four direct revelations from God to himself, and Grace added another two (pp. 8, 11-12, 15, 25, 128). In the first, God told him to marry Grace, preach the Bible, train men, and plant churches. In the most disturbing vision, God showed him—in vivid description—a sexual act that Grace performed with another
man prior to their marriage (pp. 11-12). In short, Driscoll is on the extreme end of those claiming to be a new Calvinist—those who are Calvinistic in theology but are open to charismatic gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

However, no one is reading this book for Driscoll’s insights on marriage in general; they want to read what he has to say about sex, which is the content of Part II. Driscoll believes that most teaching on sex inside the church is inadequate and most outside is perverted (p. xiv), and if people do not receive answers about their sex questions from pastors and parents, they will find them in dark, depraved places (p. 177). It is for this reason that Driscoll preached through the Song of Solomon during the second year of his pastorate and again in 2007 (p. 14), and it is also the reason for this book and for the “Real Marriage Conferences” which he holds throughout the world.

The Driscolls believe that most people perceive sex as either gross or as god (pp. 110-22), rather than as a gift. They teach that only by regarding sex as a god that is worshipped is it possible to make sense of the porno plague (p. 112); for this reason, an entire chapter is devoted to pornography (pp. 139-55). While there is some helpful information here it deals far too much on statistics (most of which are old and dated) and the supposed physical, chemical, and biological forces behind porn addictions. Not only can these theories not be proven or trusted, the real concern should be what God’s Word says with regard to pornography. A few scriptural passages are provided but there is no mention of Ephesians 4 (and similar texts), which instructs believers how to avoid sin, “put on” righteousness, and be renewed in their minds. The authors even recommend that people journal their “entire sexual history, including everything you have ever seen, done, and had done to you sexually” (p. 152), which corresponds well with their adherence to the pop psychological theory of “healing of memories,” but, in fact, would begin a process for more deeply engraining sinful thoughts into the minds of people (this is the most disappointing chapter in the book).

The opposite of viewing sex as god is viewing sex as gross, which results from poor education and instruction, and/or sexual abuse (pp. 114-18). Here the Driscolls challenge some of the misconceptions taught in the church throughout the ages and then devoted chapter seven to sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is a real and horrible sin that has scarred the lives of many, yet, whatever helps this chapter may have provided are marred by several things. First, the Driscolls seem to categorize all sinful encounters by a woman into the sexual abuse category, which includes consensual sex (pp. 133-35). Secondly, Grace told readers correctly that they could be cleansed from all sins because of Christ’s death (p. 136), yet her cleansing
involved applying their very unbiblical advice of recalling all sexual sins in order that those memories might be healed. Grace even asked “the Holy Spirit to restore any memories that need to be brought into the light so I could be cleansed and remade as a child of God” (p. 127). She then journaled everything God brought to her memory about instances of verbal and sexual abuse, sin, fears, and life (p. 133). At this point, she recalled all sorts of situations including jokes, innuendos, and inappropriate talk. While there are absolutely no biblical instructions to recall and repeat forgotten sins in order to be healed of them, there is ample encouragement to do so in secular—especially Freudian—psychology that the Driscolls obviously believe (p. 131). Finally, Grace joined a support group of abused women in which she talked “through the years of sin against me and sin I committed against others in response” (pp. 127-28). While 12-step programs are popular in churches today, one will never find in Scripture the encouragement to develop groups for fellowship or sharing centered on specific sins (this is another missed opportunity to communicate the light of God’s truth on a tragic situation that all too many have to encounter).

The Driscolls rightly see sex neither as a god nor as gross but as a gift from God to be enjoyed within marriage. The questions the authors want to address have to do with the types of sexual activity that is permissible for married couples. The final section of the book has resulted in tremendous attention, and has propelled Real Marriage to the top of the New York Times bestseller list. Mark engaged his readers in chapter 9 with a combination of good biblical truths (e.g. “marriage is for our holiness before our happiness,” p. 159), with psychological miscues (e.g. “selfishness begins in childhood,” p. 151, rather than the fact that one is born selfish). Mark also believes in “testosterone—induced depressions,” which can be cured with more frequent sex (p. 164); this unprovable theory will no doubt create many discussions between couples. Some practical and mostly helpful advice is also offered (pp. 163-69). Biblically, Mark based most of his views on the Song of Solomon (pp. 170-76), and, while he was faithful to much of the book, he tended to read into the text what he wanted to find, such as oral sex (pp. 119, 185-87) and the unfounded theory that the Shulammite was Solomon’s first wife (p. 174).

With the preliminaries addressed, Mark launched into chapter ten entitled “Can We_______?” The premise he used for discussing sexual acts graphically is the fact that the apostle Paul addressed such issues to the believers at Corinth, who lived amidst the sexually charged culture of their city. What Driscoll misses is that while Paul dealt clearly and boldly with the sexual sins both without and within the New Testament church, he avoided graphic specifics. He gave timeless teachings on purity and marital
relations (1 Cor 6-8; 1 Thess 4) without titillating details. Nevertheless, Driscoll developed three questions from 1 Corinthians 6:12 to guide his readers toward knowing what sexual behavior is allowed between married couples: Is it lawful (or biblically permitted)? Is it helpful (to enhance one of the God-given reasons for sex)? and, is it enslaving? The questions are good to answer and will help couples think; nevertheless, Driscoll’s thoughts are somewhat marred once again by returning to psychology and a study on so-called “sexual-addition” (pp. 179-84).

Driscoll then applied his three questions to a number of sexual acts: masturbation (pp. 181-84, relying heavily on psychology and statistics), oral sex (pp. 185-87, relying heavily on questionable interpretations of the Song of Solomon), anal sex (pp. 187-89), menstrual sex (pp. 189-90), role-playing (pp. 192-93), sex toys (p. 193), birth control (194-98), cosmetic surgery (pp. 198-200), cybersex (p. 200), sexual medication (p. 201), and marital sexual assault (pp. 201-03). Driscoll believes all but the last sexual related action passes the first test and passes the second and third tests under certain circumstances. Of course, Driscoll has presented his personal opinions, primarily, but for some reason people want to hear what Driscoll has to say.

Most revealing is an advertisement at the end of the book (p. 255) promoting Driscoll’s new website. The presenting blurb reads, “Have questions? Pastor Mark has answers.” Give that some thought. Most Christian leaders might have claimed that the Bible has answers and they will help guide their readers to those answers, but Driscoll makes the claim that he has the answers. Nevertheless, this describes, at least in part, what the reader is given in Real Marriage—the opinion of the authors. There is, in fact, some helpful biblical teaching, but to assess this the reader must disregard and/or wade through psychobabble, statistics, poorly exegeted Scripture, and personal opinion. Consequently, Real Marriage is more harmful than helpful. A verse found in Jeremiah should be pondered, when one reads books such as this one: “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority, and my people love it so. But what will you do at the end of it?” (5:31). The assessment here is not to regard Driscoll as being in the same category as these false teachers of Jeremiah’s time but it is interesting to note how the Old Testament people were willing to gravitate toward those who spoke on their authority. When leaders do this, no matter how confident they seem, one must recognize that what they speak is their own opinion, not necessarily God’s. All such opinions need to be evaluated by Scripture before accepting them.

Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel

In this book, Duane Day attempted to answer the question, “What happened to the size and influence of the ‘Mainline Churches’?” Day limited the term “Mainline Church” to the following groups: Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, the United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, American Baptists, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (p. 14, note 1). The churches included on this list reflect the author’s presuppositions and prejudices. One can easily discern that Day’s own fundamental commitments would never allow him to discern the real answer to his own question. Like all the churches that Day called “mainline,” his book, God’s Establishment, presupposes a theology that minimizes the teaching of Scripture, accepts as authoritative the traditions of men, and also espouses loyalty to human philosophies over devotion to God’s Word. These are very harsh charges, but the entire book strongly reflects all these prejudices. Holding to these presuppositions will never allow someone to admit the truth about why these groups continue to lose the prestige that they once may have had.

An instance of the first charge (minimizing the teaching of Scripture) can be found in Day’s statements with regard to the text of the Bible. He accepted as normal that “mainline” groups accept the Graf-Wellhausen view of the writings of Moses, in addition to other unsupported theories of the writing of the biblical text (pp. 142-43). He also asserted that those whom he called “fundamentalist and evangelical” churches tend to be uncomfortable with and do not accept this view. He even went so far as to state that this might be a place where it would be very difficult to share fellowship or ministry burdens with one another (p. 141). While it is remarkably clear that the teaching of the Bible is that Scripture is complete and has no errors in the original manuscripts (Ps 119, 2 Tim 3:16, etc.), yet Day remained entirely comfortable with the “mainline churches” teaching alternate and unbiblical views. Day specifically affirmed that the biblical view is a simplistic approach that only caters well to an uneducated audience (p. 73).

Day’s assertion is clearly an area where his own prejudices against Scripture prevent him from understanding why the “mainline churches” are not continuing to grow as they have in the past. Their rejection of Scripture was based upon theories that are now being proven insufficient and untrue. For example, the Q-Document theory (specifically mentioned on pp. 142-43) has never had any physical evidence supporting it; in fact, the physical remains of the manuscripts clearly teach the accuracy of the
current text of the New Testament. Nevertheless, this flawed thesis is still taught and believed in the churches that Day referenced in his book. The same is true of the Graf-Wellhausen theory; it has been shown to be unsupportable and is continually losing adherents, yet it still part of the preferred education of the “mainline churches.” Nevertheless, Day claimed that the “mainline” church is more complete and nuanced than the groups whose followers he derided as “little concerned with theological propositions” (p. 73).

The second accusation mentioned previously was Day’s acceptance of the traditions of men as valid teaching in an assembly of believers. Day’s prejudice is demonstrated in the choices he made for those he classified together as churches in competition with the so-called “mainline.” Day listed everything from dispensationalists (whom he claimed teach a position with little Scriptural support, pp. 52-53), to those whom he called “Modern Day Gnostics” (like Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons, pp. 85-99), as the Christian groups growing in competition with the “mainline.” His grouping could only be the product of someone who believes that all traditions that claim the title of Christian have equally valid claims of truth. At the very end of his book, this presupposition led Day to remark, “Respectfully, let us ask God to grant the gift of humility to all those who claim the name of Christ, that we may, learning from one another, share mission and ministry” (p. 178).

Accepting all traditions that claim to be Christian as valid is another presupposition that does not allow Day to discern the true answer to his question: that growth in numbers or influence in an assembly means little to God (He has no need for numbers). Instead, God’s goal is that His truth is accurately proclaimed among His people and by this proclamation God receives all the glory at all times. According to Day, the presupposed goal is a human tradition being proclaimed to large numbers, and he neither has concern nor even regard for asking what God’s goal actually is.

The final accusation made against the ability of this book to answer the stated question was Day’s presupposition that one must have a greater loyalty to a human philosophy than to God’s truth. Day’s presupposition is evident by his continual references to human educational systems as vital to perceiving the real truth. His view of the teaching of creation or evolution is an excellent example of this prejudice. He said that there are some who understand the Bible so literally that they say that the universe was created in seven days, some of them even saying it was about 6000 years ago; set against them are those who are persuaded by science that humanity evolved slowly over time (pp. 112-13). Day then let his readers know that not all Christian groups are so literal so as to actually believe in
a “Seven Day Creation;” many in the mainline are able to create a model
where they can combine the two together and so present a more accurate
depiction of the truth (p. 114). Day’s approach seems very much like a
Hegelian dialectic style of philosophy being used to find the truth; this very
worldly philosophy is clearly contrary to the certain teaching of Scripture
concerning God’s Word being completely accurate in all it affirms.

The last accusation is perhaps the strongest example of Day
allowing a worldly presupposition to guide him to the reason for the
diminishing of vitality in the “mainline churches.” It seems likely that the
reason for their loss of strength is their acceptance of this, or other, false
views of finding truth. It is clear from Scripture that faith pleases God,
particularly when human reasoning sees no possible way that God could
accomplish what He says. The “mainline churches” have abandoned any
view of biblical faith, and hence they lose the vitality that God gives to
those who truly follow Him and seek His truth. The statement herein does
not intend to communicate that there is not a counterfeit of this vitality
found in many of the false religions, like Mormonism or Islam, but what
this reviewer is communicating is that Day’s presuppositions prevent him
from actually answering his own question, making it impossible to
recommend this book.

Cliff Allcorn, senior pastor, Rim of the World Community Church

What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice,
Shalom and the Great Commission by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert.
Wheaton: Crossway, 2011. 283 pp., paper, $10.00.

The authors’ contention is that to determine the mission of the church “is
the most confusing, most discussed, most energizing, and most potentially
divisive issue in the evangelical church today” (p. 25). Scot McKnight
claimed that recent interest in social justice, or what he called missional,
“represents the biggest shift in evangelicalism in the last century” (p. 142).
The assessment of this reviewer is that the contention of DeYoung and
Gilbert is correct. Much energy has been devoted to promoting the social
agenda, and a good book challenging missional thinking—drawing
Christians to Scripture to carefully analyze such thinking—was needed.
DeYoung and Gilbert’s work is that book; it is well done, carefully
researched, scripturally based and extremely practical; it is also written by
the right men because both DeYoung and Gilbert are highly respected by
the young, Reformed, and restless crowd that is most likely to accept the
missional agenda without much reflection. If nothing else, What Is the
Mission of the Church? should give evangelical Christians reasons to pause and reconsider their direction.

Specifically, the authors addressed whether the "mission of the church is discipleship or good deeds or both" (p. 16). They also wanted to consider the role of the church in pursuing social justice and building the kingdom of God on earth (p. 16). Their thesis, often stated and defended throughout, is that the church’s mission “is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey His commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father” (p. 62) (see also pp. 231-39; 241-42; 245-47). They did not want to be misunderstood to say that Christians should be indifferent to suffering in the world (pp. 22-23), just that alleviation of suffering is not the mandate for the church—making disciples is.

Having said this, DeYoung and Gilbert know they are writing contrary to recent and popular evangelical thinking. The authors responded to emergent leaders, such as Brian McLaren, who frame the church’s mission in purely social terms; nevertheless, the author’s response is equally applicable to mainstream evangelicals who are adopting much the same perspective. The difference so far is that some of these mainstream thinkers, such as Scot McKnight and Christopher Wright, have not abandoned the Great Commission; rather, they merely add the social schema and elevate it to equal status with the Great Commission. John R. W. Stott, an early leader in this approach, wrote, "Evangelism and social action, therefore, are full partners in Christian mission” (p. 54). Although not mentioned in the book, authors from Francis Chan to David Platt would define the mission of the church as including environmental stewardship, poverty relief, digging wells, working for social justice, and providing medical attention to the needy. In other words, the mission of the church is being broadened far beyond the Great Commission. DeYoung and Gilbert argue that believers should involve themselves in social issues by virtue of their love for their neighbors, but there is nothing particularly Christian regarding humanitarian work (pp. 231-39). Christians can work with non-Christians in response to social concerns, and they should, but they should not confuse this action with the unique mission of the church: to proclaim the gospel and make disciples (pp. 224-29). "We are not called,” they write, “to bring a broken planet back to its created glory. But we are to call broken people back to the creator” (p. 248).

DeYoung and Gilbert exhausted much of their work in examining and challenging the missional (a term they use but never really define, p. 25) mindset in light of Scripture. For example, they critique Christopher
Wright's teaching on Genesis 12 (pp. 30-34) and the Exodus (pp. 34-36), missional views of Luke 4:16-21, false uses of "Shalom" (pp. 52-53, 195-203) and incarnationism (pp. 54-58), and the erroneous idea that our actions will inaugurate the kingdom (pp. 27-35, 197). Specifically, they analyzed favorite biblical texts that missional leaders use in their arguments.

Leviticus 19:9-18 (pp. 143-47)
Leviticus 25 (pp. 147-53)
Isaiah 1 (pp. 153-55)
Isaiah 58 (pp. 155-56)
Jeremiah 22 (pp. 156-58—good summary)
Amos 5 (pp. 158-59)
Micah 6:8 (pp. 159-61)
Matthew 25:31-46 (pp. 162-65—although their interpretation ignores context)
Luke 10:25-37 (pp. 165-66)
Luke 16:19-31 (pp. 166-67)
2 Corinthians 8-9 (pp. 168-70)
James 1, 2, 5 (pp. 170-71)

Of a more positive nature, the authors provided biblical understanding concerning dealing with the poor (pp. 175-77; 186-92), owning possessions (pp. 177-79), rejecting guilt motivations that are often used (pp. 192-93), the Cultural Mandate (pp. 208-213), continuity issues between the present and new heavens and earth (pp. 213-19), the importance of hell in one's understanding of mission (pp. 244-45), and the value of the church realizing that it is a "holy huddle" (p. 264). They also traced God's commands for social involvement through the Scriptures and determined that the focus of such concern is upon the covenantal people not society at large (pp. 184-86). In the Book of Acts, for instance, one finds no examples of societal renewal on the part of the disciples (p. 49).

The authors are definitely covenental in their theology, which affects some of their thinking. For example, they accept George Ladd's "already, not yet" understanding of the kingdom (pp. 49, 99, 112, 117-18, 124-25, 131-32), Jesus is presently on David's throne (pp. 85-87), confuse the millennium with the eternal kingdom (pp. 88-123), strangely believe that when John proclaimed the kingdom was near that is what he meant, but when Jesus did the same He meant the kingdom was actually here (p. 95), Christians are the Israel of God (p. 201), and the present heaven and earth will not be destroyed but renewed (pp. 213-19). While this reviewer personally disagrees with each of these positions none of them
appreciatively diminishes the argument of the book, which is that the church’s unique mission is the Great Commission not the Cultural Mandate to fix the planet. *What Is the Mission of the Church?* is a valuable book. I hope many well-meaning missional leaning believers will read it and consider its thesis. In light of the popularity of the social agenda, and a present confusion regarding the mission of the church, all pastors and Christian leaders are encouraged to read this work.

**Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel**


The _Ancient Christian Devotional_ is a companion to the massive _Ancient Christian Commentary_ series (both series are edited by Thomas Oden). The _Devotional_ apparently draws most, if not all, of its material from the commentary, both of which are designed to provide insights into the riches of church history and “help us to read holy writings with ancient eyes” (p. 7). The _Devotional_ offers fifty-two weeks of readings, which follow the liturgical year. The reading for each week is structured around the following elements: theme, opening prayer, reading, Psalm of response, reflection from the church fathers and a closing prayer. The book is well documented and includes an appendix of brief biographical sketches of those quoted in the volume. Most often quoted are Augustine, Chrysostom, Ambrosiaster, Ambrose, Cyril of Alexandria, Bede, Jerome, and Origen.

There are plenty of correct and helpful thoughts in the _Ancient Christian Devotional_ but few that are profound or worth wading through this volume. Unfortunately, the reader will also be introduced to the beginning sources of false teaching that ultimately can develop into complete doctrinal error. Only two of those errors will be mentioned. The first error is baptismal regeneration (e.g. 76, 77, 79, 87, 110, 141, 150, 152, 178, 183, 253). Ambrosiaster wrote, “Therefore, baptism is the death of sin so that a new birth might follow” (p. 152).

Perhaps more importantly is the constant use of the allegorizing method of interpretation that ultimately distorted the meaning of Scripture beyond recognition (e.g. 40, 67, 77, 121, 146, 161, 165-66, 167, 170-77, 181, 183, 243, 256). To illustrate this point, a couple examples will be provided concerning Jacob’s ladder. Chromatius offered the following interpretation (pp. 170-71):
Through the resurrection of Christ the way was opened. Therefore with good reason the patriarch Jacob relates that he had seen in that place a ladder whose end reached heaven and that the Lord leaned on it. The ladder fixed to the ground and reaching heaven is the cross of Christ, through which the access to heaven is granted to us, because it actually leads us to heaven. On this ladder different steps of virtue are set through which we rise toward heaven: faith, justice, chastity, holiness, patience, piety and all the other virtues are the steps of this ladder. If we faithfully climb them, we will undoubtedly reach heaven. And therefore we know well that the ladder is the symbol of the cross of Christ. As, in fact, the steps are set between two uprights, so the cross of Christ is placed between the two Testaments and keeps in itself the steps of the heavenly precepts, through which we climb to heaven.

Caesarius added (p. 171):

Blessed Isaac, as we said, sending his son away was a type of God the Father; Jacob who was sent signified Christ our Lord. The stone that he had at his head and anointed with oil also represented the Lord our Savior. The ladder touching heaven prefigured the cross; the Lord leaning on the ladder is shown to be Christ fastened to the cross. The angels ascending and descending on it are understood to be the apostles, apostolic men and all doctors of the church. They ascend by preaching perfect truths to the just; they descend by telling the young and ignorant what they can understand. . . .

Another example—written by Bede—is with regard to the empty tomb: "Mystically the rolling away of the stone implies the disclosure of the sacraments, which were formerly hidden and closed up by the letter of the law" (p. 67). Through this method of interpretation, the early church was eventually led astray, and sadly, it is the intent of the editors and publishers of both the Ancient Christian Devotional and the Ancient Christian Commentary to reintroduce this perverted form of hermeneutics to the modern church.

Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel

Bruce Demarest, longtime professor of theology and spiritual formation at Denver Seminary, offered this book as a polemic for what is commonly called spiritual formation, a method of spiritual development created and promoted for centuries within Roman Catholicism. Demarest assured his readers repeatedly that he is evangelical in doctrine (see p. 10), but discovered something lacking in his life, which his theology could not address. He similarly assumed that those reading this book have a similar need in their souls (pp. 7, 17, 22). Due to the author’s perceived lack of spirituality, he decided to participate in a six-week residential program at the Renewal Center at the Roman Catholic Benedictine Abby in Pecos, New Mexico (pp. 23-24). There he was instructed: “for centuries Christians understood what it meant to ‘live by the Spirit’ . . . [but today evangelicals] are not taught how to find the growing edge of our souls—where we hunger for God” (pp. 17-18; see pp. 23, 167). In order to solve this problem, he now believes that help can be found when believers “turn to our Christian past—to men and women who understood how the soul finds satisfaction as we grow in God, and how His Spirit finds a more ready home in us” (p. 23). By this admonition, Demarest does not mean turning to Jesus or the Apostles or the New Testament Scriptures, but to the Catholic mystics and contemplatives. Specifically, he likes (among others) John of the Cross, Francis of Assisi, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, and various desert fathers and mothers. Among modern mystics he promoted: Richard Foster, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Morton Kelsey, and Brennan Manning.

Demarest believes the Catholic contemplatives discovered a method of sanctification called “spiritual formation,” which the author defined as “a form of discipleship we are rediscovering today . . . an ancient ministry of the church, concerned with the ‘forming’ or ‘shaping’ of a believer’s character and actions into the likeness of Christ” (p. 23). Spiritual formation has long been practiced among Catholic and Orthodox mystics, hermits, and within monastic settings, but more recently was introduced and popularized among Protestants mainly by Richard Foster. Demarest admitted that it was quite a challenge, given his theological pedigree, to embrace spiritual formation, but at the retreat he was taught to move beyond Scripture and read the mystics (pp. 26-27). He soon began agreeing with much of what he read (p. 28) and now believes there is much to learn from Catholics (pp. 29-30). Despite huge doctrinal differences that he later called secondary (p. 75), he decided he “wanted to reconnect with
the ancient wisdom of the church” (p. 30). Once he “got past (his) old prejudices and misunderstandings, [he] accepted more than [he] rejected” of the Catholic traditions and beliefs (p. 35). Demarest, unlike many others who progress this far in their acceptance of Catholicism’s spiritual formation, does not want to cease being an evangelical. He wants instead to merge the three major traditions of intellectualism of the West, mysticism of the East and relationalism of the tribal people worldwide (p 85), choosing the better part from each tradition (p. 89). Additionally, he is open to Richard Foster and Foster’s Renovaré, which combines six Christian traditions: contemplative, holiness, charismatic, social justice, evangelical, and incarnational (pp. 76, 262-64). As would be expected, Demarest is strongly critical of only one tradition: conservative evangelicals (such as Michael Horton – pp. 75, 79) who claim, as Demarest perceived, “I alone have the truth” (p. 87).

The author believes Protestantism has reduced God to a theological idea and what is needed is an experience of God that the “ancient spiritual masters” can provide (p. 96). Therefore, “the goal for Christian spirituality is not information, it is transformation into the likeness of Christ” (p. 96). With this statement, one may strongly agree, the issue is how does such a transformation occur? The answer to this question is where this reviewer would encourage rejecting the message of Satisfy your Soul. Rather than directing individuals to the New Testament teachings, examples, and practices, Demarest directed his readers to the ancient contemplatives and Roman Catholic church traditions. While he occasionally referenced Scripture to attempt to prove his point, he did a remarkably distressing work of exegesis, especially considering he is a professor of theology (see pp. 97, 101, 104, 127-29, 135, 167, 168-69.) Clearly, the author’s basis of authority is not the Word of God but the “spiritual masters” from the Catholic mystical tradition.

Demarest described Christian mysticism as “the believer’s unmediated experience of God, ministered to the heart by the Holy Spirit which facilitates Christ-like character and empowers for kingdom service” (p. 114). Initially, this sounds much like an acceptable definition of discipleship, but the key is found in the words “unmediated experience.” The mystic seeks an experience directly with God, that is, he or she makes an attempt to avoid any difficulties or obstacles with God that would include the mind, Bible study, rational prayer, or the people of God. Union with God is the ultimate goal of all mysticism, of any religious persuasion, and that union is individualistic, indescribable, and not subject to the senses.

How does one achieve such an experience? Answering this question is where the spiritual disciplines are thought to be relevant.
Catholic mystics (Demarest’s “spiritual masters”) invented numerous disciplines in which they believed aided in accomplishing the unmediated union that they sought. The primary discipline, without which there would be no Christian mysticism, is contemplation. At this point, it is important to distinguish contemplation from meditation. Demarest defined meditation as “the art of turning our attention from the things of the world to the things of God” (p. 164). The definition is consistent with the biblical teaching and desire of God’s people to meditate upon the Word and upon the Lord Himself (Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2; 19:14; 119:15, 24, 27). However, Demarest distinguished meditation from contemplation, which he described as “turning our attention from the things of God to attend to God Himself” (p. 164). By this he meant, “Contemplation is the practice of focusing our inmost being by fixing the eyes of the inner man on God Himself”? The answer is not through the rational mind or traditional study of Scriptures, but through contemplative approaches to prayer and Scripture never found or taught in God’s Word.

Contemplative prayer may have various names including “centering prayer,” “prayer of the heart,” “prayer of simplicity,” “entering prayer” and “breath prayer” (p. 159). Fundamental to the method is recitation of a mantra or, as Demarest said, “Lovingly reciting a biblical word or phrase” (p. 160). Some, such as Henri Nouwen, suggest repeating this word or phrase for as long as 20 minutes to “create an inner stillness and thus listen to the voice of God” (p. 160). Demarest admitted that practitioners of Transcendental Meditation use the same basic techniques but for different purposes (p. 161); it is true that Transcendental Meditation seeks an altered state of consciousness, while the Christian mystic is seeking an indescribable experience with God. However, both in practice and in experience, contemplative prayer has far more in common with Transcendental Meditation than biblical Christianity.

Speaking of practice, those entering into centering prayer begin with quieting their hearts through use of a mantra (the “Jesus Prayer” is a popular mantra used by many, p. 160), which is followed by resting in the Lord, then listening to His voice, and attempting to sense His presence (p. 163). As Thomas Merton said, “[contemplation concerns the] secret and obscure promptings of the Spirit of God” (p. 157). As these techniques are not found in the Bible, Demarest attempted to support contemplative prayer through testimonies of past practitioners (pp. 164-67); this section is followed by a short, piteous attempt at finding a biblical base from such accounts as Elijah’s “still small voice” and a translation of Colossians 3:1-2
from *The Message*, followed by a quote from Mother Teresa (p. 168). All these attempts fail badly.

The same techniques are applied to Scripture in what the contemplatives have called *lectio divina* (pp. 135-40, 152-53). *Lectio* is not a method of Bible study but rather a contemplative technique for attempting to experience the presence of God in an imaginative way as one reads Scripture. It is important to note that *lectio* is nowhere taught nor does one find allusion to it in the Bible. Demarest also recommended contemplating images and icons (p. 143), and supported use of labyrinths (to a degree) (pp. 178-80), Catholic liturgy (pp. 173-78), use of spiritual directors (pp. 188-218), psychology (pp. 220-54), inner healing techniques (pp. 241-50) and visualization (pp. 250-51).

As Demarest brought *Satisfy Your Soul* to a close, he chose two post-Reformation writers as examples, and the two he chose are most enlightening. He began with the Counter-Reformation nun Teresa of Avila (pp. 269-74) whose “classic” book *Interior Castles* is a virtually incomprehensible description of a mystical fantasy that spiritual formation disciples love. Having read the book, this reviewer seriously doubts that many have any idea what she means as she describes her supposed visions from the Lord (although Demarest diligently attempted to explain them).

Thomas Merton was next (pp. 274-77). Merton was a priest in a Trappist monastery in Kentucky and died in 1968. No modern mystic besides Richard Foster has had more influence on the Spiritual Formation Movement than Merton. His work and promotion of contemplative prayer cannot be overestimated. Nevertheless, Demarest admitted that towards the end of his life, Merton became attracted to Eastern mysticism and believed that Zen meditation and Christian contemplation pursue the same goal (p. 276). Ultimately, he saw no difference between Buddhism and Christianity and once visited the Dalai Lama to “discover truth in dialogue” (p. 276). Demarest disagreed with Merton at this point, but still recommended him as one of the best two post-Reformation writers who can provide believers with spiritual riches (p. 269). What Merton really did was to demonstrate where Christian contemplation—logically and consistently—takes the practitioner: not to biblical Christianity but to a mystical lifestyle not supported by Scripture and very similar to Eastern mysticism.

*Satisfy Your Soul* attempts to lure evangelicals into ancient Catholic and Orthodox contemplative practices in order to draw them closer to God, experience His presence, and hear His voice apart from Scripture. In order to embrace this mystical form of spirituality, Demarest was willing to compromise with every opportunity. Central doctrines such as *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura* were disregarded as secondary. Techniques not found in
the Bible as pathways to spiritual growth were promoted as the true means of knowing God, and heretics, such as Thomas Merton, were seen as reliable spiritual guides. Demarest has abandoned the clear teaching of Scripture in favor of Catholic mysticism. Sadly, in the process, he will influence many undiscerning evangelicals to do likewise.

Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel