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EDITORIAL

Proverbs 30:4 begins a series of rhetorical questions (similar to Job 38–39), with the obvious reply being “God.” Agur considered the immensity of the natural forces, and was amazed when considering that it is God who controls them. Enoch and Elijah ascended into heaven, but none have been known to also descend. Agur’s readers would have regarded the request for a name as an extension of the argument, but it may also be a prophetic intimation of Jesus, the Son of God (cf. John 3:13; Eph 4:9-10). The one who knows the name of the Creator, as revealed through Jesus Christ, is happy and wise to have obtained such internal and intimate knowledge (John 1:14-18; 17:3). The primary emphasis of verses 2-4 is humility, combined with gratitude for what God has revealed, and proper submission to God’s revelation without intruding upon his words.

God’s Word is true and unailing (“tested”), which must not be combined with autonomous pontifications and speculations. Eternal truth is unattainable by one’s own ability and intellect; rather, God alone is the sole infallible source of truth. Not mere parts of God’s Word are infallible, but “every word of God” is reliable. Scripture is perfect and sufficient. All who “take refuge” *behind* God as “a shield” will find protection from the vicissitudes of life (Prov 30:5-6). Agur, therefore, warned against adding to (and therefore misconstruing) the perfection and purity of God’s Word (cf. Deut 12:32; Rev 22:18).

Proverbs 30:2-6 communicates two profound truths regarding Scripture, the Word of God. The *first* verity is the perfection of God’s revelation, and the *second*, is the entire sufficiency of the words, or sayings of God. Treasuring the revelation that God has given is the natural response to its trustworthiness.

Peter J. Goeman’s article demonstrates such cherishing of Scripture, as he not only contributes uniquely to an understanding of Amos 9:11-12 theologically but also textual critically. *Ray M. Wenger’s final article* in his series elucidates the Lukan Olivet Discourse in comparison to the more frequently explicated Matthean text, which is helpful even if one does not agree with all aspects of the proposed chronology. *Tony Garland’s article* causes one to appreciate the authority structure that God established so that local churches find protection from cultural fads, internal distractions, and non-eternal expectations. No person can attain truth by his/her own ability or intellect because God alone is the only infallible source of truth. May each of the articles and book reviews herein cause you to treasure even more the flawless Word of God.

— Ron J. Bigalke, Ph.D.
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THE ROLE OF THE LXX IN JAMES' USE OF AMOS 9:11-12 IN ACTS 15:15-18

Peter J. Goeman

Amos 9:11-12 is a significant passage in Old Testament Greek studies as well as theological studies in the New Testament. There are significant differences between the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Old Greek (LXX)¹ which are noteworthy. Is it possible that the LXX translation is based upon a different *Vorlage*? When James quoted Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:15-18, he appeared to quote the LXX rather than the MT. By doing so, did James affirm that the LXX in Amos 9:11-12 is the original reading, and thus superior to the MT? Conversely, if the MT is the original reading, why did James use the LXX rather than the MT?

The article herein will seek to answer these questions through an exegetical analysis of Amos 9:11-12 based upon a comparison of the LXX and MT. The examination will include a textual critical evaluation of the Greek readings compared with the MT. After having studied Amos 9:11-12 in context, this research will examine how James used Amos 9 in Acts 15.

THE STRUCTURE OF AMOS

The structure of Amos is rather straightforward. Although it is possible to go into further detail with the outline, for the purposes of this study the main structure of Amos will be sufficient. The development of the book focuses mainly upon judgment, both upon Israel's enemies as well as upon Israel itself. The emphasis is reflected in the following outline.²

- I. Oracles of Judgment (1:3—4:13)
 - A. Against the nations (1:3—2:3)

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¹ Septuagintal scholars often make a distinction between the Pentateuch Greek translation (LXX) and the remainder of the Old Greek translation (OG). Noting this distinction, this article will utilize the common terminology of most commentators by referring to the Greek translation (as a whole) as the LXX.

² Adapted from R. Reed Lessing, *Amos* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2009) 10-11.

- B. Against Judah (2:4-5)
- C. Against Israel (2:6—4:13)
- II. Woes and Lamentations (5—6)
- III. Visions of Judgment (7:1—9:10)
- IV. Future Restoration of Israel (9:11-15)

ANALYSIS OF AMOS 9:11-12 IN THE LXX

[11] ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἀναστήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀναστήσω καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω αὐτὴν καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος, [12] ὅπως ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἐφ' οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ' αὐτούς, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα.³

[11] On that day, I will raise up the fallen tent of David and I will rebuild its fallen things, and its destroyed things I will raise up. And I will rebuild it just as the days of old, [12] so that the remnant of mankind and all the nations upon whom my name is called will seek [me], says the Lord, the God who does these things.⁴

“On that day” (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ) is the translation equivalent to the MT and delineates the following verses as referring to a specific time in the future. Throughout the book of Amos, the author depicted “that day” to include Israel’s punishment for sins and great oppression (2:16; 3:14; 5:18, 20; 8:3, 9). The descriptions correspond to what other Old Testament passages describe as “the latter days” of Israel and is likely equivalent to this expression.⁵ For example, Deuteronomy 4:25-29 speaks of the exile and the oppression of Israel because of their sins. However, in verse 30 Moses said that in the latter days Israel will return to God and He will restore them. Likewise, Hosea 3:4-5 describes a time in which Israel is punished, having to dwell in exile without sacrifices or king. However, in the latter days, Israel will return to David their king and to Yahweh, which will lead to their restoration.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Old Testament Greek quotations are taken from Alfred Ralphy, ed., *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004).

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are author’s own translation.

⁵ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977) 123; Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990) 322.

Similar to Hosea 3:5, Amos 9:11 promises a restoration of the Davidic kingdom: “I will raise up the fallen tent of David and I will rebuild its fallen things, and its destroyed things I will raise up” (ἀναστήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀναστήσω). God promises to “raise up” the fallen tent of David and its “fallen things.” Abbot-Smith listed “tent” (σκηνήν) as one of the normal translations of “booth” (תֶּבֶט), although there are other possible Greek words that are sometimes used.⁶ Some have conjectured a plural reading of תֶּבֶט, which relies upon a consonantal Hebrew text, and would require a different pointing than in the MT. However, no ancient version has a plural in its translation, and there is no reason contextually that a plural should appear here.⁷ Therefore, the singular תֶּבֶט (as reflected by the LXX σκηνήν) is how the text must be understood.

Some have seen this reference to tent/tabernacle in Amos 9:11 as a specific reference to the Christ as described in John 1:14,⁸ yet this seems forced upon the text here. One commentator suggested that the original Hebrew is a reference to modern Tel Deir.⁹ Others have suggested that it should refer to Jerusalem itself.¹⁰ The greatest problem with understanding the “tent of David” as referring to a place is that it does not correspond contextually with verse 12. In the Hebrew, the antecedent of “they will possess” (יִשְׁרְתוּ) recalls verse 11 (and being plural, it is unlikely this would refer to any location).¹¹

There is another option that seems best, which is to understand the antecedent as a reference to the Davidic dynasty. One may support this understanding with another LXX passage – Isaiah 16:5 – which uses “in the tent of David” (ἐν σκηνῇ Δαυὶδ) in reference to the restoration of the Davidic monarchy through the Messiah.¹² Hence, it is possible that the Greek translator of Amos intentionally used similar language because he

⁶ George Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921; reprint, Oxford: Oxford City Press, 2011) 408.

⁷ James D. Nogalski, “The Problematic Suffixes of Amos ix 11,” *Vetus Testamentum* 43 (1993): 415.

⁸ Lessing, *Amos*, 587.

⁹ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 398. The city name is תֶּבֶט in this view and a strategic outpost for the Davidic dynasty.

¹⁰ Kenneth E. Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 61–63.

¹¹ W. Edward Glenny, *Finding Meaning in the Text: Translation Technique and Theology in the Septuagint of Amos* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 220.

¹² *Ibid.*

understood the messianic nature of this passage.¹³ The emphasis upon the Davidic dynasty connotes with it implications for Jerusalem and the nation of Israel (cf. 9:14-15); however, those are not the primary focus of verse 11.

In the Greek translation of verse 11 there is a notable difference from the MT, and that is the unification of the possessive suffixes. The MT uses three different suffixes to describe the tabernacle of David; it uses a 3rd person (fem. pl.) suffix to describe the breach (פְּרִצֵּיהֶן), a 3rd person (masc. sg.) suffix to describe what is torn down (וְהָרַסְתִּירָא), and also a 3rd person (fem. sg.) suffix in verse 11c to describe the rebuilding process (וְבִנְיָתֶיהָ). However, the Greek translator made all these suffixes parallel by using the feminine singular demonstrative pronoun (αὐτῆς) and (αὐτήν). Therefore, the translator ensured that the reader understands all these pronouns as referring to the tent (σκηνήν). Clearly, the LXX and MT are in disagreement here. Is the LXX a translational decision working from the MT, or is the translator working from a different Hebrew *Vorlage*?

The manner in which English translations resolve these changes is consistent with the LXX interpretation. The New American Standard, for example, states, “I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its [booth] breaches; I will also raise up its [booth] ruins and rebuild it [booth] as in the days of old.” One should note the importance in understanding that the early versional witnesses struggled with this text too. Notably, the Syriac and Vulgate did not homogenize the suffixes like the LXX, but neither did they reflect the MT readings. Nogalski provided a chart which compares the four major sources.¹⁴

	Breaches Suffix	Ruins Suffix	I Will Rebuild “it” Suffix
MT	Fem. Pl.	Masc. Sg.	Fem. Sg.
LXX	Fem. Sg.	Fem. Sg.	Fem. Sg.
Syriac	Masc. Pl.	Masc. Pl.	Fem. Sg.
Vulgate	Neut. Sg.	Neut. Pl.	Masc. Sg.

¹³ The Hebrew could be alluding to the fact that the Davidic dynasty is normally called a house (2 Sam 7:11, 16). However, as a consequence of all the sorrow and humiliation David’s house had experienced, it was only a lowly tent (which is not even standing upright). Amos would then be emphasizing the current dilapidated status of the Davidic dynasty, which God promises will be restored to complete supremacy in the future. See Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 123.

¹⁴ Nogalski, “Problematic Suffixes,” 414.

The chart demonstrates that the issue is complicated, and there is no consistent agreement among the versions. The LXX suffixes differ from the MT, Syriac, and Vulgate in that it utilizes a standardized feminine singular in each instance. The MT, Syriac, and Vulgate appear to be trying to emphasize some difference in referent by each using a variety in gender. Hence, although not certain, it is unlikely that that Syriac and Vulgate were working from a Hebrew text which corresponds to the LXX. Further, one thing also appears certain: that the Greek translation is least likely to be original since it has eradicated the problem entirely. The observation herein demonstrates that the translator of Amos was willing to modify his translation, even if it changed the intent of the Hebrew.¹⁵

Verb	I will raise םקא ἀναστήσω	I will wall up וַגְּדֹרָהוּ ἀνοικοδομήσω	I will raise םקא ἀναστήσω	I will rebuild וַבְּנִיתֶיהָ ἀνοικοδομήσω
Object	the fallen booth tent of David דַּוִּד תְּכֵתֶהָ תִּלְכָּהּ τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν	their breaches וְצִדְתֵיהֶם τὰ πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς	his ruins וְהָרָסוֹ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς	it (the booth) וַבְּנִיתֶיהָ αὐτήν
Referent	Full Statement	Collective Statement	David	Booth

The willingness to amend the translation is also evident in how the translator chose his verbs. Not only have the pronouns been equalized, but also the first and third verbs are translated the same (ἀναστήσω), in addition to the second and fourth verbs (ἀνοικοδομήσω).¹⁶ The choice represents another adjustment of the text which is not present in the MT.¹⁷ Although possible to ascribe these factors to a different *Vorlage*, the

¹⁵ *Editor’s Note:* several maqqefs are absent due to a format incompatibility between documents, and are not the fault of the contributor.

¹⁶ Glenny, *Meaning in the Text*, 218.

¹⁷ Although the first and third verbs are the same in the Majority Text, the second and fourth are different.

preponderance of the evidence suggests that these are stylistic refinements made by the translator to ensure a smooth reading of the text.¹⁸ Henceforth, the vastness of the evidence seems to point to the MT as the original reading in verse 11.¹⁹

If the MT is the proper reading, then how is the reader to understand the different suffixes? The best solution is probably to view verse 11 in syntactical parallelism,²⁰ which is supported by both the grammar as well as the suffixed pronouns. The preceding table (p. 111) illustrates the syntactical parallelism.

In this view, the suffixed pronouns progress from more general to specific. The 3rd person (fem. pl.) suffix in the MT is taken as a collective that refers to the entire phrase, “booth of David.”²¹ The 3rd person (masc. sg.) suffix refers to a specific part of the phrase, David, and the 3rd person (fem. sg.) suffix refers to another specific part of the overall phrase, the booth. The understanding expressed herein corresponds to the parallel structure of the phrases and demonstrates why the MT text would contain different suffixes in verse 11.

The four parallel statements previously cited all refer to an aspect of the promise of God to restore the tent of David. The fourth of these statements stresses the extent of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, “And I will rebuild it just as the days of old” (καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω αὐτήν καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος). The Greek phrase “days of old” (αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος) is equivalent to the Hebrew עֲיָרֵי יָמָיו, and also appears in Micah 7:14 and Malachi 3:4. All three passages involve anticipating the future wherein Israel and her king are restored to their former glory and prosperity among the nations. Amos’ prophecy proclaims that the house of David

¹⁸ Glenny, *Meaning in the Text*, 218.

¹⁹ Nogalski, “Problematic Suffixes,” 414.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 416.

²¹ Similar occurrences of a plural suffix being used in reference to a singular feminine noun are Numbers 27:17 and Jeremiah 51:43. Genesis 30:43 and 1 Samuel 25:18 are examples where the singular collective “sheep” receives plural adjectives. See Emil Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English ed., trans. and ed. Arthur Ernest Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910) 428 (§132g), 462–63 (§145c). Contra Walter C. Kaiser, “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles (Amos 9:9–15 and Acts 15:13–18): A Test Passage for Theological Systems,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (June 1977): 101.

(which currently is only a fallen tent) will be restored to its former glory in the future.²²

Commentators view verse 12 with the most scrutiny because the differences between the MT and the Greek translation are quite significant. The Greek reads, “so that the remnant of mankind and all the nations upon whom my name is called will seek [me]” (ὅπως ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς). The reading differs from the MT reading, “so that they might possess Edom and all the nations who are called by my name” (לְמַעַן יִירְשׁוּ אֶת־אֶדְוֹם וְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמִי).²³

The differences between the Greek and Hebrew include different verbs, different subjects, and different direct objects. The significant discrepancies contain both textual-critical issues as well as theological. How is one to account for the noteworthy differences?

There are three main options that may account for the differences. First, the Greek translator may have had a different *Vorlage* in front of him. Second, he may have been working from the MT but misread it. Finally, it is possible that he made a translational decision that departed from a literal translation. The issue is compounded because there may be a combination of these factors involved.

Some have surmised that the translator misread יִירְשׁוּ for יִרְשׁוּ, confusing a *yod* (י) for a *daleth* (ד).²³ According to such a view, it is further suggested that Edom (אֶדְוֹם) may have been spelled with a defective *holem* in the translator’s *Vorlage*, thus giving the same three consonants that could be confused for man (אָדָם).²⁴

There are a few problems with this theory. First, for it to be true, the translator’s *Vorlage* would have to either be missing the direct object marker (אֶת), or else he would have to ignore it based upon how he was viewing the verb. Second, the presence of a defective *holem* is conjecture that is based upon no manuscript evidence. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the approach bases its theory upon the confusion of two letters, which are not normally confused.²⁵ In essence, the entire theory depends upon the misreading of one letter, thus making the theory as a

²² Verses 13–15 expand upon this prophecy and note that the restoration of the Davidic kingdom will result in a return from captivity and a prosperous dwelling in the land for the people of Israel.

²³ Anthony Gelston, “Some Hebrew Misreadings in the Septuagint of Amos,” *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002): 498.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ellis R. Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 109.

whole unlikely.²⁶ Furthermore, the words and syntax of the MT are not inherently difficult or rare, thus indicating there may be different factors that provide clarity regarding the issue.

An important facet of this issue to consider is the tendency of certain translators to interpret theologically. F. F. Bruce noted the tendency of translators to freely interpret prophetic passages, “In turning the prophetic books from Hebrew into Greek, the Septuagint translators were quite ready to conform the wording to their own religious outlook or otherwise to adapt it to an interpretation which was accepted in the circles to which they belonged.”²⁷ Although difficult to demonstrate conclusively, there appear to be times when intentional changes were made to texts, as is evidenced in the Qumran literature.²⁸ Is this perhaps true of the Amos translator?

There may indeed be evidence of such changes introduced by the translator of Amos.²⁹ Already it has been demonstrated that the translator elected to homogenize the pronominal suffixes in Amos 9:11 so that they all unquestionably referred to David’s tent. However, there are other examples in the LXX of Amos which suggest an altered translation.

One such possible example is Amos 6:1, which reads, “Woe to those who despise Zion” (οὐαὶ τοῖς ἐξουθενοῦσιν Σιων). The reading is different than the MT, which reads, “Woe to those at ease in Zion” (הוֹי הַשְּׂאֲנַנִּים בְּצִיּוֹן). Consequently, it has been suggested that the translator may have confused the two ן for a ׃, thus resulting in the verb שָׂאָן (“to despise”).³⁰ Another possibility is that the translator did not understand the Hebrew word שְׂאֲנַנִּים (only used 10 times in the MT). However, perhaps the answer explaining the difference is that the translator inserted his own theology into the text at this point. Evidence for this notion is deduced from the Hebrew text of Psalm 123:4. The verse affirms that those who are at ease

²⁶ Glenny, *Meaning in the Text*, 225.

²⁷ F. F. Bruce, “Prophetic Interpretation in the Septuagint,” *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 12 (Fall 1979): 17.

²⁸ Richard Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles (Acts 15:13 – 21),” in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 161.

²⁹ In a very helpful study, Glenny argued that many of the differences between the Old Greek and Majority Text of Amos derive from a free rendering of a proto-Majority Text and not a different *Vorlage* or textual corruption. See W. Edward Glenny, “Hebrew Misreadings or Free Translation in the Septuagint of Amos,” *Vetus Testamentum* 57 (2007): 524-47.

³⁰ Gelston, “Some Hebrew Misreadings,” 495.

are conceived as Israel's enemies;³¹ they are depicted as those who have contempt. Therefore, those who are at ease (Israel's enemies) are those who have contempt (i.e. they despise Israel).

The understanding of those at ease may provide clarity on the manner in which Amos 6:1 is translated. In the MT, the context of Amos 6:1 is a woe upon Israel because of her iniquities. However, in the Greek, the woe is upon those who despise Zion (the enemies of Israel). In the context of the translator's day, this could be specifically targeting the Samaritans.³²

If correct, this would suggest that the translator was keen to introduce the idea of hostility to Zion into his rendering of Am. 6:1: that is, keen to depict those against whom the biblical woe is uttered in terms that would suggest the Samaritans of his own day. Ps. 123 [122 LXX]:4, in fact might naturally have sprung to mind in this connection, for that Psalm, like many of the Songs of Ascents, describes the hostility directed against post-exilic Zion by those round about, that is, a hostility analogous to that of the Samaritans.³³

One cannot discount these kinds of Old Testament influences upon the translator of Amos. Other influences may have been on his mind as well. For example, Edom is paralleled with all the nations in Obadiah 15-21 and Isaiah 34:1-8; 63:1-6. The translator may have been influenced by the parallelism of Edom and the nations in those texts. Perhaps he did not confuse the letters as much as he made a theological metonymy of Edom (i.e. one nation representing the many). Therefore, perhaps he harmonized Edom with all the nations in a non-literal, free theological rendering.³⁴

If that is the case, the translation of the LXX is constructed to emphasize the universal seeking of God by the nations. The emphasis upon the universal effects of David's restoration would be consistent with the translator's tendencies in other passages. The universal emphasis on the part of the translator appears elsewhere in Amos as well.³⁵ For example, this tendency appears in the last part of Amos 9:12, "says the Lord, the God

³¹ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 3:474.

³² Glenny, *Meaning in the Text*, 169.

³³ Philip E. Satterthwaite, "The Translator as Imperialist: And Other Aspects of the Septuagint Translation of the Book of the Twelve" (an expanded version of an unpublished paper presented at the Old Testament Seminar, Cambridge University, October 1997), quoted in Glenny, *Meaning in the Text*, 169.

³⁴ Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 195.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 188-89.

who does these things” (λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα). The phrase ὁ θεὸς ὁ is lacking in the MT. However, the phrase “κύριος + ὁ θεός + ὁ [substantive]” is common to the Amos translator (cf. 4:13; 5:8), and appears to be part of his universalizing strategy to expand the description of God to contain universal language. Another example of this is Amos 9:15 where “Yahweh your [Israel’s] God” (יהוה ייִהְיֶה לְכָל) is changed to “Lord, the God of all” (κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ) in the Greek to stress the universal relationship of God rather than the personal relationship with Israel.³⁶

The universal emphasis undoubtedly appears in Amos 9:11-12 in that the Greek translation focuses upon the universality of God’s relationship to the nations. “The perspective of the LXX concerning Gentiles would be much more attractive than the MT to Jews in the Diaspora who sought to fit into their culture and show the attractiveness of their religion to the Gentiles among whom they lived.”³⁷ Consequently, it appears that the translator of Amos made adjustments as he deemed appropriate to make certain that the applicability of the book extended past the Jews of Jerusalem.

The main point of the translator in Amos 9:12 is that the Gentiles will “seek” (ἐκζητήσωσιν). As a result of the context of the next phrase, there is likely an implied “me” (με) as the direct object.³⁸ The notion of seeking is emphasized earlier in Amos, and this verb use is possibly an allusion to the necessity of seeking the Lord in Amos 5:4, 6.³⁹

Amos 9 describes the people who will seek the Lord: “The nations upon whom my name is called” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς). The description is identical to what is written in the MT. In the Hebrew, similar expressions which include “name” (שֵׁם) and the Niphal of “be called” (קָרָא) are used in reference to God renaming the patriarchs as part of his gracious promises (Gen 17:5; 35:10), as well as covenantal contexts where Israel is called by Yahweh’s name (Deut 28:10; Isa 48:1-2; Jer 14:9).⁴⁰ Similar to Amos 9, Isaiah 43:6-7 envisions a time when there will be people from the nations who are called by God’s name. Based upon its usage, Finley observed that this phrase should be considered an

³⁶ Glenny, *Meaning in the Text*, 228.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. 227. According to Göttingen’s critical apparatus of the Septuagint text, several Lucianic manuscripts add the missing direct object (με); and, Alexandrinus, being influenced by Acts 15:17, supplies τὸν κύριον.

³⁹ Glenny, *Meaning in the Text*, 226.

⁴⁰ Lessing, *Amos*, 578.

idiomatic expression of ownership or possession.⁴¹ Therefore, both the MT and LXX anticipate a future time that includes blessing for both the Gentiles as well as the Jews since they will all be God’s people.⁴²

Amos 9:11-12 (MT)	Amos 9:11-12 (LXX)	Differences
בְּיָוֶם הַהוּא אָקִים אֶת־סֶכֶת דָּוִד הַנִּפְלֵת	ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἀναστήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν	Standardization of MT. The pronominal suffixes are equalized in the LXX. Ἀνοικοδομήσω is used for רָגַד as well as בָּנָה in the following phrase.
וַגְּדַרְתִּי אֶת־פְּרִצֵי־הָיָה וְהָרַסְתִּי אֶקְיָם	καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ πεπτωκότα <u>αὐτῆς</u> καὶ τὰ κατεσκευασμένα <u>αὐτῆς</u> ἀναστήσω	
וּבְנִיתִי בְּיָמַי עוֹלָם	καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω αὐτήν καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος,	
לְמַעַן יִירָשׁוּ אֶת־אֶרֶץ אֲדוֹם כְּלֶהְגֹּלֹם אֶת־שָׂרְקָרָא שְׁמִי צְלִיקָם	ὅπως ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ <u>κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων</u> καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς,	Here the תָּסַח particle is dropped, and אֶת־אֶרֶץ דּוֹם becomes the subject. אֲדוֹם is revocalized to דָּסַח, which could assume a defective <i>holem</i> was used in אֲדוֹם, in addition to a possible confusion of the verb יִירָשׁוּ with יִרְשָׁו. ⁴³
בְּאֵם־הַנְּהַ עֲשֵׂה יָאֵת	λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα.	The LXX adds ὁ θεὸς ὁ to the MT.

⁴¹ Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, 325.

⁴² Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 167.

⁴³ Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, 138.

The preceding table (p. 117) helps summarize the textual issues in verses 11 and 12. (Changes to the text were underlined and explanations are in the right column.)

Both the MT and the LXX are apparent that in the future there will be people from Gentile nations who will belong to God. Although both MT and LXX agree on this point, it is important to consider that the LXX context has been changed from that of the MT. Glenny summarized how the MT and LXX contexts differ.

The purpose for the restoration of the “tent of David” in the LXX is fundamentally different than the purpose in the MT. In the MT the Davidic kingdom is restored so that other nations may be included in the kingdom by virtue of Israel’s extension of its dominion and possession of its ancient conquests and “all the nations.” This indicates an extension of authority and control far beyond the ancient Davidic kingdom. In the LXX the Davidic dynasty and kingdom are restored so that all the Gentiles upon whom the Lord’s name is called may seek “[the Lord] . . . who accomplishes these things.” In the LXX, as a result of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom, Gentiles will seek the God who remembers the Davidic covenant, the Lord God of Israel, and they, as Gentiles, will be his covenant people.⁴⁴

In summary, Amos 9:11-12 provides a prophecy concerning a future time (“in that day”) which is equivalent to the “latter days” elsewhere in Scripture. In that future day, God promises to restore the house of David, which has become a broken tent because of disobedience. The restoration of the Davidic kingdom will lead to the possession of Edom and the remainder of the nations. The Greek translator changes the nuance of the passage and describes God’s restoration of the Davidic kingdom as the impetus for the remnant of mankind seeking God. Consequently, there are significant contextual differences, and yet there are important similarities. Pertinent to the conclusion of this article, a notable similarity between the MT and the LXX is that both indicate there is a future in God’s plan for Gentiles.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Glenny, *Meaning in the Text*, 228.

⁴⁵ Both the MT and LXX are in agreement referring to this future group of Gentiles as “upon whom my name is called” (אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֶמְי עַל־יהוָה; ἐφ’ οὗς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς). As demonstrated previously, such language is often covenantal in the Old Testament and here provides assurance of future blessing.

THE USE OF AMOS 9:11-12 IN ACTS 15:15-18

Having examined the Greek and the Hebrew of Amos 9:11-12, it appears that the MT is the original text and the Greek translation is a theologically influenced deviation from the Hebrew from which the translator was working. If that is indeed the case, one must ask why James utilized the Greek text of Amos 9:11-12 prior to the Jerusalem council. Was James wrong to quote the Greek text, which did not completely reflect the meaning conveyed in the MT? The question can only be answered by a study of Acts 15:15-18.

Acts 15 begins by stating that certain men were teaching that Gentiles must be circumcised according to the custom of Moses (v. 1). The teaching ignited a great debate between these men and Paul and Barnabas (v. 2). Paul and Barnabas opposed the teaching, and eventually it was determined that they should venture to Jerusalem and receive insight concerning this issue. Once at Jerusalem, some from the sect of the Pharisees arose and proclaimed the necessity of circumcision (v. 5). The action prompted a thorough examination of the matter. The issue was what did Gentiles need to do to be accepted as God's people? Was it necessary to circumcise them?

After much debate on the issue, Peter arose and proclaimed that God had given the Spirit to the Gentiles just as He had given the Spirit to the Jews (vv. 7-8). There was no distinction, so why should the Jews expect the Gentiles to conform to a standard that in the past the Jews could not even conform properly (vv. 9-11). After the insight by Peter, James arose and affirmed Peter's assessment. God had been pleased to receive a people for his name from the Gentiles (v. 14). The description of Gentiles for God's name comes close to Amos 9:12 (in both the MT and LXX) which foretold this occurrence.

James continued his defense of Peter's assertion (v. 15): "And with this the words of the prophets agree" (καὶ τούτῳ συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν καθὼς γέγραπται). The antecedent for "this" (τούτῳ) refers to the assertion made by Peter and confirmed by James — that God had saved Gentiles as they are and without distinction. James claimed that this was consistent with the "words of the prophets" (οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν). The emphasis upon the plural (prophets) is important, because (as will be shown) in referencing Amos 9:11-12, James worked with other prophecies in addition to Amos 9 to validate his argument.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 503; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand

One should note that James did not say that Amos or the other prophecies are fulfilled; rather, he said “they agree” (συμφωνοῦσιν), from the root συμφωνέω (from which English derives “symphony,” an harmony of sounds together).⁴⁷ Some argue that this is just another way of saying that Amos is fulfilled. However, in Acts the apostles use fulfillment (πληρῶ) language intentionally.⁴⁸ Based upon the normal use of συμφωνέω, as well as the tendency in Acts (in addition to the remainder of Scripture) to be explicit concerning fulfillment, it is best to regard James as introducing agreement and not fulfillment here.

James then referenced the Greek Old Testament, much of which corresponds to Amos 9:11-12. However, not only are there some significant changes and additions, but also there is a significant portion of Amos that is omitted in James’ quotation. In light of the noteworthy differences, as well as the fact that James referenced this quote by stating it was derived from the prophets (plural), it is probably best to understand this as a combination of prophecies that James correctly viewed to closely relate. More discussion will be given while proceeding to examine the differences.

The first notable difference is that James omitted “in that day” (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ) and added “after these things I will return” (μετὰ ταῦτα ἀναστρέψω). Lessing has suggested that μετὰ ταῦτα is referring to Amos 9:1-4 which, to him, involves the destruction of the temple at Bethel. According to Lessing, James was making a parallel between the destruction of the temple in Amos 9 and the destruction of the real temple, that is, Jesus (John 2:18-22).⁴⁹ Others regard μετὰ ταῦτα as referring to the broad context of judgments described earlier in Amos.⁵⁰ Another option that some propose is that this phrase may have reference to the Greek of Jeremiah 12:15, “And it will be that after I cast them out I will return and have mercy upon them” (καὶ ἔσται μετὰ τὸ ἐκβαλεῖν με αὐτοὺς ἐπιστρέψω καὶ

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 459; contra F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd ed. (1952; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960) 297. Bruce stated this refers to the Book of the Twelve.

⁴⁷ The word is only used in Matthew 18:19; 20:2, 13; Luke 5:36; Acts 5:9; 15:15. Each occurrence connotes the idea of agreement.

⁴⁸ For example, in Acts 1:16 and 3:18, Peter proclaimed the fulfillment of Scripture using forms of πληρῶ. Acts 3:18 is instructive because there is also reference to a plurality of prophets.

⁴⁹ Lessing, *Amos*, 598.

⁵⁰ I. Howard Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) 591.

ἐλεήσω αὐτούς).⁵¹ Although there may be conceptual allusions with Jeremiah, the passages utilize different verbs (ἀναστρέψω and ἐπιστρέψω). Therefore, a definite connection is likely not present.

Perhaps it is best to regard this phrase as James' chronological understanding of the Amos text.⁵² James knew the Greek reads "on that day" (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ). As previously demonstrated, this time period reflects the chronological understanding of the "last days" which includes a return from exile and a restoration of the Davidic kingdom (Deut 4:30; Hos 3:5). The apostles understood that God's kingdom had not yet come (Acts 1:6; 3:19-21), and James modified the Greek of Amos 9:11 to reflect the theology which is inherent in the Old Testament understanding of the coming eschatological sequence. Therefore, James indicated that this prophecy would be accomplished when the Lord returns. In other words, he argued for a future fulfillment of the passage when Christ returns.

At the Lord's return, the tent of David will be rebuilt. James used ἀνοικοδομήσω instead of ἀναστήσω, which likely indicates he was not intent upon preserving exact replication of Amos 9 as much as he was intent upon securing the main point. One should find it interesting that James made a significant change in describing the restoration of the dynasty of the king by using ἀνορθώσω ("I will restore"), which is not used in Amos 9. Of note is the fact that ἀνορθώσω is used in 2 Samuel 7:13 and 1 Chronicles 17:12 in God's promise to establish David's throne forever. The word is not often used in the Greek Old Testament, but half of its uses are in reference to God establishing the Davidic Covenant.⁵³ James may have asserted an intentional allusion to those Davidic Covenant passages. In any case, the context of Amos 9:11 at least supports the idea that the Davidic kingdom was already on James' mind, and it would be natural for the Davidic Covenant passages to be occupying his thoughts and supplying the vocabulary for his beliefs.

⁵¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 329; Marshall, "Acts," 591.

⁵² James E. Rosscup, "The Interpretation of Acts 15:13 – 18" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1966) 140. Rosscup ultimately did not affirm this view but provided a good summary of the arguments.

⁵³ The future singular form is only found in 2 Samuel 7:13 and 1 Chronicles 17:12; 22:10. Of a total of 13 uses in the Old Testament, 6 of 6 times in 1 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, it is used in reference to the Davidic Covenant. Word usage statistics provided by Logos Bible Software 5, which utilizes James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*, elec. ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996).

In Acts 15:17, the only significant change is the addition of the direct object “the Lord” (τὸν κύριον). As already stated, the LXX version did not have a direct object, and a με was implied. By adding τὸν κύριον, the phrase now has a remarkable similarity to Zechariah 8:22, “And many peoples and many nations will come to seek the face of the Lord” (καὶ ἤξουσιν λαοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ ἔθνη πολλὰ ἐκζητῆσαι τὸ πρόσωπον κυρίου).⁵⁴ Therefore, Acts 15:17 appears to be an intentional allusion to the prophecy of Zechariah 8, especially since the natural contextual reading of Amos 9 would have required a first person direct object (με). The context of Zechariah 8:22 also supports James’ point: that Gentiles will be a part of the Lord’s people in the future. Furthermore, here it is the direct allusion to seeking the Lord that makes it most likely that this is in James’ mind.

There is one more addition that James made at the very end of his quotation (v. 18). He stated, “[these things] known from of old” (γνωστὰ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος). The words are also foreign to the text of Amos, and are likely added by James as an allusion to Isaiah 45:21, “that they might know at once who made these things heard from the beginning” (ἵνα γνῶσιν ἅμα τίς ἀκουστὰ ἐποίησεν ταῦτα ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς).⁵⁵ Similar to Zechariah 8 previously, the context of Isaiah 45:21-23 expands the idea that people from many nations will come to God their Savior at a future time.⁵⁶

James’ quotation appears not to be connected to one prophecy but multiple. The relation is not surprising since he states in advance that the words of the prophets (plural) agree with Peter’s statement. James gave evidence of that by referring to Amos 9:11-12, Zechariah 8:22, and Isaiah 45:21. All three of these passages provide evidence for a future time when Gentiles will receive salvation from the Lord. The following chart (p. 123) summarizes the key differences between Acts 15:16-18 and Amos 9:11-12. (Changes to the text were underlined and explanations are in the right column.)

⁵⁴ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 459.

⁵⁵ David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 432; contra C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Shorter Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2002) 232. Barrett understood these as simply an addition by James.

⁵⁶ Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40—66* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009) 273.

Amos 9:11-12 (LXX)	Acts 15:16-18 (NA27)	Differences
<p>ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ</p> <p>ἀναστήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν</p> <p>καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀναστήσω</p> <p>καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω αὐτὴν καθὼς αἰ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος,</p> <p>ὅπως ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς,</p> <p>λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα.</p>	<p><u>μετὰ ταῦτα ἀναστρέψω</u></p> <p>καὶ <u>ἀνοικοδομήσω</u> τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν</p> <p>καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀνοικοδομήσω καὶ <u>ἀνορθώσω</u> αὐτήν,</p> <p>[omitted]</p> <p>ὅπως <u>ἂν</u> ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων <u>τὸν κύριον</u> καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς,</p> <p>λέγει κύριος ποιῶν ταῦτα <u>γνωστὰ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος</u>.</p>	<p>Adds this phrase. Some understand a quote from Jeremiah 12:15.</p> <p>The New Testament uses a different verb here, possibly as a result of having omitted the section below.</p> <p>Textual issue: ⲛ, (B; Eus), ⲱ, 33 326 <i>pc</i> have τὰ κατεστραμμένα, “things destroyed.” Uses ἀνορθώσω instead of ἀναστήσω or ἀνοικοδομήσω, likely due to Davidic Covenantal language.</p> <p>Adds ἂν. Adds a direct object (τὸν κύριον) which is not present in the LXX, thus reflecting Zechariah 8:22.</p> <p>Omits ὁ θεὸς ὁ. Adds γνωστὰ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος, likely a reference to Isaiah 45:21.</p>

As noted previously, James did not state that these passages are fulfilled; rather, he asserted that what the Gentiles were experiencing at that time was in agreement with those prophecies. James quoted these passages to answer the question regarding whether or not the Gentiles and Jews should be made into one people. James demonstrated that the Gentiles need not act like Jews, because in the end times Gentiles will still retain their Gentile identity. Therefore, why should the church compel

Gentiles to adopt Jewish identity? James rightfully indicated that salvation transcended both groups in God's plan. Both Jews and Gentiles were able to keep their functional ethnic identities, unified in Christ through a common faith.⁵⁷

The colossal question which remains for this research is whether or not James' use of the LXX of Amos 9:11-12 is legitimate. In comparing the MT and the LXX, there are significant differences. The MT stresses the restoration of the Davidic king, through which Edom (likely a metonymy for all Israel's enemies) and the nations are subjugated to Israel. Admittedly, it is through this subjugation that the peoples are blessed, but the main focus remains the blessing of Israel and her king. In contrast, the LXX focuses upon the restoration of Israel's monarchy which is the catalyst for the nations seeking God. In the LXX, there is no explicit mention of the subjugation of the nations, though it may still be implied by the restoration of Israel's king. In the discussion on why the LXX differs from the MT, it was made known that it is likely the theology and preference of the translator that led to the changes in Amos 9:11-12.

Given this understanding, did James make a mistake by quoting the LXX? First, it is important to remember that the LXX was the Bible for the people of that day. Perhaps it is similar to the time of the English speaking church from eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The King James Version was the almost unanimous choice for English speakers; it definitely had imperfections, yet that was the common Bible of the day. Second, James referenced Amos 9:11-12 for a specific reason. Although the LXX does significantly change the context of the passage, James used the LXX to support the point that is specified in the MT. He quoted Amos 9:11-12 to emphasize the point that Gentiles are saved as Gentiles. In both the MT and the LXX, the Gentile inclusion is apparent. Therefore, James used the Greek text in a manner which legitimately supported his stance. The LXX accurately reflects the MT's original meaning as far as the proposition that James made: Gentiles will be saved as Gentiles in the future, thus the church should not force them to obey Jewish regulations in the present.

CONCLUSION

Amos 9:11-12 is an important passage theologically and textual critically. There are significant differences between the MT and the LXX which must be examined with consideration of the overall tendencies of the translator of Amos. The translator of Amos was prone to making stylistic changes, in

⁵⁷ Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 432.

addition to broadening texts to a universal meaning rather than being Israel-centric. When examining Amos 9:11-12, these same tendencies are displayed. Despite changing the emphasis of Amos 9, the pertinent theological proposition of the passage remains intact and usable for the discussion at the Jerusalem council.

At the Jerusalem council, in Acts 15:15-18 James referred to, at least, three prophecies (Isa 45:21; Amos 9:11-12; Zech 8:22). In so doing, James reinforced Peter's proclamation that God has called a people for his name from the Gentiles. James did not argue that these prophecies are fulfilled in Acts 15; rather, his argument is that Gentiles will be saved in the future as Gentiles. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Gentiles are saved currently as Gentiles. Consequently, the church, which consists of both Jew and Gentile, should not mandate a universal adherence to the Jewish customs; rather, Jews may remain Jewish and Gentiles may remain Gentile.

HERMENEUTICAL KEYS TO THE OLIVET DISCOURSE Part 3: Matthean Eschatology (Matt 24–25)

Ray M. Wenger

As noted in the first two articles of this series,¹ Luke provides hermeneutical keys for understanding the Olivet Discourse. To achieve their specific purposes, the synoptic authors selectively included portions of what Jesus said. The structures of Luke's presentations isolate various components of Jesus' eschatological teaching: tribulation events are isolated from the events surrounding AD 70; the much disputed "this generation" is specified within the tribulation context — not the generation of Jesus' contemporaries and the AD 70 event; and, the "one taken, others left" pericope is taught in a context that does not discuss tribulation events, with an emphasis that no signs precede it. The isolation enables definitive understanding of the meaning of those components, and those conclusions form a basis for a lucid understanding of the longer version of the Olivet Discourse found in Matthew 24–25.

HERMENEUTICAL KEYS FROM LUKE

The Meaning of "This Generation"

Luke's material resolves the enduring debate regarding the meaning of "this generation." The structure of Luke's account (Luke 21), and the analogous situation of "this night" (Gk. wording in Luke 17:34) make it evident that "this generation," which will not pass until all these things are fulfilled, is the generation which lives during the tribulation events of Daniel's seventieth week prophecy (Matt 24:34). The rapid consummation corresponds to Luke's specific admonition to tribulation saints: when all these things begin to occur, they should look upward because their redemption is drawing near — a command that would be meaningless if

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¹ "Hermeneutical Keys to the Olivet Discourse: Part 1: Lukan Eschatology (Luke 17)," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 17 (Winter 2013): 229-48; "Hermeneutical Keys to the Olivet Discourse: Part 2: Lukan Eschatology (Luke 21)," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 18 (Spring 2014): 49-72.

that redemption did not occur during that very generation (Luke 21:28). The purpose of Jesus' illustration regarding the budding of the fig tree is not so that the beginning of "this generation" can be pinpointed to the reconstitution of Israel as a nation in 1948; neither should one speculate how long a generation will endure. The imagery is an ordinary botanical illustration to emphasize that the generation, which sees the specified global catastrophes, will also witness everything brought to a consummation. The saints of the tribulation period will not be guessing about the timing when all things will be fulfilled; it will be as obvious and certain as knowing that when a fig tree buds, summer is only a few weeks in arrival.

The Matthean Time of the End

Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:4—25:46) includes only the time of the end. Comparison with Luke's account makes this evident. As argued in part 2 of this series, the structure of Luke 21 precisely delineates his account of the time of the end to be verses 8-11 and verses 25-36, with the intervening verses 12-24 describing early persecutions and the AD 70 event.

Matthew 24:4-7 addresses the same material as Luke 21:8-11a, which Matthew describes as the beginning of birth pains (v. 8). Verse 9 begins with "then" [τότε], a temporal marker indicating a continuation of the end-time material, not a new topic. The subsequent material (Matt 24:9-28), includes details not mentioned by Luke: tribulation persecutions, the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom, the abomination of desolation, the unparalleled severity of the tribulation, and the warning against being impressed by miracles supposedly identifying Christ (because the Lord's coming will be like lightning flashing through heaven, accompanied by vultures gathering to feast upon the dead).

The next verse (Matt 24:29) continues the same topic with another connecting phrase "immediately after the tribulation of those days" [Εὐθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων]. At that time, the sun and moon will be darkened and the stars will fall, which parallels Luke 21:11b, 25-26. The connectors in Matthew and the parallels with Luke 21 delineate the entire section (Matt 24:4-29) as a cohesive section describing only tribulation events. Matthew's assertion that then [τότε] Jesus appears (Matt 24:30-31) corresponds to Luke 21:27. Matthew continues with the parable of the fig tree and the surety of Jesus' words (Matt 24:32-35), which corresponds to Luke 21:29-33. Therefore, Matthew and Luke

address the same material regarding the end, with Matthew providing considerably more detail.

Matthew 24	Luke 21
deceivers, wars, international conflicts, earthquakes, famines (vv. 4-7)	deceivers, wars, international conflicts, earthquakes, famines (vv. 8-11a)
all these are beginning of birth pains (v. 8)	—
—	before all these things: early persecution and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (vv. 12-24)
extensive tribulation details not mentioned by Luke (vv. 9-28)	—
sun and moon darkened; stars fall; powers of heaven shaken (v. 29)	terrors and signs from heaven (v. 11b); signs in sun, moon, and stars, distress of nations (v. 25); fear, powers of heavens shaken (v. 26)
Jesus appears in glory (vv. 30-31)	Jesus appears in glory (v. 27)
—	when these things occur, redemption is near (v. 28)
parable of the fig tree (vv. 32-33)	parable of the fig tree (vv. 29-31)
this generation will not pass until all is fulfilled (v. 34)	this generation will not pass until all is fulfilled (v. 32)
Jesus' predictions are more reliable than the universe (v. 35)	Jesus' predictions are more reliable than the universe (v. 33)

Accordingly, Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse simply does not include the AD 70 event. The indicator for fleeing is different. In Luke's structurally demarcated AD 70 event, the sign for fleeing is when armies surround Jerusalem (Luke 21:20); in Matthew, the indication is the abomination of desolation in the holy place (Matt 24:15). Matthew said nothing concerning Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, nothing

regarding Jerusalem's destruction, and nothing in relation to Jews being scattered to all the nations until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Luke 21 explicitly states that the early persecutions and the destruction of Jerusalem and the worldwide dispersion of the Jews are *before* the time of the end. The remainder of Luke's account addresses the time of the end, and is paralleled by the material in Matthew's account. Contrary to Walvoord, Matthew 24:4-14 does not refer to the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ, with the conditions mentioned gradually increasing in intensity toward the time of the end.² Since birth pains occur only at the end of pregnancy, and begin suddenly with ever increasing frequency and intensity, Matthew's statement that the terrible events of verses 4-7 are merely the beginning of birth pains (v. 8) confirms that these must be events of the End leading directly to the consummation, not painful episodes 2000 years ago in AD 70.³ Matthew's account then describes even worse things, giving detail regarding the time of the Antichrist (Matt 24:15-28), which is material Luke did not include. Therefore, Matthew's account focuses entirely upon the time of the end.

The historical situation in the first century confirms that Matthew refers only to the time of the end in verses 4-29, because the details do not correspond with the Judean situation before AD 70. False Christs would have been unattractive to true believers, both because of the recent spectacular ministry of the true Christ, and because of the presence of living Apostles. Instead of international conflict, the nations were functioning under *Pax Romana*. There is no evidence of global earthquakes, or of terrifying signs from heaven worse than normal eclipses, comets, or meteorite showers.⁴

² John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 183-85. Larry D. Pettigrew stated similarly, "The great Messianic Kingdom promised by the OT prophets was to be delayed, and instead there would be a period characterized by false Christs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, false religions, secularism, as well as the preaching of the gospel. Such events would typify the era from the time of the Lord's prophecy up to the middle of the seven-year tribulation" ("Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 [Fall 2002]: 175).

³ See also, Ron J. Bigalke Jr., "The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (Spring 2003): 121.

⁴ The book of Acts mentions a famine which occurred in all the inhabited earth during the reign of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:28). However, for the prophecy of Matthew 24:4-8 to be fulfilled, all the mentioned signs must occur, not just one of them, and they must occur in rapid succession to correspond with both the metaphor of birth pains, and the fulfillment within one generation.

Aspects of the Rapture

Luke's eschatology clarifies the rapture of the church. In Matthew 24:36-41, Jesus referenced the days of Noah and the judgment of the Flood, comparing his return when one shall be taken and the other left. Even though this "one taken, the other left" pericope sounds very much like the rapture, various pretribulationist authors have asserted that the Olivet Discourse does not speak of the rapture whatsoever, because of commendable concern for contextual consistency regarding judgment and the glorious advent of the Son of Man. As a result, they insist that the ones taken are wicked people who are taken to judgment, leaving the righteous to inherit the kingdom.⁵ However, contextual proximity is not enough to prove continuation of a given aspect of a subject in prophetic statements. For example, Jesus abruptly terminated his quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2a, which He said was fulfilled on that very day in the synagogue (Luke 4:21). In Isaiah, the sentence continues with the day of divine vengeance and comfort for all who mourn — continuing the topic of Christ's ministry, but an aspect not to be fulfilled until thousands of years later at the return of Christ.

Reasons given to support a "no rapture" position regarding Matthew 24—25 are inconclusive. 1) *The Jewish disciples would not have understood teaching regarding the rapture of the church.*⁶ Prophecy frequently speaks of things that could not have been fully comprehended by the original audience (cf. Gen 3:15) or even by the prophets themselves

⁵ For example, "The only future coming of the Son of Man described in the discourse is the glorious and universally visible return of Christ (24:3, 27-31; cf. 24:14, 33, 50-51; 25:1-13, 14-30, 31-46). The language of 24:27-41 does not suggest that a different event is now addressed. Matthew 24:40-41 occurs in the context of judgment" (Neil D. Nelson Jr., "Three Critical Exegetical Issues in Matthew 24: A Dispensational Interpretation," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 11 [August 2007]: 64-65). See also, Pettegrew, "Interpretive Flaws," 187; John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew 24-28* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985) 73-76. Another author has insightful comments regarding far and near context, but without the hermeneutical keys from Luke, and in particular the structural shift between verses 35 and 36 of Matthew 24, his contextual conclusion regarding the rapture is not conclusive (cf. Bigalke, "Olivet Discourse," 111-19). By contrast, John F. Hart argued, "the pretribulationist rapture teaching of Paul can also find its central portion of revelation in the Discourse" ("Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36-44? Part 3 of 3," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 21 [Autumn 2008]: 45, fn. 3).

⁶ Russell L. Penney, "Why the Church Is Not Referenced in the Olivet Discourse," *Conservative Theological Journal* 1 (April 1997): 49.

(Dan 8:27). Jesus did not hesitate to say things which his disciples would only understand later (John 2:22). Jesus spoke of building his church (Matt 16:18) without prior definition of what that would mean for disciples who had just completed a missionary tour limited to the nation of Israel. 2) *The reference to Noah and the Flood is a context of judgment, and therefore does not correspond to the rapture.*⁷ Actually, the account of Noah is a picture of salvation *and* judgment: salvation for Noah and his family, and judgment for the world, which corresponds precisely to the situation at the rapture. 3) *The text emphasizes the unexpected judgment rather than the unexpected timing of the rapture.*⁸ The passage absolutely contradicts this assertion. There is repeated emphasis upon unknown timing. When the coming does occur, it is not merely a judgment scene, but a scene of both judgment and deliverance: Noah and his family were delivered; the rest judged. Similarly, in the rapture, both judgment *and* deliverance occur at an unexpected time. 4) *The two Greek words for “took away” (ἤρην, v. 39) and “taken” (παραλαμβάνεται, vv. 40-41) are synonyms, and therefore those taken (vv. 40-41) are taken in judgment like the ungodly of Noah’s day, leaving the righteous to populate the kingdom.*⁹ The first word has a lexical focus upon “take away.” The second word has the basic sense of “take” in the sense of “receive” or “take along” (thus there is a distinction).¹⁰ However, even if the words were exact synonyms, this would not prove that the ones “taken” are removed in judgment. The meaning must be decided by the analogy of the paragraph. In the analogy with Noah and the Flood (similar to Lot’s escape from Sodom, Luke 17), the righteous were positioned to a place of safety *before* the wicked were overwhelmed by judgment. The analogy corresponds to church saints taken to be with Christ in a pretribulational rapture, with tribulation judgments falling upon those who remain.

Biblical authors often delimit a new section by thematic contrast and by structural indicators such as *inclusio* and *chiasm*, parameters designed to guide one’s exegesis. Most importantly, the Bible teachers who assert that the rapture is not found in the Olivet Discourse fail to adequately address the hermeneutical keys found in Luke: 1) a carefully delimited subsection in the Olivet Discourse that does address the rapture (Luke 21:34-36); and, 2) Jesus’ longer teaching regarding “one taken, the other left” which defines it as rapture material — a coming not preceded by any signs (Luke 17:20—18:8).

⁷ Pettegrew, “Interpretative Flaws,” 187-88.

⁸ Bigalke, “Olivet Discourse,” 130.

⁹ Pettegrew, “Interpretative Flaws,” 187-88.

¹⁰ For a discussion on the futility of the debate whether παραλαμβάνεται has a good or bad connotation, see the prior article addressing Luke 17.

Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21 omits the material found in Matthew 24:36-41. However, Luke recorded a different occasion when Jesus used this material to teach his followers (Luke 17:20—18:8), an account in which Jesus gave no details regarding the terrible events of the tribulation. He only mentioned judgment that comes after the righteous ones are taken to a safe place, and at the very end of the section regarding "one taken, the other left" made a statement in relation to vultures gathering to a carcass (Luke 17:37). Analysis of the "one taken, the other left" pericope in that isolated context clarifies its meaning. For several reasons, it is impossible to arrange the details of the teaching into an event at the end of the tribulation.

First, the days immediately preceding the coming of the Son of Man will be days filled with ordinary activities of life (Luke 17:27-28), not with desperate measures attempting to deal with the excruciating disasters of the tribulation. Second, the general populace will be characterized by spiritual complacency and secularism, a great contrast to people of the tribulation who will either be saints who diligently follow Christ and love not their lives to the death, or they will be devoted worshippers of the Antichrist and the devil, bent on destroying the saints. Third, in Luke 17, Jesus emphasized that no signs precede the coming of the kingdom of God. Hence, what He said concerning the sudden coming of the Son of Man cannot refer to an event occurring at the end of the tribulation, because the many specific tribulation events will provide a checklist to chronicle the nearness of the glorious advent. In particular, the 1,260-day supernatural provision of Israel (Rev 12:6) must begin on the day of their hasty flight when they see the abomination of desolation (having no time to gather provisions) (Matt 24:15-18), and be concluded on the day of the glorious advent when Jesus destroys the Antichrist, thus providing a daily countdown to the day of Christ's coming.

For the reasons stated, the "one taken, another left" pericope must describe an event that occurs *before* the tribulation, where the righteous are taken to safety, while the wicked are left to be overwhelmed by destruction, which is pictured as a carcass to be devoured by vultures. The evident meaning of the pericope cannot be arbitrarily reversed (wicked taken, righteous left) in Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse, but must be allowed to stand on its own merit. Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse gives specific advice to saints living at the time of the end (Luke 21:28-36). The advice is divided into two subsections: 1) advice to tribulation saints (Luke 21:28-33); and, 2) advice to those who will be raptured prior to the tribulation (Luke 21:34-36). The twofold advice

immediately follows the material regarding the glorious advent of the Son of Man (Luke 21:27).

Matthew 24—25	Luke 21
Jesus appears in glory (24:30-31)	Jesus appears in glory (v. 27)
—	know your redemption is near (v. 28)
parable of the fig tree (24:32-33)	parable of the fig tree (vv. 29-31)
this generation will not pass until all is fulfilled (24:34)	this generation will not pass until all is fulfilled (v. 32)
Jesus' predictions are more reliable than the universe (24:35)	Jesus' predictions are more reliable than the universe (v. 33)
one taken, another left (24:36-42) householder watches to avoid being burglarized (24:43-44) warning: wise slave rewarded; brutal slave judged (24:45-51); wise virgins enter; foolish excluded (25:1-13); good slaves rewarded; lazy slave judged (25:14-30)	be ready for rapture: careful attention to spiritual life; pray to be able to escape all the tribulation events (vv. 34-36)
after the glorious advent: sheep and goat judgment (25:31-46)	—

Luke's advice to the tribulation saints is precisely parallel to the material in Matthew 24:32-35. Subsequently, Luke continued with admonition to those who will be raptured prior to the tribulation: give careful attention to spiritual life — not allowing the cares of life to produce complacency lest that day (a short form designation for "Day of the Lord" tribulation events) come upon you like a trap, for it will come upon all who dwell on the earth. Instead, pray to be able to escape all these tribulation events that must occur, and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:34-36). As will be demonstrated later in chart form, the synoptic accounts selectively include different portions of Jesus' entire presentation, but the order of arrangement is consistent throughout all accounts. Therefore, if Matthew were to record Jesus' words on the theme of being ready for a

rapture prior to the tribulation, one would expect to find it in the verses immediately following his statement concerning the absolute reliability of his words (Matt 24:35), which is exactly the case. Matthew’s account includes a sizeable section which enlarges upon Luke’s brief treatment, and gives much more detail concerning the theme of how to “watch” (24:36—25:30), providing examples and instructions regarding how to live to be ready for the rapture.

Discourse Structure

Considering the structure of a given passage is foundational for a proper exegetical understanding of that passage, and this necessitates investigation of the structure of the Olivet Discourse as presented in Matthew 24—25. When Jesus was seated on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came with two questions. First, when will these things occur? The second question had two parts, closely related: What will be the sign a) of your coming, and b) of the completion of the age? The questions, in addition to Jesus’ answers in reverse order, present a chiastic structure.

- A. Timing: when will these things occur (v. 3b)?
- B. What is the sign of your coming (v. 3c)?
- C. And of the end of the age (v. 3d)?
- C’. The sign of the end of the age: the tribulation (vv. 4-29)
- B’. The sign of his coming: astronomical event (vv. 30-31)
- A’. Timing: regarding the events of the end (vv. 32ff)

Therefore, Jesus’ answers to the questions provide the key to the structure, making a natural outline. The *chiasm* also distinguishes Matthew 24:4-31 from what follows, based upon the connection between the question in relation to timing and Jesus’ answer regarding timing.¹¹ The structure indicates the start of a third section in verse 32 (further investigation will reveal where this third section is concluded).

¹¹ Although Matthew does not record Jesus’ answer regarding when the Temple would be destroyed, comparison with Luke’s account demonstrates that Jesus said the destruction of Jerusalem would occur at a time earlier than the end. However, Matthew does record the disciples’ question concerning timing, as well as a reply by Jesus regarding timing in verses 32 and following. Consequently, as far as Matthew’s literary presentation is concerned, there is a question concerning timing in verse 3b, and an answer regarding timing in verses 32 and following (thus the *chiasm* still remains).

The first section addresses the sign of the completion of the age. The sign is the sum total of the catastrophic events of the tribulation, the early part of which is described as initial birth pains, with the end not being yet (24:4-8), and continuing with even greater disasters (24:9-29).¹²

The second section addresses the sign of the Son of Man. The sign is specifically connected in Matthew to the sudden glorious appearance (vv. 30-31) that cannot be duplicated by any impostor because it flashes like lightning across the heavens (24:27, 30). Luke's account also emphasizes "sign" in relation to events in the heavens immediately preceding the glorious advent (Luke 21:7, 11, 25).

The third section addresses timing regarding future events. Jesus' answer regarding timing begins in verse 32, giving encouragement to saints who live during the tribulation. He used the parable of the fig tree to indicate that the generation which sees all these terrible events will also witness the consummation of all things (vv. 32-35), which is a statement parallel to Luke 21:28-33, and corresponding to what can be deduced from Revelation and Daniel (i.e. that the tribulation will be limited to a period of seven years).

Jesus continued with the issue of timing, making a summary statement regarding the coming of the Son: no one knows the day and the hour, neither the angels nor even the Son (24:36). The repetition of "day" and "hour" (24:37-38, 42, 44, 50; 25:13) indicate continuation of Jesus' answer regarding timing. The paragraphs are interconnected in various ways to indicate continuation of the topic of the sudden coming of the Son of Man. "Then" [τότε] of 25:1 connects to 24:51, and ultimately to "then" [τότε] of 24:40.¹³ The temporal marker indicates He gave an illustration concerning the same topic, and this continuation is confirmed by reiteration of "day" and "hour" (25:13). The very next parable with regard to the talents is connected to the preceding parable by the words "for it is just like" [ὡσπερ γάρ] (25:14), which explain why it is so necessary to be watchful regarding the unknown timing of the coming.

The section is concluded by an *inclusio* based upon "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων) (24:51; 25:30) which connects the talent pericope (25:14-30) to the account of the brutal slave (24:45-51), reiterating that the talent pericope is a continuation of the warning that each individual must be diligent with reference to being ready for the sudden return of the Master. The talent pericope completes the section with regard to timing — a conclusion confirmed by a triple

¹² See also, Pettegrew, "Interpretive Flaws," 188.

¹³ Bigalke, "Olivet Discourse," 133.

element *inclusio* (Jesus appearing in glory, angels, a gathering) regarding the most dramatic event of the age: the glorious advent.

Jesus appears in glory at the end of the tribulation (24:30),
and angels gather the elect (24:31)
Focus: proper response to timing information
(24:32—25:30)
Jesus, on the throne of his glory, with angels (25:31),
all nations gathered (25:32)

The triple element *inclusio* – based upon the most dramatic event of the age (the glorious advent) – is an emphatic structural signal delineating Matthew 24:32—25:30 as the grand focal point of the entire discourse. One can almost imagine the author saying, “Pay utmost attention to this central major section. Do not get distracted by the amazing details seen before and after. For believers, this is the most important thing to remember.” The structure thus isolates the central section as a separate topic with regard to how believers are to relate to the prospect of the coming of Christ. Failure to utilize this structural marker has been the basis for many exegetical errors concerning the Olivet Discourse.

The prominence of the central section is emphasized both by the large number of verses devoted to it, as well as its position in the center of the *inclusio*. Consequently, it is the answer to “when,” the perennial question humans always ask: when will these things occur? The primary issue is not so much “when” but the importance of responding properly to the information Jesus gave regarding the timing of future events.

The central section (24:32—25:30) is divided into two parts: 1) observe tribulation events and be encouraged because one knows that Jesus will return very soon (24:32-35); and, 2) be ready for a coming that could occur at any moment (24:36—25:30). The subdivision of this central section into two parts is indicated by several factors. First, a change in topic is initiated by the opening words of verse 36 (Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας), the first two words of which are an expression which in other contexts is often translated “now concerning” and is used to indicate a different topic.¹⁴

¹⁴ When it occurs with a specific numeral, it refers to an approximate time, such as “about the eleventh hour” (Matt 20:6, cf. 27:46). Without a specific numeral, it often indicates a change of topic (Matt 22:31; Mark 12:26; Acts 21:25; 1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thess 4:9; 5:1). The final example is especially interesting because it indicates a change in topic from the rapture in chapter 4 to

Second, the details of the two parts confirm the change in topic. In the first part, the believers are admonished how to respond when they observe “all these things” (v. 23), namely, what has been described in verses 4-29; they can expect the consummation within their own generation (v. 34), a confidence guaranteed by Jesus’ own words (v. 35). Jesus used the example of the budding fig tree to emphasize that the saints of the tribulation period will know with absolute certainty that his glorious return will occur very shortly (v 32-33). There is no element threatening losses for those not prepared, a stark contrast to the second part, with its urgently repeated warnings of devastating losses for those who are not ready for the unknown day or hour of His sudden coming.

Indeed, the themes in the verses of the second part (24:36—25:30) make a dramatic contrast to what the first group is commanded to observe in verses 4-29. For example, 1) complete absence of signs *in contrast to* global earthquakes, worldwide plagues, the abomination of desolation, amazing miracles to authenticate a false christ, and darkening of the sun and moon; 2) emphasis upon complacency and carefree enjoyment *in contrast to* deception and excruciating tribulation; 3) repeated emphasis upon not knowing the day and hour *in contrast to* the dramatic global signs immediately following the terrible tribulation (v 29) and preceding Christ’s advent (v. 30); 4) urgent warnings of devastating losses for the unprepared *in contrast to* no emphasis upon being ready and no threat of loss; 5) selective judgment of individuals *in contrast to* the mass disasters of the tribulation which would affect everyone without discrimination; and, 6) a time period of indefinite duration before the coming *in contrast to* a specified time limit of the Son of Man appearing in glory within a generation. Thomas summarized these ideas.

The (*de*) that begins v. 36 must be transitional, because the thirty-sixth verse changes from the discussion of signs preceding the coming to emphasize that no signs will precede the parousia. *Peri de* (24:36) is a frequent NT device for introducing a change from one phase of a subject to another phase of the same subject or from one subject to another subject (cf. Matt 22:31; Mark 12:26; 13:32; Acts 21:25; 1 Cor 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thess 4:9, 13;

the tribulation in chapter 5 (in the entire section, Paul addressed the time of the end, but he changed to a distinctly different aspect of that discussion). If someone would claim that some usages exist that do not indicate a change in topic or emphasis, this would not negate the fact that some usages do indicate a variation. In Matthew 24:36, the change is confirmed by the dramatic difference in details and themes.

5:1). The verse introduces an aspect of the coming different from the one pointed to in Matt 24:29-31.¹⁵

Consequently, Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse contains structural and thematic indicators designating Matthew 24:32-35 and 24:36—25:30 as two distinct units. Both units are focused upon a proper response to timing information, but the first admonition gives tribulation saints confidence that Jesus will come in their generation (24:32-35), and includes a pivotal verse with regard to certainty (21:35), applicable to both what precedes and what follows. The second admonition is for saints who at an unknowable time will be raptured before the tribulation begins (24:36—25:30). Careful comparison with the accounts in Mark and Luke demonstrates the same pattern: timing advice for tribulation saints (Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:28-33) which also (similar to Matt 24:32-35) includes a pivotal verse with regard to certainty (Mark 13:32; Luke 21:33), applicable to both what precedes and what follows; then timing advice for pretribulation saints with regard to being ready for the Lord's coming at an unknown time (Mark 13:33-37; Luke 21:34-36).

Therefore, the Olivet Discourse does address the rapture, and the *structure* of the discourse removes the contextual objection of having a rapture paragraph adjacent to material describing the end of the tribulation period. The structural consideration explains the presence of the rapture pericope in Matthew 24, and confirms the retention of the evident meaning defined in Luke 17. Observation of the content and structure of Matthew 24:30—25:46 reveals a *chiasm*.

- A. Christ's Glorious Advent, part 1 (24:30-31)
 - B. Timing advice for tribulation saints: expect consummation in your generation (24:32-35)
 - B'. Timing advice applicable prior to the tribulation: be ready for an any-moment rapture (24:36—25:30)
- A'. Christ's Glorious Advent, part 2 (25:31-46)

Ronald Mann made an important observation regarding the significance of a chiastic structure.

Two characteristics of chiasm help interpreters understand the meaning of biblical passages: (1) the presence of either a single central or of two complementary central elements in the structure,

¹⁵ Robert L. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul's Thessalonian Epistles," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (Fall 2002): 193, fn. 8.

which generally highlight the major thrust of the passage encompassed by the chiasm; and (2) the presence of complementary pairs of elements, in which each member of a pair can elucidate the other member and together form a composite meaning.¹⁶

As a literary device, the structure of a multi-level *chiasm* emphasizes the central section. However, when the chiastic structure is composed of only two pairs of elements, the focus is not so much upon the central portion as a unit, but rather upon the correspondence between each pair of elements.¹⁷ Recognition of these elements is particularly relevant in the two-part central section, which highlights the admonition to the tribulation saints regarding the glorious advent, and contrasts the admonition to those raptured prior to the tribulation beginning.

Therefore, the Olivet Discourse produces a natural outline. The first point is the sign of the end of the age, the tribulation; then, the next four points arise from the chiastic structure formed by the repetition of the glorious advent enclosing two sections of admonition regarding timing.

- A. The sign of the end of the age: the tribulation (24:4-29)
- B. Christ's glorious advent, part 1 (24:30-31)
- C. Timing advice for tribulation saints:
 - expect consummation in your generation (24:32-35)
 - C'. Timing advice applicable prior to the tribulation:
 - be ready for an any-moment rapture (24:36—25:30)
- B'. Christ's glorious advent, part 2 (25:31-46)

Proper analysis of Matthew's account is analogous to a geologist who discovers a huge granite boulder on a vast level plain. He does not attempt to deny the existence of the boulder, nor give arguments as to why it cannot be a granite boulder even though it possesses chemical and physical properties of granite. Instead, he investigates all available data in order to discover the significance and implications of its presence. Careful analysis of Luke 21 causes us to *expect* a rapture pericope in Matthew 24; study of Luke 17 provides independent definition of the "one taken, the other left"

¹⁶ Ronald E. Man, "The Value of Chiasm for New Testament Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (April 1984): 147-48.

¹⁷ Ibid. 148-49. See also, Gary W. Derickson, "Matthew's Chiastic Structure and Its Dispensational Implications," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (October 2006): 424-25.

pericope as rapture material, and therefore defines its meaning in Matthew 24.

In summary, the events of the tribulation are the sign of the end of the age, a sign culminated by the glorious advent. However, this sign is initiated by an event that is preceded by no signs and comes without warning: the rapture. When the church is raptured to safety, the interim between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth week is finished, and the Day of the Lord judgments begin for those who remain. After Jesus finished discussing the importance of being ready for the imminent and sudden rapture, He recommenced a discussion regarding his glorious advent (i.e. what happens when He is seated on the earthly throne of his glory).

Context of Matthew's Discourse

In Matthew 23, Jesus scathingly denounced the religious leaders of Israel, who were outwardly pious, but full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. His concluding paragraph (vv. 29-36) condemned them for building the tombs of the prophets, and claiming they would not have been partners in shedding their blood, when in fact they had the same vicious character as their fathers who had murdered those prophets. Jesus promised to send them prophets, wise men, and scribes, but prophesied that instead of receiving their message, they would kill, crucify, scourge, and persecute the messengers. Judgment would fall upon "this generation," the contemporaries of Christ (cf. the parallel usage in Luke 17:25).¹⁸

While this paragraph is not part of the Olivet Discourse *per se*, it is actually inversely parallel to the section in Luke's account of the Discourse that deals with the early persecutions and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Luke 21:12-24). Luke's account advises saints regarding two issues: 1) how to respond to persecution; and, 2) how to escape the judgment that will fall upon the capital city of their persecutors.

The paragraph in Matthew 23:29-36 focuses upon the same time period from the standpoint of the persecutors. Jesus will send them messengers whom they will persecute, and then severe judgment will fall upon the Jewish nation. After making this dire announcement, Jesus

¹⁸ The meaning of "this generation" obviously means Jesus' contemporaries, and does not contradict a different meaning in 24:34, which (as demonstrated in part 2 of this series), Luke's carefully structured account defines as the tribulation generation (21:32). The usages illustrate the fact that the same word can have vastly different referents even though they appear less than 40 verses apart — *if* the structure of all the relevant passages is taken into account.

departed from the Temple (Mat 23:37-39). He no longer described it as “My Father’s House,” but rather as “your house.” The house remaining in their evil hands is desolate because of the absence of the rejected King, and awaits its destruction at the hands of the Romans. Since Matthew addressed these events in Matthew 23:29—24:2, it is not too surprising that he included no more concerning the destruction of Jerusalem when Jesus was teaching on the Mount of Olives (24:3—25:46). Luke’s account supplies the details (Luke 21:20-24).

As Jesus was leaving the Temple, his disciples mentioned the beauty of the building (24:1), almost as if they had not heard his declaration of its desolation (23:38). Jesus made a statement to get them thinking (24:2), a statement that would have been utterly shocking to any believing Jew: not one stone will be left upon another. Such destruction of the Temple would imply severe divine displeasure against the nation, indicating profound national sin. The mention of the Temple’s destruction (24:2) relates to Jesus’ statement that their House is left to them desolate (23:38), and ultimately to his pronouncement of judgment upon that generation (23:35-36).

Therefore, Jesus’ eschatology of the Olivet Discourse actually begins in chapter 23. By including this material as it occurred chronologically in relation to the Olivet Discourse, Matthew managed to include both the material regarding the early persecutions and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (23:29—24:2), as well as material regarding persecutions and the terrors of the abomination of desolation at the time of the end (24:3-28). At the same time, Matthew avoided any confusion that would come from a tendency to view Matthew 24:3-28 as a combination of AD 70 and the time of the end.

Combine Synoptic Contrasts and Parallels for the Entire Olivet Discourse

To correctly understand the Olivet Discourse, one must properly assimilate the data from all three accounts. First, one must observe that the structural and thematic details of each account delimit specific sections, so that one a) accurately identifies referents to events separated by many centuries, and b) properly differentiates between referents to different aspects of the complex events of the time of the end (viz. the rapture and the tribulation). Second, one must keep in mind that the order of presentation of each account is consistent among all accounts. Careful comparison enables one to confidently reconstruct the order and content of Jesus’ entire discourse,

even though the various synoptic authors selectively included different sets of details.

Matthew included the early persecutions and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 from the vantage point of the persecutors (Matt 23:29–24:2), while Luke included the same event from the vantage point of the persecuted (Luke 21:12-24). The sections of Mark's account are not as emphatically delimited as those of Luke. However, the position and content of his statements (Mark 13:9-13) is parallel in so many details to Luke 21:12-19 that it must be referring to the early persecutions described in the Lukan account, not the tribulation persecutions described in Matthew 24:9-14 with which Mark 13:9-13 lacks detailed correspondence. Mark begins this section (v. 9) with a topic shifting construction [βλέπετε δὲ ὑμεῖς ἑαυτοὺς]. The intensive pronoun "you," serves to change the topic from the nations of the end time to his contemporary audience who will experience this early persecution.

Only Luke included admonition concerning how to escape the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The key for fleeing is when armies surround Jerusalem. Only Matthew and Mark include admonition concerning how to escape the ravages of the Antichrist. The key for fleeing is when he establishes the abomination of desolation.

Luke alone included a concise and pointed statement of a pretribulational rapture — avoid complacency and dissipation and pray to be able to escape all the coming tribulational events (Luke 21:34-36). The obvious pretribulational rapture statement in his paragraph is within the same sequential position in the Discourse as the expanded material regarding how to be ready for that rapture found in Matthew and Mark. The details in Matthew and Mark correspond to a pretribulational rapture, but cannot properly correspond to the glorious advent at the end of the tribulation.

Matthew includes the most extensive treatment of Jesus' admonition regarding the rapture. In the illustrations mentioning two types of people, the righteous are delivered or rewarded first, and then the wicked are judged. The day Noah entered the ark, the Flood came and destroyed those who remained. The faithful slave who is rewarded is described prior to the brutal slave who is punished. The five wise virgins go into the wedding; later the five foolish are refused entry. In the parable of the talents, the faithful slaves are rewarded first, and then the lazy slave is judged.

The illustrations correspond to the meaning of the summary statements in Luke 21:34-36. The reader is admonished to avoid complacency and dissipation and to pray to be able to escape all the

tribulation events. Otherwise that Day will come as a trap in the way it catches all the earth dwellers. Luke's careful structure and wording demonstrate that the rapture occurs prior to the tribulation, which fits the pattern of the classic rapture-tribulation passage: after the rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18), the Day of the Lord comes like a thief, with sudden destruction like labor pains (5:2-3). By describing the tribulation using the labor pain metaphor, Paul confirmed that this symbol in the Olivet Discourse is an important indicator identifying the tribulation section; it will be a time of excruciating severity. The listing of catastrophic events (deceptions, wars, earthquakes, famines) is immediately followed by an ominous summary: these are the *beginnings* of birth pains (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8b), implying that what follows will increase in intensity and frequency.

The following chart shows the correspondence between the synoptic accounts, and enables one to construct a visual representation of the entire Olivet Discourse. For clarity, section summaries are presented in italics, followed by detailed comparisons.

Matthew 23—25	Mark 13	Luke 21
early persecutions and destruction of the Temple in AD 70: vantage of persecutors (23:29—24:2)	—	—
<i>end time tribulation, part 1 (vv. 4-8)</i>	<i>end time tribulation, part 1 (vv. 5-8)</i>	<i>end time tribulation, part 1 (vv. 8-11a)</i>
deceivers, wars, international conflicts, earthquakes, famines (vv. 4-7)	deceivers, wars, international conflicts, earthquakes, famines (vv. 5-8a)	deceivers, wars, international conflicts, earthquakes, famines (vv. 8-11a)
all these are beginning of birth pains (v. 8); defines the material as end time tribulation	these are the beginning of birth pains (v. 8b); defines the material as end time tribulation	—

—	[βλέπετε δὲ ὑμεῖς ἑαυτοὺς] (<i>construction suggesting change to contemporary audience regarding persecution (vv. 9-13)</i>)	<i>before all these things: early events from vantage of the persecuted (vv. 12-24)</i>
—	early persecutions involving synagogues, kings, and rulers, resulting in testimony (v. 9)	early persecutions involving synagogues, kings, and rulers, resulting in testimony (vv. 12-13)
	the gospel must be preached to all the nations (v. 10)	—
—	trust the Holy Spirit to give the believer words to speak (v. 11)	trust the Holy Spirit to give the believer words to speak (vv. 14-15)
—	relatives will betray one another to death (v. 12)	relatives and friends will betray one another to death (v. 16)
—	the believer will be hated by all unbelievers, but the one who endures will be saved (v. 13)	the believer will be hated by all unbelievers, but will not experience lasting loss (vv. 17-19)
—	—	advice concerning how to escape the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (vv. 20-24) sign for fleeing: when one sees armies surround Jerusalem (vv. 20-21) result: Jews killed and captives scattered to all nations; Jerusalem trampled until the end of the age (vv. 22-24)

<i>end time tribulation, part 2</i> (vv. 9-29)	<i>end time tribulation, part 2</i> (vv. 14-25)	<i>end time tribulation, part 2</i> (vv. 11b, 25-26)
<p>tribulation persecutions (vv. 9-14)</p> <p>hated by all the nations (v. 9)</p> <p>many offended and will betray and hate one another (v. 10)</p> <p>false prophets deceive many (v. 11)</p> <p>lawlessness will cause the love of many to grow cold (v. 12)</p> <p>the one who endures to the end will be saved (v. 13)</p> <p>this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the nations, then the end will come (v. 14)</p>	—	—
<p>advice concerning how to escape the ravages of the Antichrist (vv. 15-22)</p> <p>sign for fleeing: abomination of desolation (v. 15)</p>	<p>advice concerning how to escape the ravages of the Antichrist (vv. 14-20)</p> <p>sign for fleeing: abomination of desolation (v. 14)</p>	—
<p>do not be tricked by deceivers (vv. 23-27)</p> <p>vultures gather to the carcass (v. 28)</p>	<p>Do not be tricked by deceivers (vv. 21-22)</p> <p>take heed to Christ's warning (v. 23)</p>	—

sun and moon darkened; stars fall; powers of heaven shaken (v. 29)	sun and moon darkened; stars fall; powers of heaven shaken (vv. 24-25)	terrors and signs from heaven (v. 11b); signs in sun, moon, and stars, distress of nations (v. 25); fear, powers of heavens shaken (v. 26)
<i>glorious advent, part 1:</i> Jesus appears in glory (v. 30); angels gather the elect (v. 31)	<i>glorious advent, part 1:</i> Jesus appears in glory (v. 26); angels gather the elect (v. 27)	<i>glorious advent, part 1:</i> Jesus appears in glory (v. 27)
<i>timing admonition to tribulation saints: be encouraged because it will soon end (vv. 32-35)</i>	<i>timing admonition to tribulation saints: be encouraged because it will soon end (vv. 28-31)</i>	<i>timing admonition to tribulation saints: be encouraged because it will soon end (vv. 28-33)</i>
parable of the fig tree (v. 32); when all these things occur, know the nearness (v. 33); this generation will not pass until all is fulfilled (v. 34); Jesus' predictions are more reliable than the universe (v. 35)	parable of the fig tree (v. 28); when these things occur, know the nearness (v. 29) this generation will not pass until all is fulfilled (v. 30); Jesus' predictions are more reliable than the universe (v. 31)	when these things occur, redemption is near (v. 28); parable of the fig tree (vv. 29-31); this generation will not pass until all is fulfilled (v. 32); Jesus' predictions are more reliable than the universe (v. 33)
<i>timing admonition to saints of the rapture: be ready for an unpredictable coming, lest you incur terrible loss (24:36—25:30)</i>	<i>timing admonition to saints of the rapture: be ready for an unpredictable coming, lest you incur terrible loss (vv. 32-37)</i>	<i>timing admonition to saints of the rapture: be ready for an unpredictable coming, lest you incur terrible loss (vv. 34-36)</i>
now concerning that Day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels (v. 36)	now concerning that Day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels (v. 32)	summary: avoid complacency and dissipation lest that Day [of the Lord — the tribulation] come upon you as a trap (vv. 34-35)

—	—	definitive statement of the rapture prior to the tribulation: watch and pray to be able to escape all the tribulation events and stand in the presence of the Son of Man (v. 36)
as the days of Noah: after one is taken to safety, the other is left for judgment; knowledgeable householder watches instead of being burglarized; faithful slave rewarded, brutal slave punished; wise virgins enter, foolish virgins excluded (24:37—25:12)	—	— [cf. Luke 17:26-37 which Jesus taught on a different occasion regarding the rapture]
watch, because one does not know the day nor hour when the Son of Man is coming (25:13)	watch and pray, because one does not know when the time is (v. 33).	—
master gives assignments for slaves to perform while he is absent in a far country (25:14-15)	master gives assignments for slaves while he is absent in a far country (v. 34)	—
good slaves rewarded, lazy slave judged (25:16-30)	—	—
—	be careful to watch, because one does not know when He will return, whether evening, midnight, or morning (vv. 35-37)	—

<p><i>glorious advent, part 2:</i> Jesus on his earthly throne judges at sheep-goat judgment (25:31-46)</p>	<p>—</p>	<p>—</p>
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Matthew’s Literary Parallel with Luke

In a literary sense, Matthew is precisely parallel with the account in Luke 21. Both begin with the initial trauma of the tribulation (Matt 24:4-8; Luke 21:8-11a). Both give advice to believers regarding a time of trouble: Matthew describes tribulation persecutions (Matt 24:9-14) and advice regarding the Antichrist disaster (24:15-28); Luke describes early persecutions and the AD 70 disaster (Luke 21:12-24).

Matthew’s observation that the glorious advent is a cause for great mourning by unbelievers (Matt 24:30) is parallel to Luke’s remark that unbelievers will be terrified by the expectation of things worse than they have already experienced (Luke 21:26). Matthew’s description of the gathering of the elect (Matt 24:31) corresponds to Luke’s advice to tribulation saints to look upward because their redemption is near (Luke 21:28).

Both Matthew and Luke give encouragement to tribulation saints: the terrible events will be brought to a conclusion in their generation (Matt 24:32-35; Luke 21:29-33). Both Matthew and Luke then include warnings to pretribulation saints regarding the rapture (Matt 24:36—25:30; Luke 21:34-36). Luke differentiates these sections by careful *inclusio* and content. Having been instructed by Luke’s structure, one recognizes the same content in Matthew.

The first century fulfillment of Luke’s prophecy of the early persecutions and desolation of AD 70 provides a dramatic harbinger of worse things at the time of the end: the persecutions and desolation described by Matthew. The very similar descriptions regarding events surrounding Jerusalem make the AD 70 event a type of the latter desolation. Matthew’s precise literary parallel with Luke emphasizes that fulfillment of the ultimate persecutions and desolation is just as certain as the early fulfillment in AD 70.

OVERVIEW OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

The Tribulation

In the first major section of Matthew's presentation of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus described details of tribulation events in verses 4-29. For many years, pretribulation authors have noticed the correspondence between Matthew 24 and Revelation 6. There will be false christs (vv. 4-5; Rev 6:2), wars and conflicts (vv. 6-7a; Rev 6:4), famine (v. 7b; Rev 6:5-6), death (vv. 6-7; Rev 6:7), earthquakes (v. 7b; Rev 6:12), martyrs (vv. 9-10; Rev 6:9-11), sun and moon darkened, and stars falling (v. 29; Rev 6:12b-13).¹⁹ The events concern the time of the end, and are not a picture of the long weary years of the centuries since the Lord's ascension. The sum total of these tribulation events are the sign of the completion of the age, and will be terminated by the glorious appearance of the Son of Man (vv. 30-31), an event causing great mourning by the evil inhabitants of the earth.

Matthew 24:4—25:41 speaks only of the time of the end, and says nothing about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The troubles described in 24:4-8 are merely the beginning of birth pains, implying future disasters of even greater intensity and frequency. The persecutions mentioned in 24:9-14 are those of the tribulation period and focus upon spiritual disaster at the hands of false prophets, a noted contrast with the early persecutions (Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19) which focus upon spiritual success and reliance upon the Holy Spirit. The abomination of desolation delineates a dramatic increase not only in the severity of trouble, but also in the danger of deception (24:15-29).

Christ's Coming in Glory

The sign of Jesus' coming in glory is like lightning which flashes across the sky, and is impossible to counterfeit (24:27, 30). His coming will be a grand contrast to the preceding weary years of trouble. Instead of deception and tribulation and false local messianic claims, Christ's coming will be in power and glory, and will be universally obvious like lightning shining from east to west. However, instead of rejoicing, all the tribes of the earth

¹⁹ See Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1916) 2:182; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 278-79; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966) 123; Bigalke, "Olivet Discourse," 122.

will mourn — the focal center of verse 30 (the Son of man appears, tribes mourn, the Son of man comes in glory). The vast majority will demonstrate their wickedness by preferring the horrors of their own Antichrist kingdom rather than submit to the rule of Christ; it is no wonder that the tribes of the earth mourn. Jesus' appearance in glory will bring the Gentile domination of the world to a complete and bloody end, their evil plans in utter ruin.

The details regarding that deadly confrontation are found in other prophecies. At the end of the tribulation period, the nations will mount a concerted attack upon Israel to eliminate the "Jewish problem" (Rev 16:14; Zech 12:1-3). Evidently the only Jews in the land of Israel will be unbelievers who made a pact with the Antichrist and did not heed Christ's warning to flee when they saw the abomination of desolation. Two-thirds of the land will be overrun (Zech 13:8). In their desperate situation, the Jews in the land will be refined (13:9a) and individually call to the Lord in their extremity and be received by the Lord (13:9b). Evidently this turning to God will occur prior to Jesus appearing (Matt 23:39). Even Jerusalem will be taken (Zech 14:1-2), and then Jesus will suddenly appear and fight against the Gentile attackers in a gigantic bloodbath known as the battle of Armageddon (Zech 12:3; Rev 19:11-21). No wonder the tribes of the earth will mourn (Matt 24:30). The Jews will recognize their national error of rejecting their Messiah and choosing the counterfeit who came in his own name (John 5:43), and as a nation they will mourn their former folly (Zech 12:10-14; 13:1, 9). Jesus will have taken the unbelieving Jewish nation through its time of tremendous trouble, and will have brought them to repentance (Jer 30:7). The new Jewish converts will be with Christ as He establishes his kingdom.

After his victory, Jesus will command his angels to gather his elect. The gathering by angels is a contrast to those who go to see a false christ during the days of the Antichrist (vv. 23-26). The absence of resurrection, and the gathering to Jesus who will already be on the earth is a contrast to the rapture where deceased church saints are resurrected and then gathered with living saints to meet Christ in the air (1 Thess 4:16-17). The gathering is a contrast to the sheep-goat judgment where all the Gentiles²⁰ are gathered, and then the goats destroyed and the sheep retained for the kingdom (25:31-46).

²⁰ The eternal punishment of the ungodly makes it evident that the sheep-goat judgment is of individuals, not nations, so "Gentiles" is a better translation of [τὰ ἔθνη] (25:32). The rendering avoids the confusion of thinking there are sheep or goat nations (see Bigalke, "Olivet Discourse," 134-35).

The gathering by the angels is from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων ἀπ' ἄκρων οὐρανῶν ἕως τῶν ἄκρων αὐτῶν) (v 31), using Greek terminology that connects the phrase to references in the Septuagint which specify distant directions upon the earth, not residence in the heavens (Dan 8:8; 11:4). The terminology also alludes to Deuteronomy 30:4 (ἀπ' ἄκρου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἕως ἄκρου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ἐκεῖθεν συνάξει σε κύριος ὁ θεός σου), speaking of believing outcasts whom God will gather. The gathering in Matthew 24:31 becomes the ultimate fulfillment of the statement by Moses.

Consequently, the elect (24:31) who are gathered are the believing Jews who have been scattered throughout the world. Certainly they include the 144,000 Jewish witnesses who will all stand upon Mt. Zion (Rev 14:1-5). They are the elite ones whose faithful testimony had been either received or rejected by the people of the world. Therefore, they will be with Christ in glory as He judges those who heard them (Matt 25:31-46); the elect also includes the faithful Jewish remnant worldwide, and particularly those who acted by faith in Christ's words and fled immediately upon seeing the abomination of desolation. When the gathering is complete, the entire believing nation of Israel will be with Christ in the land as He judges the Gentiles, and speaks of "the least of these my brethren" (Matt 25:40, 45).

The Question of Timing

The next part of Matthew's account records Jesus' discussion regarding timing. As a special encouragement to saints living during the dark days of the tribulation, Jesus has promised that all the things He has just mentioned will be fulfilled during their generation. The tribulation events will provide an encouraging countdown to his glorious advent (24:32-35). The sequence of tribulation events is the sign of the end of the age, which is the great Day of the Lord described by the Old Testament prophets (viz. the time when the Lord outpours his judgments upon the earth).

"Day" and "hour" are regularly used throughout Scripture for "time" in general, not just twenty-four-hour or sixty-minute periods (in Matt cf. 7:22; 10:19; 24:42, 44, 50; 25:13; 26:45). "Day" especially reflects the Old Testament "Day of the Lord" (cf. esp. throughout Zephaniah) as a stock phrase for the end of the age (cf. Matthew's "day of judgment" in 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; and cf. also Rom 10:21; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 3:14; Eph 6:13). Verses 42-44 will use "day," "time of night" (*watch*), and "hour" interchangeably. "Day" and "hour" appear in synonymous parallelism in v. 50. Hence,

Christians who claim they can narrow down the time of Christ's return to a generation or a year or even a few day's [sic] period, while still not knowing the literal day or hour, remain singularly ill-informed.²¹

In contrast to this countdown for tribulation saints, Luke's carefully structured account makes it evident that the saints of the present era are to both guard their hearts from being distracted by temptations and cares of this life, and also to pray that they will be able to escape all the tribulation disasters which will come like a trap upon the earth dwellers (Luke 21:34-36). The moment when this period begins is totally unpredictable, not preceded by any signs. No one knows when the Son of Man will return to remove the church from the arena of tribulation judgments. Jesus said that no one knows the day or hour, indicating that the time of his coming is "beyond human determination altogether, and not just partially, e.g., so that, say, the month or year *could* be known."²²

Jesus is saying that no one has the faintest idea about when—in the broadest sense of the term "when"—the Son of Man will return. Here He indicates the complete unexpectedness of what will overtake the world at the time of His second advent. He changes the subject from the signs that indicate the nearness of His coming to establish the kingdom in 24:32-35 to speak of events which will have no signals to indicate that the advent is "at the door." In other words, 24:36 speaks of a different arrival from the arrival signaled by "all these things," twice referred to in connection with the parable of the fig tree in 24:32-34. After 24:36 Jesus looks at the events of Daniel's seventieth week as a whole and how the beginning of that week will catch everyone by surprise, with no indication that it is "at the door."²³

The repeated unknown timing emphasis agrees with the rapture, but definitely does not correspond with what is known concerning the timing of the glorious advent from the perspective of saints living during the tribulation period. Revelation provides not only a sequential checklist

²¹ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992) 365. He included D. A. Carson's pointed statement in a footnote: "Moreover it is ridiculous quibbling divorced from the context to say that though the day and hour remain unknown, we ascertain the year or month" ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 8:508.

²² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Dallas: Word, 1998) 716.

²³ Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 194.

of seals, trumpets, and vials of wrath by which one can monitor the progress of Daniel's seventieth week, but also presents a specific countdown (42 months, two periods of 1,260 days each) that pinpoints the actual day when the Antichrist's career will end. The countdown will be a special encouragement during those dark days of the tribulation: there is a definite measurable time limit on the reign of the Antichrist who will be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming (2 Thess 2:8). The time of Christ's return in glory is the same day that the Antichrist is destroyed.

No one, not the angels of heaven, not even the Son of Man in his humiliation (v. 36), can pinpoint the time of the rapture of the church. Truly, it is amazing that mere men throughout the centuries have claimed to know the date, thus exalting themselves as being wiser than the Lord Jesus when He walked the earth. The "one taken, the other left" pericope (Matt 24:36-41) is clearly defined by Luke 17 to be referencing the rapture, not the glorious advent at the end of the tribulation. Matthew's account includes this pericope in precisely the position corresponding to the rapture paragraph in Luke 21, and continues with illustrations giving much more detail regarding the terrible losses to be incurred by those who are negligent and disobedient to the assignments given to them by Christ.

The coming of the Son of Man will be just like "the days of Noah" which obviously refers to the time prior to the Flood. People were pursuing the ordinary activities of life: eating, drinking, and marrying. Matthew's description of the initial troubles of the tribulation period as the *beginning* of birth pains absolutely precludes the notion that this coming of the Son of Man is referring to something at the end of the tribulation period. Just as labor pains make it impossible for a woman to concentrate upon anything else, the crescendo of tribulation disasters will make ordinary life impossible. People from all walks of life will be crying for rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of God (Rev 6:15-17). Even unbelievers will know God has caused their calamities, and will be terrified at the prospect of meeting Him; it will not be ordinary life whatsoever!

Neither does the description of Noah's day speak of the wickedness of those times (which one knows from the account in Genesis), but rather describes a society engulfed in secular pursuits, with no concern to give account to God. Suddenly, ordinary life was interrupted by Noah's entry into the ark. Once Noah was in a place of safety, the Flood came and destroyed the wicked who remained (Matt 24:36-39a).

The same pattern will be repeated when the Son of Man comes for the church (24:39b-41). Similar to the righteous preaching of Noah (2 Pet 2:5), the saints today testify to the importance of being ready to meet God.

However, society is engulfed in secular pursuits and ignores the warning. Suddenly the Son of Man will take the church to Himself, and those left behind will experience disaster.

A great separation will occur, based upon inner spiritual condition. Two men will be working in the field. Two women will be grinding together. In both cases, the emphasis is upon ordinary life and identical activities; it is not that the one who is praying in church will be taken, but the other who is living as a prostitute will be left. According to the inner spiritual condition, one will be taken to safety with the Lord, the other left. Those left behind will be overwhelmed by judgment.

The illustrations that follow exhibit the same pattern of people busy with the affairs of ordinary life: the unwatchful man whose house was burglarized, the slave who was punished for abusing his opportunity, the contrast between virgins ready to attend the wedding and those who were not, and the rewards for faithful service contrasted to punishment of the wicked and lazy. The illustrations emphasize the unexpectedness of the Lord's coming, and the devastating losses for those who are not prepared. Each illustration depicts ordinary life of this present age, not scenes of mass judgments in the tribulation.

Jesus used a sequence of illustrations to emphasize the supreme importance of living diligently according to the Master's directives, in order to always be ready for a rapture that could occur at any moment. The illustrations explain in greater detail Luke's brief paragraph teaching believers to be alert and pray to be able to escape all the tribulation events (Luke 21:34-36). The biblical perspective enables one to understand the paragraphs in their natural sense, that is, precisely the type of situation when Jesus calls his own by an imminent rapture, sending the rest into judgment.

Such understanding is confirmed by a passage from Luke 12, which uses parables to emphasize the importance of being ready for the unpredictable coming of the Son of Man. The parables Luke mentioned have obvious correspondence to Matthew's Olivet account. Slaves who carefully wait for the return of their master from a wedding (Luke 12:35-37) correspond to virgins also waiting for a bridegroom coming to a wedding (Matt 25:1-13).²⁴ The householder whose house was burglarized because he was not alert (Luke 12:38-40) is also found in Matthew 24:43-

²⁴ Even though the wedding events are different in the two accounts, the focus in both accounts is upon the importance of being ready for a coming of unknown timing, which clarifies an important point. The parable of the ten virgins is a parable emphasizing the importance of being ready, not an allegory with one identity for the virgins and another for the non-mentioned bride.

44. The good and wise steward, having the option of either remaining faithful and receiving a reward, or turning vicious and licentious and being punished (Luke 12:42-48) corresponds to Matthew 24:45-51. The catastrophic judgments of the tribulation are completely absent from the context of Luke 12; the admonition is for believers in the present era to be alert always and to be ready for Christ's coming, which could occur at any moment, without advance warning. The same parables emphasizing the unpredictable timing of the Lord's return cannot in the Olivet Discourse be referring to Christ's glorious advent which will be preceded by a detailed countdown of dramatic events. Therefore, the parables of Luke 12 provide hermeneutical confirmation that the parables in Matthew 24:36-25:30 refer to the rapture of the church, not to something occurring at the end of the tribulation.

The central section regarding timing advice to saints dominates Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse (24:32—25:30). Of this portion, the second part (24:36—25:30), which warns pretribulation saints to be ready for the rapture, is more than ten times as long as the first part giving timing encouragement to tribulation saints (24:32-35), and thus has by far the greater emphasis. The section addressing the imminent coming of the Son of Man is the longest single section in Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse (24:36—25:30), and by its length and its central position is therefore the supreme focus of the entire discourse. Such emphasis is not surprising: the unknown moment not only ushers the church to safety, but is the day and hour (cf. 24:36) that initiates the tribulation judgments, analogous to the Flood judgment of Noah's day. For the church, the rapture is an imminent event (not preceded by any signs, cf. Luke 17), which will immediately precede the great Day of the Lord, which will culminate in the consummation of all things.

The Judgment of the Gentiles

Of the three synoptic authors, Matthew alone recorded what will occur subsequent to the glorious advent. Jesus will have already returned in glory (24:30), vanquished the attacking Gentile armies and fed them to the birds (Rev 19; cf. Matt 24:28), and gathered the believing Jews who had been scattered throughout the earth (24:31). He now proceeds to the next stage of operations. All the Gentiles²⁵ of the world (those in the homelands and not part of the attacking armies) will be gathered to Him as He sits on his throne of glory (25:31-32). Jesus will judge them according to their

²⁵ Bigalke, "Olivet Discourse," 134-35.

character, as evidenced by their works: how they treated the believing Jews (these My brethren, vv. 40, 45) during those tribulation days.

Only true believers will be willing to risk their lives to minister to believing Jews during the intense worldwide persecutions that will dwarf the holocausts of previous centuries. The wicked will be cast into eternal punishment (v. 46). At this point, all the tares that have infiltrated God's field will be cast into the fire (Matt 13:30, 40-42), and the wheat gathered into his barn (13:30, 43). The Jewish and Gentile believers will inherit the kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world, producing the population of the millennium.

CONCLUSION

Luke 17 and 21 provide hermeneutical keys for confident exposition of the Olivet Discourse. Using these indicators, the Olivet discourse can be carefully reconstructed, combining the various elements provided by the three synoptic authors. Matthew 23 predicts the AD 70 event from the vantage point of the persecutors; Luke 21 predicts that event from the vantage point of the persecuted. Matthew 24:4—25:46 speaks only of the time of the end.

“This generation shall not pass” refers to the generation living at the time of the tribulation. Believers during that period will have many events providing them a countdown to the day of their deliverance at the glorious appearance of Christ (Luke 21:29-33), encouraging them to be confident while the rest of the world cowers in fear (21:25-28).

Believers in the church age are to live carefully, praying that they will be able to escape all the tribulation events that will suddenly come like a thief to overwhelm the unbelievers (Luke 21:34-36). Just as in the days of Noah, people were busy with their secular pursuits, and without warning except for the preaching of Noah, sudden judgment fell after Noah was placed in a position of safety — so it will be when the Son of Man comes to take the church to be with Him. The longest section of the Olivet Discourse emphasizes the supreme importance of being ready to go with Christ when He comes at the rapture (Matt 24:36—25:30), an event which will come suddenly upon the world without any prior signs (Luke 17:20). Those unprepared will experience great loss. Those who are ready will reign in the earthly kingdom (cf. Rev 20).

The Olivet Discourse addresses the vast expanse of New Testament prophecy: the early persecutions which came soon after the ascension; the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70; the scattering of the Jews and trampling of Jerusalem in the weary centuries continuing through the present; the

importance of present day saints always being ready for the imminent rapture of the church; the tribulation (including information concerning how to respond to the Antichrist abomination of desolation), and specifics regarding severity (birth pains) and relative brevity (all fulfilled within a generation); the exultant anticipation of believers who witness the countdown of tribulation events guaranteeing their soon redemption at the coming of their Lord; the great mourning of unbelievers when the Son of Man comes in glory; his sending angels to gather the elect; and, the gathering of the Gentiles for judgment where the goats are sent to eternal fire, while the sheep inherit the millennial kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world.

The Olivet Discourse is thus the Lord's succinct outline for all New Testament eschatology. Jesus' teaching provides the foundational framework for elucidating all the details from Revelation and Daniel and all the prophets. By beginning with Jesus' outline, prophetic studies can be presented in a way that is easy for audiences to understand. Further detail can be added after the fundamental framework is understood.

AUTHORITY INVERSION: The Subversion of Pastoral Leadership

Tony Garland

A troubling situation many pastors find themselves in today is that of occupying a place of apparent leadership, but lacking true authority. The office of pastor, which Scripture establishes as the source of leadership and authority within a local fellowship, can be hindered and even subverted by local church practices which have more in common with cultural expectations than the teaching of the New Testament. The unfortunate result is that the person or persons expecting to be entrusted with the role of spiritual leadership and authority within the local church find themselves under the restrictive control of those whom they purportedly lead. The limitation represents an inversion of the authority structure established by the New Testament and contributes to the subversion of pastoral leadership within the local church.

EXAMPLES

Although there are numerous situations which contribute to the inversion of pastoral authority, consideration of a few representative scenarios can help to illustrate what is meant by “authority inversion” and provide a foundation for identifying some root causes of this unbiblical practice.

Congregational Rule

One of the more obvious practices by the local church which subverts pastoral authority is that of *congregational rule*. By its very name, a *congregational-ruled* church, places ultimate authority within the congregation. The congregational-ruled church governmental structure is particularly popular in the West since it aligns with the expectations of the untaught within a congregation that biblical government would naturally

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follow democratic principles. For instance, if the Bible teaches that men are predisposed toward evil, congregational rule would be the safest and wisest approach rather than centralization of authority among a few men — or even one man.

Within the congregational-ruled local church, decisions are made by popular vote. Although the pastor or pastors within a congregational church may have considerable influence upon the decision-making process, ultimately they have no more authority than any other voting member within the local church. Therefore, authority ultimately resides with the sheep rather than the shepherds and authority is *inverted*.

It is mainly in our American democratic society where the churches feel it is their right to vote on almost every issue, from the selection of the pastor down to the color of the church bus! The sheep are then in charge, and not the leadership and the shepherds that God wants in place in an assembly!¹

Pastor Search Committee

Another situation where authority inversion frequently occurs is the case of a long-term fellowship of believers which seeks to obtain a pastor by way of a pastoral search committee. Concluding they lack viable candidates within the fellowship, the committee searches for an external candidate suitable for the figurehead role as pastor.

In many cases, the process is triggered by the departure of the previous pastor requiring that the search occur during a period of ministry by multiple itinerant pastors during which the local church lacks committed long-term spiritual guidance. The fellowship itself may have a long history — often owning the local church building, property, and other resources — such that the continuation of the fellowship and its assets continues over multiple generations while individual pastors come and go.

Typically, the lack of any remaining pastor(s), the longevity of the fellowship within the local community, and the practice of inviting an external “unknown” pastor lead to an authority problem: the local fellowship is unwilling to take the risk of investing their new pastor with true biblical authority. Of course, it takes time to get to know someone and to build real trust. An external candidate, no matter how carefully examined, remains a significant unknown — a risk. The problem is often compounded by a lack of a plural pastorate because important biblical

¹ Mal Couch, ed., *A Pastor's Manual on Doing Church* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2002) 133.

checks and balances are not in place to safeguard the process of introducing and establishing a new pastor.

The result is predictable: the new pastor occupies a position only as a figurehead, but lacks true authority — often regarded simply as an employee who can be fired as easily as he was hired. The authority of the pastor only extends to matters and decisions which are implicitly endorsed by significant members of the congregation. In other situations, pastoral authority is subverted.

Governing Board

The real authority within the fellowship continues to reside with a search committee or governing board, most often regarded as “the elder board.” While this may seem to approximate what the New Testament prescribes for a biblical fellowship, the problem is often that the persons which constitute this board are not true elders because they lack the biblical qualifications which the New Testament sets forth for such individuals: men who are of godly character possessing an intimate knowledge of Scripture coupled with the ability to teach and refute false teachers.

According to Paul’s required qualifications for eldership, a prospective elder must have enough knowledge of the Bible to be able to refute false teachers . . . [Tit 1:5, 6, 9] . . . unlike modern board elders, all New Testament elders were required to be “able to teach” (1Timothy 3:2) . . . it is a scriptural requirement that an elder “be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9).²

Church Discipline

The subversion of pastoral authority is problematic and stressful when it affects day-to-day operational decisions within the local church, but becomes egregious when it compromises spiritually important activities, which are critical to the health of the fellowship, such as church discipline.

Church Discipline. The very words strike terror in the heart of most pastors. Their hands sweat, their mouths go dry, . . . What are we to do? To obey God may very well threaten our ministry, our security, our hopes and dreams, not to mention wreaking havoc and strife

² Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995) 18-23.

among the people we love and have devoted our lives to serve. But to disobey God due to our fears and apprehensions is to dishonor Him and abandon the field of spiritual warfare at precisely the wrong moment. . . . Many a pastor has found himself marginalized, or even removed from his ministry, for daring to obey the Word in relation to a family member of a well-connected church leader.³

CAUSES

Prior to considering Scripture for solutions to this marginalization, it is helpful to consider factors which lead to authority inversion.

Cultural Expectations

The history of the Christian church is one of periods of varying acceptance by its surrounding culture. At times, when the church undergoes rejection and persecution, its form and practice tend toward faithfulness to Scripture. Conversely, in times of acceptance, the church often incorporates elements of the culture which are foreign to Scripture. The latter situation characterizes much of the history of the Christian church in the West resulting in numerous local churches which are patterned after cultural expectations and practices rather than New Testament truth. Two common cultural influences upon practices of the local church are the *democratic model* and *business model* of government. Both of these influences contribute to an inversion of authority within the local church which ultimately subverts biblical pastoral leadership.

One of the examples given earlier was that of a *congregational-rule church*. Such a church is patterned after democratic ideals rather than New Testament principles: the spiritual leaders have no authority except what derives from approval by congregational vote.⁴ Congregational government misinterprets the advisory role which the assembly exercised in the New Testament as being authoritative and binding upon the leadership.⁵ *Congregational-elder rule* is a variation of this democratic

³ Christopher Cone, ed., *Practical Aspects of Pastoral Authority* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009) 211, 218.

⁴ “. . . to the extreme, the congregation votes on almost every issue. The sheep have full control, with the shepherds only following directions” [Couch, *Pastor’s Manual*, 37].

⁵ “The congregation may have a say in choosing missionaries (Acts 15:19-29), and the setting forth of candidates for the office of deacon (Acts 6:11-7).

version of church government where the congregation elects elders and deacons but remains involved to varying degrees (by vote) in governing the local church (this may be the most popular system within evangelicalism).⁶ Although the elders and deacons are vested with decision-making authority, their authority is limited — subject to pleasing the majority of the congregation since retaining the office of elder or deacon is dependent upon the vote of the assembly.

One can generally identify *de facto* congregational rule, even within local churches which do not claim to be congregational. A clue can be found in the importance which attends requirements for local church membership: the church constitution will place great emphasis upon membership — establishing a clear line between attendees who are “members” versus those who are not, which is natural when one considers that the congregational *vote* is where authority lies. Hence, those with authority (the congregation) need to carefully control where such authority is extended. Becoming a member of such a local church is generally conditioned upon acceptance by being voted into association by the existing members of the congregation. The emphasis upon membership, because of the all-important voting privilege that ensues, compounds problems by distorting the biblical definition of a local fellowship.

Apparently the New Testament did not have a formal church membership or inauguration into the fellowship of the congregation. . . . It would seem biblical that those wishing to fellowship in a church would be admitted based on their profession of faith only. The apostles do not give any specific criteria for joining the group.⁷

Formal membership further compromises spiritual decision making because some members may not be true believers while others who are true believers may not be members. Decisions may not only be within the prerogative of the congregation, but to varying degree within the control of *unbelievers*. Membership within a local fellowship by an act of men departs from the teaching of the New Testament which emphasizes membership in the body of Christ by an act of God.

However, the elders are spiritually responsible for the way they manage and take care of the church of God (1 Tim. 3:5)” [Ibid. 37].

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. 35.

The most biblical way of dealing with membership would be that the church would have no hard and fast guidelines for membership, except certainly, confession of faith. Strong elders are the “keepers” of the truth for the church, and should be able to deal with any problems that might cause conflict in the local church body.⁸

As the importance of official church membership is elevated, so too unbiblical distinctions have an effect upon believers. If only members can vote, should non-members be allowed to serve? To teach? To administer communion? Procedures such as these results in a serious distortion of what it means to be a member of the body of Christ. A believer who may have attended the fellowship for some time, but is not a member, is allowed to *take* communion, but not *administer* communion. Such a believer is then essentially prohibited from exercising their God-given gifting: all because of man-made criteria which is not found within the New Testament.

. . . our being a member of the church, of the body of Christ, of one another, has absolutely nothing to do with human voting or the will of man. It has everything to do with what God has accomplished within that person through the new birth. God is the one who makes a person a member, not us. And for us to say that someone is not a member and use that terminology, I believe is a denial of spiritual reality based upon a man-made criteria. . . . to refuse someone their place within the body, to refuse them the work that God not only endowed them for but called them to because of a human institution or criteria that I can't even find in scripture, to me is a fearful thing. It's almost a denial of the work of God in that person's life.⁹

Proponents of placing great importance upon local church membership — most often because of its relationship to voting—sometimes counter that formal church membership is a measure of spiritual commitment to the local church. If a believer attends the fellowship regularly, why would they not simply become a member and begin serving? One reason could be that they can find no scriptural mandate for the practice, or perhaps they have experienced its abuse in situations where the preponderance of voting members are unbelievers. In

⁸ Ibid. 36.

⁹ Greg Summers, *The Nature of the Church - Part 1* (Camano Island, WA: Mabana Chapel, 2006) 5, http://www.mabanachapel.org/teaching/topics/20060430_nature_of_church_1.pdf (accessed 23 July 2010).

any case, formal membership, which is so important to democratic forms of local church government, has proven to be an unreliable measure of spiritual commitment.

I am convinced that voted membership is not a valid measure of a person's spiritual commitment either to the church or to Jesus Christ. It is certainly not a biblical one. I have known voted members who were quite treacherous in their commitment to the body of Jesus. And I have known non-voted members who have been exceptionally responsive to the will of God. True measures of spiritual commitment are biblically defined. Not humanly defined. And they are such things as love, and servant-hood, and giving, and faithfulness, and prayer, and time in the word, and there are a number of things, but not voted membership. It's not an accurate measure of spiritual commitment.¹⁰

Another cultural expression of church government which subverts pastoral authority follows modern business practices. In this form of church government, typically a single pastor occupies the role of "visionary" or "executive" corresponding to the business role of a CEO. He may also have a supporting staff which is under his authority; however, as in a corporation, he and his staff is subject to a board of directors who essentially hire and fire them as employees. His performance as pastor may even be formally evaluated by comparison with a detailed job description including specifications for frequency of home and hospital visits, pulpit performance, formal reporting of activities, and more.

Often, this model of church government also embraces secular ideas of what it means to be a leader with the attendant belief that the services of a special, formally-trained professional are needed in order to specialize ministry and accomplish local church growth.¹¹ Rather than being raised locally — in conjunction with other similarly gifted individuals — into a position of true authority, the pastor is viewed as a solitary and unique individual: a "hired holy man." Typically, the expectations for his performance and influence upon the fellowship are

¹⁰ Ibid. 6.

¹¹ "Lesslie Newbigin goes so far as to question whether the church ought to encourage the concept of leadership, so difficult it is to use without being misled by its non-Christian counterpart. The church needs saints and servants, not 'leaders,' and if we forget the priority of service, the entire idea of leadership training becomes dangerous. Leadership training must still follow the pattern our Lord used with His twelve" [J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994) 148].

unrealistically high yet he is not granted corresponding authority because final authority (and his remuneration) resides with the board — which often consists of members lacking in biblical qualification.

Since the pastoral leader is the hired professional, he is often viewed as the main person responsible for accomplishing the work of the ministry. Instead of equipping the saints for the task, his role becomes that of *doing* most of the ministry. Spiritual work which could and should be done by the wider congregation is left to the professional.¹²

Unbiblical Elders

Leadership authority can also be subverted within churches by an unbiblical understanding of how the New Testament defines the office of “pastor” or “elder.” Problems occur when churches differentiate between the office of “pastor” and “elder.” Most frequently, the man who regularly teaches from the pulpit is known as the “pastor” whereas another group of men, usually members of a governing board, are distinguished from the pastor having the title of “elders” or “lay elders.” Sometimes the terms “pastor” and “elder” are used to differentiate those who are paid (pastors) from those who are not (elders). The pastor is often a hired full-time employee subject to a governing board consisting of elders, who are typically elected by the congregation and may or may not be paid.

There are at least two problems with such an arrangement. First, the pastor, being an employee of the board, is effectively under the authority of the elders. He may occupy a position of authority in the eyes of the congregation, but ultimately his opinion must acquiesce with the elder board or he risks termination as their employee. Second, the Bible does not differentiate between the office of pastor and elder — the terms merely emphasize different aspects of the same position of service.

Where the terms “pastor” and “elder” are used to denote differences in function there is also the attendant danger of understanding them to denote a difference in the biblical qualifications of the individuals to which they apply. Since the pastor occupies the pulpit and has great spiritual visibility within the assembly, he is generally subject to the biblical qualifications which Scripture specifies for such an individual.

¹² “Clericalism does not represent biblical, apostolic Christianity. Indeed, the real error to be contended with is not simply that one man provides leadership for the congregation, but that one person in the holy brotherhood has been sacralized apart from the brotherhood to an unscriptural status. In practice, the ordained clergyman—the minister, the reverend—is *the Protestant priest*” [Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 113].

However, since the elders do not occupy the pulpit — and may not even teach — they are often pragmatic business leaders with influence and connections within the community, but lacking the biblical qualifications required by an elder. Even though the New Testament says otherwise, this practice of differentiating between the purpose and qualifications of “pastor” versus “elder” has become so widespread that it has made it difficult to use the biblical term “elder” as an alternate appellation for the pastor.

Although the term *elder* is the predominate New Testament term used to describe local church leaders and is especially suited to the nature of the new Testament churches, it conveys to the overwhelming majority of Christians and non-Christians today ideas that are different from those found in the new Testament. People today think of church elders as lay, church-board members who are separate and distinct from the professional, ordained pastor (or clergyman). I refer to these elders as “board elders;” they are not true New Testament, Christian elders. They are advisers, committee men, executives, and directors. A true biblical eldership is not a businesslike committee. It’s a biblically qualified council of men that jointly pastors the local church.¹³

Even where the pastor is included as a member of the “elder board,” pastoral authority is subverted because decisions are subject to the majority rule of the elder board, which is comprised of individuals who lack the biblical qualifications of a true elder. Consequently, pastoral decisions are subverted through the influence of men critically lacking in spiritual orientation and priorities.

Lack of Longevity

Another contributor to authority inversion is the relatively short period of time that characterizes many pastoral tenures. When a pastor occupies a position within a local fellowship for a relatively short period of time, it becomes impossible for the congregation to really get to know him and vice versa. Add to that the concern by the congregation that the pastor may not be committed to the fellowship for the long term and it is easy to see why the biblical model of placing authority in the possession of the pastorate is not readily followed.

¹³ Ibid. 31.

The reasons why many pastoral positions are short-lived are varied. In some cases, short tenure is simply a symptom of the inability of leadership within the fellowship to have a harmonious relationship because of conflict — often in regard to the exercise of authority. Another common contributor is ambitious pastors who view their role within the body of Christ much like a secular career in which one of their goals is that of promotion to ever more influential and larger pastorates — with an attendant increase in remuneration.¹⁴ In churches whose government emulates a business model, pastoral tenure may be short because the pastor, as CEO, fails to accomplish the required growth in numbers or ministries sought by the board so his employment is terminated in favor of a replacement. In other cases, the pastorate may be subject to imposed limits on length of service established by his denomination. Lastly, as families live within an increasingly mobile society where associations, businesses, and living arrangements seem to be changing more frequently than ever this contributes yet another challenge to the long-term commitment to ministry within a community.

Regardless of the cause, short-term pastoral tenure adversely affects the development of transparency and trust between those who would minister as pastors and the sheep which God has given them. The results are unfortunate as history and experience demonstrate that truly fruitful ministry occurs most often when pastors serve within the same fellowship for an extended period.¹⁵

Familiarity

Another contributor to the subversion of pastoral authority is the reluctance to develop pastoral leadership from the midst of an established fellowship. Once again, the issue is risk: *whenever a fellowship attains a spiritual leader from an outside source there is greater risk due to the lack of intimate familiarity between the fellowship and the new leader.* The idea of introducing a relatively unknown person and investing them with authority over the fellowship is fraught with difficulty. The result is

¹⁴ “The word *ambition* comes from a Latin word meaning ‘campaigning for promotion.’ The phrase suggests a variety of elements: social visibility and approval, popularity, peer recognition, the exercise of authority over others. Ambitious people, in this sense, enjoy the power that comes with money and authority. Jesus had no time for such ego-driven ambitions. The true spiritual leader will never ‘campaign for promotion’” [Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 15].

¹⁵ Examples of fruitful long-term ministries include those of Alistair Begg, James Boice, and John MacArthur.

predictable: the externally obtained leader is immediately given a title, position, and responsibility, but various means are employed to avoid vesting him with the necessary biblical authority to be truly successful in his role. Once again, authority inversion is the unhappy result.

If filling pastoral roles with relatively unknown external candidates is so risky, why is it so common? There are numerous factors which contribute to this practice. First, there is often the belief that a pastor must be a trained professional — preferably a seminary graduate. While it is possible to become better prepared and trained to pastor, training alone is not the primary measure of whether a person is suitable or effective as a pastor — much less whether they are called to this office by God. Consider those whom Jesus and Paul disciplined as leaders and from where they were drawn. With the notable exception of the Apostle Paul, they were not formally trained in the scriptures. The New Testament gives priority to character and faithfulness over formal training (John 7:15; Acts 4:13; 2 Tim 2:2). The misplaced belief in the need of a trained professional automatically prevents consideration of men within the fellowship who God would raise to become pastors and who are intimately known and trusted, having a long and demonstrated involvement in the local church.

Second, there may be an emphasis on a clergy-laity distinction — a distinction foreign to the New Testament. Similarly to how Jesus remarked, “a prophet is not without honor except in his home town and in his own household” (Matt 13:57), the local fellowship may seek an external individual whom they assume is of great spirituality for a leader rather than recognize the true spirituality of one in their midst. Therefore, there may also be an unwillingness to elevate someone who is called by God, but presently “only a deacon or sheep,” into a position as a spiritual leader because it entails submitting to his leadership which requires trust in God and great humility. There may also be the perception that in order to function effectively as a spiritual leader, the pastor must occupy the role of a uniquely gifted and separated person who can never really become a part of the congregation, but must distance himself from the sheep.¹⁶ Such expectations exclude consideration of called and gifted individuals within the fellowship since they are already an intimate part of the assembly.

Third, the fellowship may have established goals which they perceive as excluding the consideration of internal candidates. Such goals can bias the selection of a new pastor because the characteristics of the

¹⁶ “The concept of the pastor as the lonely, trained professional — the sacred person over the church who can never really become a part of the congregation — is utterly unscriptural. Not only is this concept unscriptural, it is psychologically and spiritually unhealthy” [Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 43].

pastor most important to the fellowship are seen to be related to ministry goals rather than biblical qualifications. For example, the fellowship may have an older, mature individual who meets biblical qualifications for consideration as a pastor, but the pastoral search committee or similar group has established guidelines which call for a young, dynamic individual — perhaps with an evangelistic emphasis and suitably “hip” style which will appeal to the younger generation, or perhaps the internal individual has a relatively modest personality whereas the search committee is seeking a “vision caster” more akin to a dynamic business CEO. There may also be undo concern that an older individual may not continue in the position as long as desired.¹⁷ In short, ministry goals are allowed to supersede biblical qualifications such that spiritual development of leadership within the local church is precluded.

In each case, the fellowship creates a dilemma: the difficult task of introducing a relatively unknown outsider while investing that individual with true biblical authority over the fellowship. Predictably, the transfer of authority is generally compromised.

SCRIPTURAL GUIDANCE

Having considered examples of the inversion of authority and examined some of the causes, the scriptures are necessary for guidance. Scripture defines the church and its function, thus one can be confident that applying biblically sound practices will alleviate or greatly reduce the problem of the subversion of pastoral authority.

Elder Rule

First, the scriptures indicate that leadership of the local church is vested in elders and not the congregation.

The New Testament does not indicate that the congregation governs itself by majority vote, and there is no evidence that God has granted every member one equal vote with every other member. Rather the New Testament congregation is governed by its own congregational elders. The elders, according to the express instruction of the New Testament, have the authority to shepherd the congregation.¹⁸

¹⁷ The term “elder” (πρεσβύτερος) denotes one who is older and experienced.

¹⁸ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 293.

In his first letter to Timothy, concerning the qualifications of an elder, Paul stated that an elder must rule his own house well in order to properly know how to take care of the church of God (1 Tim 3:5). Paul affirmed that as a man rules as head of the household so too an elder rules in a way which takes care of the local church. Later in the letter, Paul mentioned, “elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17). Paul instructed the church at Thessalonica “to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thess 5:11-12). The ministry of the elders at the church of Thessalonica was a labor of love among the fellowship. Paul said these elders were “over” the flock and were to be esteemed. Peter, having exhorted the elders in their leadership task, enjoined the younger people to “submit yourselves to your elders” (1 Pet 5:5). The writer of Hebrews also made mention of the leadership role of elders within an assembly: “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you” (13:7) and “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account” (13:17).

The unambiguous testimony of the New Testament is that a group of men, known as “elders,” are to lead the local church. They are to lead by way of sacrificial example, following the pattern of the ultimate Shepherd of the assembly: Jesus (1 Pet 5:2-4).

Plural Elders

Second, the scriptures indicate that each local church is ruled by a plurality of elders. The principle of a plurality of elders in each fellowship is an enormous safeguard and provides great benefit to the local church. As a safeguard against authority inversion, it allows the vesting of true biblical authority among the elders with a greatly reduced risk of the abuse of authority. A single individual, even a relatively unknown external candidate, may go astray yet the fellowship remains protected from abuse by the multiplicity of elders — most of whom will have a longstanding record of service at the assembly. With a plural eldership in place, the motivation for withholding authority from the elders is greatly reduced.

A Pastor Is an Elder Is a Pastor

Third, the Bible indicates there is no distinction between the role of “pastor” and “elder.” As already mentioned, the term “pastor” has become the culturally established title of someone who serves as the main preacher within a local church whereas the term “elder” is often understood as denoting a different function, or worse: the title used for a pastor within a cult.¹⁹ Scripture simply does not support the common practice of attaching different responsibilities, qualifications, and roles to the terms “pastor” and “elder.”

The Apostle Peter, having referred to himself as a “fellow elder,” enjoined elders to “shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers” (1 Pet 5:2). The function of the elders is that of shepherding (*poimainō*, from which the term “pastor” derives) and serving as overseers (*episkopountes*, from which the term “bishop” derives).

Scripture is quite clear that these descriptive titles relate to the same pastoral office. The terms elder and bishop are synonymous in Acts 20:17, Acts 20:28 and Titus 1:5-7. The terms elder, bishop, and shepherd are synonymous in 1 Peter 5:1-2. The leadership role of elders is also evident in the shepherdly activity of James 5:14. As clearly noted by Lightfoot, in biblical times elder and bishop were synonymous terms.²⁰

Overseers and deacons are called to lead the church. As is clear from Acts 20:17, Acts 20:28 and Titus 1:5-7, overseer is another term for elder, the most common New Testament name for the office (cf. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 23; James 5:14). Elders are also referred to as pastors (or shepherds; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2), pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11), and bishops (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:2).²¹

Nor does Scripture know anything of a “lay-elder” — someone who functions as an elder, but lacks suitable knowledge of the scriptures to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2). According to the New Testament, a pastor is a shepherd is an overseer (bishop) is an elder! Whenever the local church makes a distinction between “pastor” and “elder,” it has departed from Scripture which can only lead to confusion or worse.

¹⁹ Mormonism is an example.

²⁰ John MacArthur Jr., *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry* (Dallas: Word, 1995) 39.

²¹ John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001) 14.

In relation to authority inversion, it is not biblical for an “elder board” to exercise authority over a “pastor” since – according to Scripture – elders and pastors are one and the same. At the very least, a pastor should be a member of the elder board and have an equal role in decisions. Where a board governs a local church, the board should be comprised of a group of *biblically qualified* elder-pastors. Specifically, the same qualifications required for a pastor would apply to each board member. Adherence to the New Testament precludes populating an elder board with individuals who possess business knowledge or community influence rather than true biblical qualifications. Heeding the biblical requirements alone would protect decisions from undue bias by secular rather than spiritual considerations because the men on the elder board are those who are spiritual and biblical in their outlook and goals.

One would search the scriptures in vain for common titles such as “senior pastor” and “associate pastor” which establish one pastor as having formal authority over another. Within the Bible, all pastors have equal authority even if some may have greater influence due to greater gifting or experience. Even the Apostle Peter, when exhorting other elders, referred to himself as merely a “fellow elder” (1 Pet 5:1). The equality of pastors set forth by the New Testament works so long as the pastors are spiritually minded, submitted to God, and submitted to one another. The result will be joint decision-making which recognizes the principle of “first among equals.”

Failure to understand the concept of “first among equals” (or 1 Tim. 5:17) has caused some elderships to be tragically ineffective in their pastoral care and leadership. Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication. Therefore, those among the elders who are particularly gifted leaders and/or teachers will naturally stand out among the other elders as leaders and teachers within the leadership body. This is what the Romans called *primus inter pares*, meaning “first among equals,” or *primi inter pares*, meaning “first ones among equals.”²²

The decision making of the plural elders operates much in the same way as gifts within the body of Christ — each elder has differing wisdom, experience, and insight which may bear upon the particular decision being

²² Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 45.

made. The various giftings will be recognized among their peers resulting in superior counsel for the benefit of the entire fellowship.

Voting Is Advisory

Fourth, the Bible indicates that although a wise group of elders will seek to understand the desires and wisdom of the congregation, decision-making is ultimately the responsibility of the elders. Although there is nothing wrong with using voting as a means of determining the majority opinion among the assembly, it should serve only as advisory input to the group of elders who are vested with the authority of making any final decision. The pattern described herein was followed in what many consider to be the earliest example of decision-making described in the book of Acts: the selection of deacons (Acts 6:1-7).

What then was the role of the congregation [in Acts 6:1-7]? And how did they respond to what was happening? (1) They “selected” the deacons (v. 3). (2) the deacons found “approval” with the apostles’ words (v. 5). And, (3) they “chose” out seven men (v. 5). Luke says nothing about a casting of lots, which would probably be the method of voting. To choose was not a voting but literally in Greek a calling forth, a form of screening, but not technically a voting. And even this “setting forth” had to be approved by the apostles who were then acting as elders.²³

There are only two places in the New Testament where the congregation had an open say on specific issues relating to the direction of the church. However, in both cases this was not a democratic voting as we think of today. The first is mentioned in Acts 6:1-7 in which the apostles, who were acting as elders in the Jerusalem church, told the congregation to “select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task” of the daily charity and the care of the widows. . . . The second mention of congregational involvement in decisions is the choosing of missionaries [in] (Acts 15:22). In both instances the assemblies had a say about the selection of their deacons and missionaries, but again, this was not a popular vote as we might conceive of today.²⁴

²³ Couch, *Pastor’s Manual*, 51.

²⁴ Ibid. 142-43.

CONCLUSION

What are the benefits which accrue when a local church follows New Testament principles so that authority is properly vested in the elders? As one might expect, they are considerable because of two simple principles in regard to Scripture: (1) God's way is always the best way; He simply knows best; and, (2) God always blesses obedience, even when one does not understand all the reasons for doing things his way.

Decisions made by spiritually-minded men possessing biblical qualifications will follow biblical principles and goals and will resist cultural fads, the desire to amuse and entertain, and succumbing to secular expectations. Such men will make leadership decisions which promote true spiritual growth. The job of governing the local church will be more pleasant, rewarding, and efficient since the leadership team are more likely to have similar viewpoints informed by the scriptures such that conflict will be reduced. Leadership will no longer suffer from crippling compromise where spiritual principles are sacrificed in order to appease other interests within the local church that wield ultimate authority. The possibility of longer term leadership involvement and commitment in the fellowship increases since there is less conflict and burnout, where multiple elders are involved, overlapping terms of pastoral service among the group of elders provides consistency even in cases where individual pastors may come and go.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Apostles after Jesus: A History of the Apostles (Separating Tradition and History) by David Criswell. Dallas: Fortress Adonai Press, 2013. 226 pp., paper, \$14.95.

Hagiography is a topic that has had negative consequences in both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. Theologians from tradition-based churches tend to accept the legends too quickly whereas Protestants have overcompensated by rejecting extra-biblical writings without a fair trial. Rare it is to find a scholar who has sincerely scrutinized the evidence to come to a reasonable conclusion of what really occurred after Acts 28. David Criswell is a resolute Protestant who has presented an honest examination of the lives and deaths of the apostles in light of history in his new book, *The Apostles after Jesus*.

Criswell's four primary sources were epistemological, historical, apocryphal, and legendary references. He determined that while the age of the source is a factor, the type of source is more significant; such that epistemology from the sub-apostolic age may be more valuable than a historical source of this time, whereas a historical source from the Nicene era may outweigh epistemology from the same age (p. 4). In contrast to Roman Catholic canonical hermeneutic, which interprets the Bible in light of church history, Criswell determined the legitimacy of a source, first and foremost, by its consistency with Scripture. However, he did not discount the entirety of a source if it has serious errors. For example, while Criswell agreed with many that *The Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas* bears heresy (pp. 5, 67-68) and unlikely route to Ethiopia (pp. 73-74), he recognized that this work lends credibility to others that claim that Thomas went to India.

The thirteen main chapters of *The Apostles after Jesus* were dedicated to the lives of the eleven original apostles (not including Judas Iscariot), Matthias, and Paul. Each of these chapters has a uniform structure. Criswell started with a brief introduction to the apostle, then presented the history and traditions affiliated with the apostle, and then he evaluated the evidence and offered a conclusion. In the final chapter, he gave a brief history of twenty-eight of the apostles' companions in alphabetical order for convenient reference. The book also includes two helpful appendices. Appendix A gives brief introductions to various

sources that Criswell referenced, including church fathers and historians and apocryphal works and traditions. Appendix B provides charts and graphs. While most of Criswell's chapters include pictures, charts, and maps relevant to the topic of the chapter, Appendix B organizes charts of people and locations for quick reference and has a list of modern day countries and the men who served in them.

The Apostles after Jesus is an interesting and enjoyable read as well as a valuable reference tool. Anyone wishing to study New Testament background, to learn about early missiology, or to critique extra-biblical history and traditions can benefit from this study of the apostles' lives.

— Paul Miles
Bold Grace Eastern Europe (Ukraine)

Engaging with Keller: Thinking Through the Theology of an Influential Evangelical edited by Iain D. Campbell and William M. Schweitzer. Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2013. 240 pp., paper, \$14.39.

One of the most creative and influential pastors, theologians, and thinkers in the evangelical church today is Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and a prolific author. The six contributors to this volume all admire Keller, share his Presbyterian background and theology, yet believe some of Keller's doctrines and practices are inconsistent with biblical teachings. Keller is trying to present Christianity for the "contemporary unchurched and largely postmodern audience" (p. 21), yet at the same time maintain orthodoxy. His goal is a different endeavor, and the contributors believe that Keller often fails to attain his objective. One general concern is that Keller adopts a twofold answer to many questions. For the traditional modernist, he provides standard orthodox theology, but for the postmodern audience he supplies a different approach and set of answers (p. 21). The second set of answers is what has the contributors concerned. In attempting to make the gospel and theology understandable and winsome, Keller tends to remove his theological points and provides philosophical answers rather than biblical ones. Each chapter of *Engaging with Keller* critiques one such area of concern.

Chapter one, written by Iain Campbell, suggests that Keller has rebranded sin (via Kierkegaard), as seeking to obtain one's identity apart from God (p. 39). Keller confuses the symptoms of sin with the cause of sin (pp. 43, 58-59). Chapter two, by Kevin Bidwell, accuses Keller of developing his understanding of hell from C. S. Lewis rather than Scripture in an attempt to soften its horror for sensitive postmodernists. Chapter three, also by Kevin Bidwell, contends that Keller's metaphor of a dance for the Trinity, fundamentally weakens the triune God and misunderstands the eternal nature and essence of who God is.

Chapter four, by Peter J. Naylor, deals with one of Keller's most popular themes — the role of the church in social justice. Naylor thinks that Keller misrepresents the biblical ministry of the church and confuses the duty of the individual Christian with the duty of the church. Chapter five, written by C. Richard Holst, challenges Keller's hermeneutical approach, believing it is not consistent with Reformed hermeneutics, resulting in flawed exegesis on many occasions. Chapter six, by William Schweitzer, attacks Keller's promotion of theistic evolution. Chapter seven,

written by D. G. Hart, claims Keller has exchanged many of his Presbyterian roots for broader ecumenical affiliations such as the Gospel Coalition.

Engaging with Keller is an intermural critique of a brother in Christ. While appreciating much that Keller has done and teaches, the contributors believe that Keller's views are seriously flawed on several aspects. With irenic, but careful and serious biblical evaluation, the authors expose what they discern as areas in which Keller has erred or gone beyond Scriptural teaching. For those who want to take a closer look at Keller and his teachings, this little volume is invaluable.

— Gary E. Gilley
Southern View Chapel (Springfield, IL)

Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment edited by Alan P. Stanley. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 234 pp., paper, \$17.99.

The present work is the latest release in Zondervan's Counterpoints series, edited by Stanley N. Gundry. The series generally follows this standard format: presentation by three to five individuals of their understanding on a particular biblical or theological topic, responses to their position by each participant, and an introduction and conclusion by an editor.

The editor of this volume is Alan P. Stanley, the author of *Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? The Role of Works in Salvation in the Synoptic Gospels* (Pickwick Publications, 2006), and a pastor and teacher in Australia. The four participants are Robert N. Wilkin, the executive director of the Grace Evangelical Society and a leading "Free Grace" proponent; Thomas R. Schreiner, a noted Pauline scholar who is a professor and dean at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; James D. G. Dunn, the preeminent British New Testament scholar and author of many books; and, Michael P. Barber, a professor at John Paul the Great Catholic University. Stanley contributed an introduction and a conclusion. There are footnotes in the presentations and the responses, in addition to Scripture and subject indexes. A table of abbreviations for the journals and commentaries cited in the footnotes precedes the book but it contains no bibliography.

The four views of the authors are summarized on the book's backcover. Wilkin commented, "Works will determine rewards but not salvation: At the Judgment Seat of Christ each believer will be judged by Christ to determine his eternal rewards, but they remain eternally secure even if the judgment reveals they have failed to persevere in good works (or in faith)." Schreiner stated, "Works will provide evidence that one actually has been saved: At the final judgment works provide the necessary condition, though not the ground for final salvation, in that they provide evidence as to whether one has actually trusted in Jesus Christ." Dunn remarked, "Works will provide the criterion by which Christ will determine eternal destiny of his people: Since Paul, Jesus, and the New Testament writers hold together 'justification by faith and not by works' with 'judgment according to works,' we should not fall into the trap of playing one off against the other or of blending them in a way that diminishes the force of each." Barber affirmed, "Works will merit eternal life: At the final judgment, good works will be rewarded with eternal salvation. However, these good works will be meritorious not apart from Christ but precisely because of the union of the believer with him."

Although the book ostensibly presents four views on the role of works at the final judgment, it is almost just the view of Wilkin versus Schreiner, Dunn, and Barber. In his introduction, Stanley has a helpful overview on the theme of judgment in Scripture, the relation of the so-called new perspective on Paul to the role of works at the final judgment, and a brief word regarding each of the contributors. In his conclusion, Stanley summarized the four positions presented in the book. However, concerning the three crucial questions he introduced on the nature of saving grace and faith, salvation, and the biblical teaching on salvation, he likewise has Schreiner, Dunn, and Barber united against Wilkin.

Wilkin emphasized that perseverance is the condition for eternal rewards and not final salvation. He distinguished between the judgment of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ and the judgment of unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment. Salvation “is based on *faith in Christ*, not *faithful service for Christ*” (p. 29). He indicated, “The *same* speaker/writer can speak of salvation as a free gift on the one hand and rewards earned by works on the other” (p. 32). He answered biblical objections that are usually stated regarding things in the Olivet Discourse as well as two in the Pauline Epistles, one in Hebrews, and two in Revelation. He also explored exegetical and practical problems with the view that Christians will appear at the final judgment.

One may disagree with some of Wilkin’s interpretations, but his overall paradigm is both fundamentally sound and standard dispensational theology: there is a distinction between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment. Although each of the other contributors to *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment* claims to believe in salvation by grace through faith and justification by faith apart from works, they all believe that works are a factor for Christians at a final judgment to determine one’s eternal destiny.

Schreiner wrote, “There is no salvation apart from obedience and good works” (p. 87). “Paul clearly argues that good works are necessary for eternal life” (p. 91). Dunn affirmed, “For Paul ‘salvation’ is a process” (p. 125). “Salvation (eternal life) is spoken of as, in some degree, conditional on faithful endurance” (p. 138-139). Barber stated, “It is the presence or absence of works that determines one’s future destiny” (p. 168). “At the final judgment, good works play a role in our salvation” (p. 184). Barber connected salvation with baptism (p. 182); surprisingly, so did Schreiner (p. 85).

In their responses to each other, Schreiner, Dunn, and Barber all emphasized how much they agree with each other. Dunn referred to Schreiner as follows: “I don’t find much to quibble about in what he has

written” (p. 107). Barber remarked as follows regarding Schreiner: “I find myself essentially agreeing with most of his exegesis” (p. 111). Schreiner said concerning Dunn: “The extent of agreement between Dunn and me is significant since we both think good works are necessary for eternal life and final justification” (p. 148). Barber praised Dunn for “a masterful job highlighting the way salvation is described by Paul as not simply a discrete event but as a ‘process’” (p. 158). Schreiner referred to disagreements between Barber and himself possibly being “ultimately semantic” because “Protestants and Catholics both believe works are necessary for eternal life” (p. 193). Dunn remarked as follows concerning Barber: “I found myself warming to Michael Barber’s ‘Catholic perspective’” (p. 197).

Wilkin was at his best in his responses to his three co-contributors. In his response to Schreiner, he explained, “The vast majority of biblical references to salvation have nothing to do with hell or regeneration at all but refer instead to deliverance from enemies” (p. 100). In his response to Dunn, he indicated, “The New Testament refers to different kinds of salvation and different divine judgments, each with its own conditions, subjects, assurances, and warnings” (p. 143). In his response to Barber, he asserted, “The conditions for eternal life and eternal rewards are entirely different” (p. 185).

Other than that of Wilkin, the opinions expressed in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment* demonstrate the hermeneutical difficulties of rejecting the fundamentals of premillennial dispensationalism. In his reply to Wilkin, Schreiner recognized what the actual issue is: “If his kind of dispensationalism collapses, so does Wilkin’s interpretation.” The book is likely to further confuse those who are already confused with regard to what the New Testament teaches regarding salvation, judgment, works, and rewards. However, for dispensationalists, the book serves as a valuable database of erroneous opinions concerning these subjects.

— Laurence M. Vance
Vance Publications (Orlando, FL)

The New Calvinism Considered: A Personal and Pastoral Assessment by Jeremy Walker. Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2013. 126 pp., paper, \$7.99.

In barely over one hundred pages of reading text, Jeremy Walker, a particular (Calvinistic) Baptist pastor from England, has provided an excellent, irenic, but critical, overview of New Calvinism. The author defined New Calvinism as “the resurgence of certain central aspects of Calvinistic doctrine within conservative evangelicalism, though it is usually associated with other convictions and actions that do not immediately derive from the teaching and example of John Calvin and others of similar faith and life” (pp. 8-9). Others have described the New Calvinists as Reformed Charismatics or “Young, Restless, and Reformed.” New Calvinism is a highly influential movement especially among young adults. Walker attempted to demonstrate both the positive and the concerning aspects of this movement, and he accomplished an excellent job with both.

While admitting that new Calvinism is not monolithic (p. 17), Walker nevertheless offered five characteristics that are typical: a belief in the sovereignty of God in salvation; Jonathan Edwards is the father of the movement, as mediated through John Piper; it is enfolded around key characters; it is a movement of networks and conferences; and, it is consolidating — becoming broader and slower (pp. 20-38). Walker genuinely appreciates the New Calvinists’ emphasis upon Christ and the glory of God, although he is concerned with Piper’s overemphasis on “Christian hedonism” (pp. 40-41).

He also commended their love of grace, although he is weary of constantly hearing gospel-this and gospel-that (p. 43). Complementarianism is also central throughout the movement, although an overemphasis on sex and graphic language is common among some, such as Mark Driscoll (pp. 48-49). The New Calvinists are on the cutting edge of technology, which helps them spread their message (pp. 49-53). They also tend to be expository preachers (pp. 53-54).

Nevertheless, almost half the book is engaged with cautions and concerns which include: pragmatism and commercialism (pp. 59-67); an unbalanced view of culture (pp. 67-76); an overemphasis upon grace to the point that a false dichotomy between faith and effort is implied (pp. 74-83); an ecumenism that grants freedom of access to false teachings (pp. 83-92); promotion of sign-gifts (pp. 92-98); and, and an overconfident, brash triumphalism (pp. 98-102). The book concludes with a short index of individuals related to the movement including: Don Carson, Tim Challies,

Mark Driscoll, Ligon Duncan, Wayne Grudem, Steven Furtick, Tim Keller, C. J. Mahaney, Ray Ortland, John Piper, and Douglas Wilson. *The New Calvinism Considered* is an excellent primer on New Calvinism, a movement that while quite popular and sustained by many high-profile pastors and theologians, nevertheless offers serious concerns to the evangelical church.

— Gary E. Gilley
Southern View Chapel (Springfield, IL)

Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals edited by Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013. 325 pp., paper, \$17.99.

Fifteen scholars worked together to produce this book, which has as its goal “to create readers who are able to read theologically, historically, practically and spiritually for the glory of God” (p. 12). While all the authors would claim to be evangelical Protestants, all are sympathetic and supportive of classical Christian mysticism and spiritual formation spirituality as found in what they consider the ancient classics. Carl Trueman (Dean of Westminster Theology Seminary) endorsed this approach as follows: “I think the medieval mystics should form a staple of the literary diet of all thoughtful Christians” (p. 9). The editors look to and praise Richard Foster claiming he “was recovering a well-worn path of ancient wisdom that helped to defend evangelicalism itself” (p. 10).

The reviewer decided to read this work after finding a very favorable review on The Gospel Coalition’s website by Nathan Finn, a professor of historical theology and Baptist studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Finn believes *Reading the Spiritual Classics* is an excellent resource for pastors, seminarians, and other Christian leaders. He stated that the authors were successful in their attempts “to help their fellow evangelicals mature in their faith through reading the spiritual classics.” *Reading the Spiritual Classics* is a superb source for understanding the background and history of Foster’s Spiritual Formation Movement, but contrary to Finn’s suggestion, reading the spiritual classics will not aid in spiritual maturity. Quite the opposite; if embraced, the classics will lead one from true maturity and into unbiblical mysticism.

Consider first the fact that the vast majority of all the “classics” recommended are from Roman Catholic and Orthodox leaders. The list contradicts the definition of a spiritual classic supplied early in the book: (1) clearly attributable to a reborn follower of Jesus; (2) focuses upon a biblical understanding of sanctification; and, (3) a multitude of voices across church history attest to its value for Christian living (p. 16). While point three depends upon what voices one wants to hear, the first two points exclude most of the ancient classics cited. If the Reformation cornerstones of *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide* are correct, then the authors of ancient spirituality and their methodologies do not fit the definition.

Bruce Demarest, former professor at Denver Seminary, wrote his chapter in defense of reading Catholic spirituality even as he admitted that Rome was and is in grave error theologically. Demarest identified ten

serious doctrinal heresies, which profoundly impact the very foundation of biblical Christianity, yet he inexplicably, exceedingly recommended ancient Catholic classics. Fred Sanders, professor of theology at Biola University, admitted that non-evangelical spiritualities and traditions ruin the gospel (pp. 157, 160); nevertheless, one “should be open but cautious” (p. 149) in devouring the ancient classics, which in fact, are often heretical. By open but cautious, the reader of the classics must distinguish not only horrid error, but also extreme asceticism (cf. pp. 125-26, 207-14), and constant extra-biblical revelation and visions (cf. pp. 240-42) upon which this form of spirituality is founded.

There are two thought patterns that proliferate throughout mystical spirituality from the second century to today. The first is allegorical hermeneutics, or the four-fold interpretation of Scripture (cf. pp. 102-06, 199, 227). Retracing in time, at least, as far as Origen, the Scriptures have not been interpreted literally (at best, normal hermeneutics was intensely minimized). Instead, allegoricalism became the norm in which hidden meaning – not actually found in the text – was sought. Secondly, an essential of ancient spirituality was the tripartite pursuit of mystical experience with God. The three divisions were purgation, illumination, and union (pp. 82-83, 126, 188-89, 239). By contrast, the Reformation emphasized the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, even though the Reformers were often inconsistent, especially with eschatology and the Song of Solomon (pp. 276, 280, 284, 296-97). Evangelicals have always understood union with God as the beginning of the Christian journey, not its end or earthly goal (p. 275). Spiritual formation derived from these classics inverts the Christian life and would have the believer embark upon a search for what he has already been given: union with God through Christ.

Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics is an excellent resource and very helpful for anyone seeking an understanding of the foundations, teaching, and attraction of mystical spirituality. Each author is knowledgeable of his subject and provides a wealth of information and insight into the teachings of the ancients (as well as a few moderns). However, it strongly promotes an unbiblical spirituality. To paraphrase one of the authors: read for the information, but read with great caution.

— Gary E. Gilley
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What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible edited by Jason S. DeRouchie. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013. 496 pp., cloth, \$30.99.

Jason DeRouchie and sixteen other contributors have worked together to provide the church this truly unique and marvelous volume overviewing the message of the Old Testament. There is also a companion New Testament volume: *What the New Testament Authors Really Cared About*. In the preface, DeRouchie informs the reader as to what is not within the book: a history of Israelite religion; a summary of the events of history; a synthesis of the sources behind the text; a review of characters in the text; a theology of the Hebrew Bible on its own; a systematic theology; and, a reflection of the reader. "Rather, following the arrangement of the Jewish canon, this survey attempts to *present the essence of what is revealed in the Old Testament*, with a conscious eye toward the fulfillment found in Jesus as clarified in the New Testament."

The book is targeted toward Bible college, seminary students, and local churches (p. 23), but anyone interested in the Scriptures will enjoy and appreciate this work. The work is divided into the three major divisions of the Old Testament as the pre-Jesus Jews arranged them: law, prophets, and writings. Each book of the Old Testament, as found in the Hebrew Bible, is dealt with individually, with the exception of the minor prophets (the twelve) being explored together. Each chapter (twenty-five) begins with a well-crafted overview and then proceeds to discuss the central message(s) of the Scripture under consideration. The exposition is supplemented with numerous charts, maps, and pictures that both aid one's understanding and provide interest and beauty to the book. Seven appendices are also added, offering additional understanding of the Old Testament.

What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About is the first volume the reviewer will take from his shelves in any future study or teaching from the Old Testament. The overview and insights are invaluable. DeRouchie's book would also serve as an excellent textbook for a serious course in Old Testament survey. In addition, according to the publisher, charts, maps, and pictures will eventually be available for purchase in an electronic format, which will greatly enhance teaching the entirety of the Old Testament.

— Gary E. Gilley
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Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012. 848 pp., cloth, \$45.00.

Peter Gentry is professor of Old Testament interpretation, and Stephen Wellum is professor of Christian theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. As Baptists, they reject covenant theology, which is not surprising in spite of the recent efforts of Reformed Baptist authors. However, Gentry and Wellum likewise reject dispensationalism. In *Kingdom through Covenant*, they attempt to arbitrate between covenant theology and dispensationalism.

The authors describe their “*via media*,” a term they use quite often, as a “Baptist theology” that fits broadly with the perspective of “new covenant theology.” The term they create that “captures” their basic proposal is “progressive covenantalism.” “‘Progressive’ seeks to underscore the progress or the unfolding of God’s revelation from old to new. ‘Covenantalism’ emphasizes that God’s plan across redemptive-history unfolds through covenants as all of these covenants are terminated, culminated, and fulfilled in Christ and the arrival of the promised new covenant age” (p. 24).

The authors argue that “the traditional ways of putting together the biblical covenants is not quite right” (p. 36). The “theological conclusions” drawn from them “go awry at a number of points” (p. 37). They are convinced that their “kingdom through covenant” idea is “an alternative theological proposal” (p. 37) that is “more accurate,” “more biblical,” “makes better sense,” and “does better justice to the story line of Scripture” (p. 91). Their notion is “a proposal for a better way of understanding the nature of biblical covenants and how those covenants relate to each other” (p. 36) and “an alternative way of understanding the nature of the biblical covenants and their relationship to the new covenant in Christ” (p. 25).

After a preface and list of abbreviations, *Kingdom through Covenant* is divided into three parts. A 62-page appendix (giving a lexical analysis of the Hebrew word *bĕrît*) supplements the book. There are both general and Scriptural indexes. Each author has his own bibliography. Scripture quotations are either the authors’ own translations or are taken from the ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT, NRSV, or the RSV.

Part 1, “Prolegomena,” contains three chapters written by Wellum, the “systematic theologian.” The first chapter contains some introductory material and a brief discussion of the nature of biblical theology and its relation to systematic theology. Chapter 2 contains an overview of

dispensationalism and covenant theology. Although Wellum rightly recognizes that one of the essentials of dispensationalism is the Israel-church distinction, his brief discussion of dispensationalism and its varieties is inadequate, incomplete, and inaccurate. However, his longer discussion of covenant theology can be considered fair and balanced. Chapter 3 is a discussion of hermeneutics and “some of the key hermeneutical issues that divide” dispensationalism and covenant theology (p. 108). Within this section, Wellum focused upon the priority of the New Testament over the Old, the nature of the biblical covenants, and the use of typology. In this portion of the book, one can discern the direction the authors are headed. Dispensational theology has not “rightly understood the nature of the land promise” (p. 114). The authors “agree with covenant theology that the land of Israel is typological” (ibid). The Old Testament text presents “the land and the nation as types and patterns of something greater” (p. 124). As Gentry and Wellum further explained: “The land itself is a type and pattern of Eden and thus the entire creation, which reaches its fulfillment in the dawning of a new creation. Christ, then, as the antitype of Israel, receives the land promise and fulfills it by his inauguration of a new covenant which is organically linked to the new creation” (p. 122).

Part 2, “Exposition of the Biblical Covenants,” which is the most substantial part of the book (pp. 129-587), contains twelve chapters written by Gentry, the “biblical scholar.” After beginning with an explanation of “The Notion of Covenant in the Bible and in the Ancient Near East,” Gentry provided an exposition of the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants followed by an excursus on Ephesians 4:15, “Life in the New Covenant Community.” He also insisted upon a “covenant with creation” in Genesis 1–3. There is certainly much useful information here. However, although Gentry believes that “the Presbyterian understanding” of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31 “is flawed,” he affirms that the New Covenant, as inaugurated by Jesus, “is not made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah interpreted as all of Judaism indiscriminately in the first century, but rather it is interpreted specifically as those *who are followers of Jesus*, regardless of ethnicity, Jew first and, later on, also non-Jew” (p. 497). The reason for his understanding is because “in the new covenant, the old divisions in Israel are healed and the Gentiles are included” (p. 481). “The renewed Israel is no longer based on ethnic parameters but is defined as those who are reconciled to the Lord and believing in him” (ibid). Consequently, “there is no separate future of physical Israel outside of the church” for “the promise concerning

the renewed Israel living in the land is fulfilled in that the new Jerusalem and the new creation are coextensive” (ibid).

Part 3, “Theological Integration,” contains two chapters written by Wellum. In the first, he provided an “overall summary” of the authors’ proposal “to tie together any loose ends and to highlight the key points” (p. 591). Wellum maintains, “it is *through* the biblical covenants, across time, that God chooses to reverse the disastrous effects of sin and usher in his saving reign to this world” (p. 594). The coming of God’s kingdom “will occur with the coming of the Messiah and the inauguration of a new covenant which will bring to fulfilment all the previous covenants” (p. 595); hence the authors’ “kingdom through covenant” concept. Consequently, Christ has *inaugurated* the kingdom of God over which He now rules and reigns: it is *already* here. Christ has inaugurated “*God’s kingdom* and thus literally has ushered in the ‘age to come’ and all that is associated with that ‘age’” (p. 601). Believers are now under the new covenant and all that that entails. However, “the land promise does not find its fulfilment in the future in terms of a specific piece of real estate given to the ethnic nation of Israel; rather it is fulfilled in Jesus” (p. 607), which is because “the land associated with Eden and creation is typological” (ibid); it points forward, “to the dawning of the new creation bound up with the new covenant age inaugurated by Jesus” (ibid).

Although Wellum acknowledged that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 “is made with the ‘house of Israel and with the house of Judah’” (p. 645), the New Testament “applies it to the church through the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ” (p. 646). In this section’s second chapter, Wellum sketched the implications of the authors’ proposal “for some areas of systematic theology.” One of these implications is a belief in limited atonement: “Christ died for the purpose of saving only those to whom he actually applies the benefits of his work” (p. 671). Wellum reasoned, “Christ’s atoning work cannot be extended to all people without also extending the new covenant benefits and privileges to them” (p. 680). Of course, it never occurred to him that the “new covenant benefits and privileges” are for “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah.”

The authors further believe that “there is only *one* people of God (the elect) throughout the ages and *one* plan of redemption centered in Christ” (ibid). Without surprise, then, they conclude: “All of God’s promises, tied to creation and the biblical covenants, including the promises to Israel, are brought to fulfilment in Christ. This is why the term ‘new covenant’ can be applied to the church in the New Testament even though in Jeremiah it is applied to the ‘house of Israel’” (p. 690). Section 3 contains some good arguments against “the covenantal argument for infant baptism” (p. 695)

but concludes with a restating of the “kingdom through covenant” ideas of the previous two sections that the “land” is just a type or pattern of something greater and that its promise is completely fulfilled in Christ.

Although Gentry and Wellum were careful to distinguish their “*via media*” from replacement theology, it is a distinction without a difference. *Kingdom through Covenant* basically presents a baptized version of covenant theology. The fatal flaw of this perspective can be summarized by a comparison between a statement the authors made early in the book – “We must apply the entire Scripture to us, including all of the previous covenants” (p. 25) – and a statement the Apostle Paul made in Romans 9:4 regarding his fellow Jews: “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.”

— Laurence M. Vance
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It's OK to Say God: Prelude to a Constitutional Renaissance by Tad Armstrong. Bloomington, Indiana: Westbow Press, 2011. 350 pp., paper, \$25.00.

Tad Armstrong is an attorney and founder of ELL Constitution Clubs, which was established to provide a forum for lay people to study the pronouncements of the United States Supreme Court. Expressing a profound concern, Armstrong believes that most people, including Christians, are ignorant of the rulings of the Supreme Court especially as they impact freedoms of religion and speech, as expressed in the First and Fourteenth amendments of the Constitution (p. ix). As a result, many not only believe but also proliferate half-truths and outright lies, which causes unnecessary anxiety and distrust of government. The only solution, Armstrong believes, is to become educated by reading the actual words of the Court's rulings and correcting those who do not know the truth.

It is my contention that, once Christians have the facts in tow, most of the unwarranted skirmishes will cease and the real battles for legitimate turf (in the field as opposed to the courtroom) can then be fought with greater success. Best of all, hopefully, victimized Christians will learn to turn that misdirected anger into the love of Christ for all. That is my hope.

Armstrong's book is a good beginning in this educational process. He demonstrates that the founders of America were highly sensitive to state-established and state-controlled religion as found in European countries, which had been a source of much pain and sorrow over the centuries. The framers of the constitution, including the Bill of Rights, wanted to ensure that America would never travel that pathway. The very first amendment, known now as the "Establishment Clause," guaranteed these freedoms. Thomas Jefferson, in a personal letter to Danbury Baptist Association, was the first to mention a wall of separation between church and state (pp. 33, 341-42), and the Supreme Court has since been trying to determine how "high" that wall is.

What becomes clear as one reads this volume is that applying the First Amendment to life is far more complicated than most imagine. Armstrong presented thirty-four Supreme Court decisions as referencing the First or the Fourteenth Amendments. He scored twenty-two rulings "for" religion and twelve "against" (see pp. 333-348 for summary), although he believes some of the rulings for religion were in error and will prove troublesome in the future.

Armstrong does exactly what he intended, that is, educate the American people, especially Christians. As a result of reading Armstrong's work, this reviewer felt more positive with regard to American freedoms in general and the Supreme Court in particular. For those interested in government or the direction America is headed, especially concerning rights and freedoms, *It's OK to Say God* is an essential read.

— Gary E. Gilley
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***Heaven Is for Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back* by Todd Burpo with Lynn Vincent. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010. 162pp., paper, \$16.99.**

The movie *Heaven Is for Real* opened in theaters on Wednesday, 16 April, taking second place in the movie box office for the week. The opening has renewed interest in the book, which had already sold more than eight million copies prior to the movie. *Heaven Is for Real* is based upon the 2010 bestselling book of the same title, which has returned to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list at #2 in the “combined print and e-book nonfiction” category, and is #1 in the “paperback nonfiction” category. At the Amazon.com website, the Kindle version of the book is #1 in the “eschatology” category, and is #1 in the “inspirational” category. For the paperback version, Amazon.com listed it at #2 in “eschatology,” #4 in “Christian living,” and #4 in “religion and spirituality.” The numbers are astounding for a book that has been on the market this long. The description for the book on Amazon.com begins as follows:

Heaven Is for Real is the true story of the four-year old son (Colton Burpo) of a small town Nebraska pastor who during emergency surgery slips from consciousness and enters heaven. He survives and begins talking about being able to look down and see the doctor operating and his dad praying in the waiting room. The family didn't know what to believe but soon the evidence was clear.

In preparation for an interview, this reviewer went to view the movie, having read the book a week earlier. In addition to the book and movie, this reviewer also began researching other “near death experiences” (termed NDEs). The research included reading three books by people who claimed to have an NDE and the specific NDE portions of two additional books. One of those books was a compilation of approximately twenty NDE stories, for a total of approximately twenty-five NDEs with which the reviewer is now familiar.

According to the hospital records, Colton Burpo (the young boy who says he went to heaven) did not die. If he did not die, then how did his soul go to heaven? The claim and belief is not that this was a God-given dream or vision but a definite visit. However, if the soul actually leaves the body then the person is dead in this world.

Colton was only three years old at the time of his “visit” to heaven, and while his descriptions of heaven correspond to what one might expect

from the imagination of a child this age, they do not find agreement with Scripture. The things he saw and experienced include: everyone has wings, both angels and humans (including Colton himself); although only the Cherubim and Seraphim among the angelic host are described as having wings, and there is no biblical reason to think that humans will have wings either before or after the resurrection. Jesus has a horse that is all colors of the rainbow, although the horse on which Jesus will return to the earth is described as being white in Revelation 19. Colton was given a little chair to sit beside the Holy Spirit, who he describes as being "kind of blue," although the Holy Spirit is pure spirit and only appears once in all Scripture and then as a dove at Jesus' baptism. Colton met and talked with Jesus personally and sat on his lap. According to the CIA Factbook, over one hundred people in the world die every minute. Even with a conservative estimate of five percent being born-again Christians, this averages to one Christian entering the Lord's presence every twelve seconds; while in Colton's account, there is no mention of anyone entering heaven while he was with the Lord.

Colton only gave a few details with regard to heaven at a time, with apparently weeks passing between the times when he mentioned a new detail. The book indicates that his parents never just sat down and asked him all the things he saw, so the story develops over a fairly long period of time. Colton revealed that there are no old-looking people in heaven, with his grandfather (who died when his father was a young boy) being approximately 25 years old; although he claimed to have met his sister who died in the womb (and she was apparently eight years old in heaven, meaning that she would have gone to heaven as a fetus and then grew older while there).

Colton rejected all the painted pictures of Jesus he was shown, except for one painted by a child prodigy who also claims to have gone to heaven and has ongoing visions and dreams. He said that picture is how Jesus looks. Although the book indicates that faith in Jesus is the requirement to enter heaven, the movie certainly communicates a universalistic sense of salvation. The salvific notion is especially troubling because there are some genuinely powerful, touching moments in the movie (bringing tears to the reviewer's eyes as well, which was the director's intention), which means that it is going to affect most viewers emotionally, while giving many a false sense of security who have never entered into a personal relationship with the Lord. Colton's father is the pastor of a Wesleyan church, and both at home and in Sunday School, Colton had already heard many Bible stories and seen many illustrations of

those stories during his young life. Colton's account contains very extensive extra-biblical revelation.

One of the things frequently found when researching NDEs is that many say they must be genuine (at least many of them) because of the similar things nearly everyone experiences, such as leaving and floating above one's body, journeying through a tunnel, approaching a bright light, etc. However, these are fairly superficial similarities when compared with all the radical differences in the details. Of the twenty-five or so NDEs studied, there were no two that matched in terms of either what was seen or experienced. If all these people really went to heaven, then what one would expect is that everyone would see the same things, or at least many of the same or similar things. If this were true, then it would make considering alternative explanations much more difficult, but this is not at all the instance.

Conversely, the similar experiences of going to heaven, feeling loved and accepted, going through a tunnel, being in the presence of a bright luminous being, etc. are reported by everyone, whether the person is a Christian, belongs to a different religion, or is even an atheist. Indeed, there are reports of a significant number of those who have had NDEs and who attended conservative, Bible-believing churches, yet eventually left those churches because of the "narrow" exclusive message of salvation being only in and through Jesus Christ.

One book is the account of a man who was raised in a Christian family and understood the gospel but had openly and staunchly rejected it. However, when he reached the point that he felt he would likely die, he very sincerely prayed to the Lord, seeking forgiveness of sins and asking to be saved. Based upon what he clearly stated in his book concerning the gospel, everything he understands is completely biblical. However, when he had his NDE, he first went to hell for some time, a place he described as intensely cold and dark where nothing could be seen at all. However, the apostle Paul says that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Furthermore, when Jesus gave the account of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man was tormented (i.e. not in intense cold but in intense heat by flames of fire); rather than not being able to see anything, the rich man in hell was able to see both Lazarus and Abraham. Furthermore, the young man who survived his ordeal was harassed continually by demons who appeared at night, came to his door and window trying to approach him and entice him to come with them, and in one instance a spear was even thrown through his window. The examples cited herein are just some of the many issues surrounding these accounts.

The number of books describing NDEs and trips to both heaven and hell is multiplying quickly, with many millions of volumes already sold and with many more books undoubtedly on the way. What is very troubling is that untold numbers of unbelievers are finding hope and assurance that “everything will be okay” in the end, and that so many conservative evangelicals are also apparently accepting these stories in considerable numbers.

— David James
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