

A F R I C A
T H E O L O G Y
S E R I E S

Introduction to Biblical Theology



Ronnie Davis
Kennedy Mulenga



Introduction to Biblical Theology

Ronnie Davis
Kennedy Mulenga



NIAMEY : NIGER

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Africa Theology Series

Copyright © 2022 by AXIS Resources

FIRST EDITION

www.axis-ministries.com

Printed in Niamey, Niger by SOLA Printing



AXIS ministries exists to serve the local church in West Africa so that the Glory of God might be declared and displayed among unreached peoples and places through healthy churches.

AXIS RESOURCES is a series of original or edited publications by AXIS for the building up of healthy churches across West Africa.

For more information about AXIS please visit:
www.axis-ministries.com

For more information about ordering Biblical resources for the church please contact us at:
solaprinting@gmail.com

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
Introduction to Series	1
Introduction	7

PART 1: THE GRAND NARRATIVE

1. Creation	27
2. Fall	65
3. Rescue	107
4. Consummation	177

PART 2: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE

5. Integration of Biblical Theology in Ministry	221
Conclusion	253

APPENDICES

Appendix A The Development of the Metanarrative in each book of the Bible	265
Appendix B Gospel Presentations	301

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1: The “Feedback Loop” of Exegesis and Theology	22
Illustration 2: The relationship of “Forming” and “Filling” in Creation	30
Illustration 3: Verb Tenses and the movement between “Already” and “Not Yet” in Romans 6-8	185
Illustration 4: Islam and Life after Death	214
Illustration 5: The Two Kingdoms Gospel Presentation	301
Illustration 6: The Three Circles Gospel Presentation	305

INTRODUCTION TO ATS

The Africa Theology Series is a multi-volume series of books on Christian Theology. Unlike a typical systematic theology, each book in this series is a stand alone volume on a specific topic or doctrine. Also, unlike a traditional systematic theology, this series expands the scope to include biblical, systematic and applied theology. The goal is to give the African church a biblically faithful and contextually appropriate tool to help them, as Jude 3 states, “Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Briefly introducing such a comprehensive work like the Africa Theology Series poses quite a challenge which is why an entire separate volume is devoted to introducing the series. In that first and key volume, the reader is provided with a foundation for all the subsequent volumes. This introductory volume explains the uniqueness of this series and explore baseline understandings of key components in the series. The introductory volume covers the contextual emphasis, the hermeneutical grounding and the theological framework for this series.

Therefore, the purpose of this brief introduction is neither an attempt to replicate nor replace the Introductory volume. To truly benefit from this series, one must start with that foundational volume.

Instead, this brief introduction is provided to explain four underlying goals for this series. Understanding these goals will help the reader gain the most insight when reading each separate volume. These goals are:

- Bridging knowledge with action
- Interacting with major faith systems
- Moving from defense to offense
- Creating a readable and helpful resource

Know, Be, Do: Bridging Knowledge with Action

Each volume in the Africa Theology Series seeks to move the reader from theological foundations (Know) to cultural implications (Be) then finally to practical applications (Do). In the African context, the concrete is much more impactful

than the theoretical. In fact, oftentimes grievous errors in the pulpit or in pastoral practice come from those who can articulate the great doctrines of the faith both eloquently and sufficiently. These men often hold degrees from theological institutions where they were trained in sound doctrine and biblical orthodoxy. In other words, the errors that seem to plague the African church aren't necessarily from a lack of knowledge but rather from a lack of application of that knowledge into practice.

A short-sighted overcorrection would be to throw out knowledge-based teaching and instead simply focus on obedience-based action. However, this would be just as dangerous and ultimately counter-productive to healthy church. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are not against one another but rather two sides of the same coin. To have one without the other is not only incomplete but insufficient to build a biblically faithful and missions minded church.

The Africa Theology Series addresses these challenges by helping the pastor or church leader see the interconnectedness of knowledge and action. There is an African proverb that says, "Two hands wash one another." We need both knowledge and obedience. Therefore, each volume will, in its own unique way, lay a theological foundation for the specific doctrine being addressed as the authors seek to answer the question, "What should I know?"

The reader will then be challenged to see how this knowledge (what I know) necessarily informs identity (who I am). Every culture has elements that the Bible can affirm and appreciate and also elements the Bible condemns and corrects. Seeing your culture and your worldview through the Biblical lens is a painful but necessary step. In fact, this step of transformed hearts is the bridge needed on the path from transformed minds to transformed actions. The authors will challenge the reader to think deeply and introspectively about the cultural implications of doctrine as they seek to answer the question, "Who should I be?"

After knowledge and being comes doing. This is where information gets to work. Sound doctrine is not merely for the academic minded nor should it be reserved only for the seminary classroom. Instead, right doctrine must be applied and spill over into right practice. The authors of each volume will assist the reader in understanding the practical application of the doctrine in their lives as they answer the final question, "What should I do?"

The following statement provides a short summation of this goal:

KNOWLEDGE *informs* **BEING** *which drives* **DOING**

My Neighbor's Faith: Interacting with Major Faith Systems

Another unique feature of the Africa Theology Series involves interaction with other major worldviews/religions. Africa is a very religious place where atheists are few and far between. Whereas books from the West might lean more into apologetical arguments aimed at skeptics, this series looks to interact with the other major faith systems on the continent.

While there are obviously outliers, the majority of Africans fall into one of several religious categories. These categories are much more diverse than a simplistic designation and are oftentimes complex combinations of two distinct categories into one. One such example would be the syncretization of two distinct categories (Islam and ATR) into one faith system (Folk Islam).

Practically this means that two Muslim men from the same tribe and living in the same city might have drastically different understandings of their faith. This also implies that some who would claim to be Evangelical Christians actually practice a much more animistic faith. These nuances and caveats are real and rampant but beyond the scope of this series, which will examine only the orthodox positions of each faith system.

However, the problem of neatly labeling categories becomes even more challenging due to the ambiguous nature of African Traditional Religion (ATR). There is no such thing as THE African Traditional Religion with an agreed upon set of beliefs. Instead, ATR is a large designation for those who would cling to an animistic faith ranging from voodoo to ancestral worship and everything in between.

It would be impossible to try and interact with every potential version of each faith system. However, it is incredibly important to understand the basic tenets (even if not held by everyone in the same way) of the major faith systems on the continent. In other words, it is helpful to know what an “average” Muslim believes about the doctrine of God and how that’s different than the Evangelical Christian. Therefore, each volume in this series will provide side-by-side comparisons to highlight major differences between Evangelical Christians and these other religious systems.

Changing Tactics: Moving from Defense to Offense

There is an anecdotal account of how those working to detect counterfeit currency spend their time only examining real currency. The story is used to illustrate the importance of focusing time and energy studying the truth instead of spending time dealing with falsehoods. While this is a point worth noting and

we would agree that knowing the truth is of utmost importance, we also believe it is a good and biblical practice to expose falsehoods.

The Africa Theology Series adopts an offensive standpoint instead of choosing to play defense alone. Far from being done in a mean-spirited fashion, each volume takes pastoral care to warn the flock of the dangers of false doctrines currently wreaking havoc on the African Church.

The prosperity gospel and many practices in Neo-pentecostalism pose an even greater threat to healthy church and missions advance than Islam or ATR. Throughout the New Testament there is a constant warning of dangers that arise from wolves pretending to be sheep. These dangers are especially devastating because they come from within the church. Paul tells the church in Corinth of a tactic of Satan wherein he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

Any good shepherd knows he is responsible to care for his flock. This means two things practically: one, he must provide for them by leading them to grazing grounds and sources of water; secondly, and just as important, he must protect them by keeping them from dangers which seek to harm the flock.

In the same way pastors must provide and protect their flocks. They must lead their people to the green pastures of God's Word and to drink from the Living Water of knowing Christ. However, pastors must be able to defend their flock and protect them from enemies who would seek to destroy and harm.

Each volume will seek to expose the various errors and dangerous ways of prosperity teachers and Neo-pentecostal practitioners. The authors will show how these false teachers twist and misuse the Scriptures and, therefore, confuse various key doctrines. The hope, then, is that these volumes will help pastors and church leaders protect both themselves and their flocks by nurturing a spirit of discernment that can detect and expose unbiblical teaching and practices.

Short and Simple: Creating a Readable and Helpful Resource

The American author Mark Twain once said, "I'm sorry this letter is so long. I did not have time to write a short one." In this quote Twain reveals a common misconception that the more words that are spoken (or typed) then the better the content. While it is true that sometimes exhaustive explanations are necessary, the reality is most subjects can be sufficiently and succinctly explained without endless words.

The volumes in the Africa Theology Series are intentionally short and written in a way to be accessible to the largest audience of readers. The shortness

comes from a ruthless approach to writing that seeks to explain the most significant truths with the fewest amount of words in the simplest way possible.

The goal is to create a resource that is readable and helpful. The authors seek to use story, dialog, proverbs, concrete examples, and other illustrious words to help complicated doctrines become understandable and applicable. Each volume also includes quick access reference guides for comparative charts on the various beliefs of each faith system.

The Journey Ahead

There is an African proverb that says, “A baby on its mother's back doesn't know the journey is long.” Everyone, to some level, has benefited from the hard work of others. Teachers, pastors, theologians, authors, professors, parents, and myriads of others have suffered greatly to carry us along. We are where we are today because of their sacrifice.

The volumes in the Africa Theology Series have come about because many men who have many responsibilities deemed it worthy to set aside time to create the resource you now hold in your hand. These resources are the result of countless hours of work so that the African church might grow in her faithfulness to the task. Our hope is that their sacrifice “carries” you along in your faith journey.

Mark Phillips and Kevin Rodgers
Series editors

INTRODUCTION

“Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus] interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”¹

One would hardly think to read a favorite book by viewing chapters in isolation or out of sequence or just read that one favorite chapter over and over again without finishing the book. Similarly, too often the approach taken by Christians with reference to the books that compose the Bible is to compartmentalize each narrative, letter, oracle, or poem as if they have no connection to the rest of Scripture. As a result, many do not ‘connect the dots’ across the biblical narrative so as to understand more fully the “Big Story” of Scripture, the *metanarrative* of God’s Word. Or, less innocently, one might hunt and search for prooftexts to support personal choices or positions while ignoring both the biblical context of a passage as well as the historical context of its original setting. In the face of a growing secular world that has moved further away from a biblical worldview and a church population that demonstrates a lack of biblical literacy a necessary correction is to teach the reality that the Bible has one grand narrative. As Robinson notes, in order to combat faulty understanding of the Bible as composed of “disjointed” or “unrelated” stories, one must recognize that “...all 66 books and 1,189 chapters of Scripture have one underlying, foundational purpose: to communicate that God Almighty is on a mission to rescue humanity from its fallen and idolatrous condition.”² Or, to express it another way, one needs to see the reality that “redemption flows in the Bible from Creation to Revelation—every page drips with God’s move toward the rescue and restoration of all creation. God is the ultimate **storyteller!**”³ Such assertion does not

¹ Luke 24:27 *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2004). Unless otherwise stated, all Bible references are taken from the HCSB.

² George G. Robinson, “Foreword,” *The Story Guide: Leader Edition* (Bloomington, IL: Spread Truth Publishing, 2011), page 8.

³ “Jesus and the Metanarrative (Big Story)” in Week Three Leader Guide, *The Story Guide* (Bloomington, IL: Spread Truth Publishing, 2011), page 30. Emphasis in the original article.

mean that every ‘jot’ and ‘tittle’ of Scripture is woven together like a popular novel; nevertheless, the clear plotline of salvation history provides the backbone to which every part of the Bible is attached.⁴ In other words, one can acknowledge the incredibly diverse nature of the Bible, both in its literature and historical contexts, and still understand that there is connectedness within the whole. Similarly, one can recognize the progressive nature of the revelation of God in Scripture as God authors the larger narrative in the real setting of history. In the place of a single ‘novel’, the Holy Spirit moving through multiple human agents has provided this diverse literary collection to tell this narrative often connecting the seemingly unrelated books through themes revealed progressively to humanity. Further, one encounters themes unfolding in Scripture which, while only loosely connected to the grand narrative, are still vital for the life of the follower of Jesus so that one might mature in faith and experience what Paul prays for the Colossians to be “...filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the LORD, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God.”⁵ How does the follower of Jesus best unpack this grand narrative as well as perceive the progressive unfolding of key themes within Scripture?

The discipline of biblical theology is particularly suited to answer such a question. In this volume of the Africa Theology Series (ATS), the authors will not only approach Scripture from a biblical theological lens, but also demonstrate the relevance of biblical theology for the follower of Jesus. This volume is composed of two major parts. Part one, which is the largest section, unpacks the metanarrative of Scripture moving through the ‘plot’ of this narrative across the whole of the Bible. This narrative plot will be divided into four primary elements: Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Consummation. Each element will be examined in a separate chapter. Each chapter will unpack the specific element with

⁴ D.A. Carson, “A Biblical-Theological Overview of the Bible” n.p. retrieved from: <https://www.zondervan.com/p/biblical-theological/what-is-copy/> on 30 May 2020 (originally published in the *NIV Biblical Theological Study Bible* [Zondervan 2018]). Similarly, Timothy Keller in a brief article “The Story of the Bible: How the Good News about Jesus is Central” n.p. retrieved from: <https://www.zondervan.com/p/biblical-theological/what-is-copy/> on 30 May 2020 (originally published in the *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible* [Zondervan, 2018]), notes the dynamic of Scripture as a “master narrative” while not being relegated to a “novel with a tight, simple plotline” and uses the following illustration: “But just as J.R.R. Tolkien produced thousands of pages of narratives, poetry, articles, maps, and even lexicons over the course of decades in order to tell one very sweeping story, so God, the author of every part of the Bible, is also telling one overarching story about the real world he created. There is a basic plotline to which all parts relate and which makes sense of all the pieces.”

⁵ Col 1:9b-10.

both an exposition of key foundational passages of Scripture and a survey of the significance of that element in the larger biblical narrative. Furthermore, each chapter will chart the progress of four major themes that occur across the biblical narrative by highlighting how the given theme reflects the element (i.e., creation, fall, rescue, and consummation). The four themes examined are Temple/Tabernacle (Presence of God); Kingdom of God; Image of God; and Covenant. Finally, in keeping with a primary focus of the ATS, the contextual setting of sub-Saharan Africa is engaged, specifically, “within four given African contexts: Islam, African Traditional Religion, Roman Catholic Church, and Neo-Pentecostalism.”⁶ The teaching of each worldview will be considered as it compares to the biblical narrative⁷ and, the understanding for each of these worldviews regarding creation—origin of life; fallenness—the reason for suffering and evil; rescue—the hope of salvation; and consummation—the future hope, will be summarized in the appropriate chapter. Further, the specific points of contact and the points of divergence from the biblical narrative will be summarized as “bridges and barriers.”⁸ Part two is a focus on the significance of a developed biblical theology for healthy ministry and discipleship. Two important topics are covered. First, an understanding of a biblical theological hermeneutic is provided. The goal is to provide practical tips and good practices for preaching and teaching from a biblical theological perspective. Second, the implications for evangelism and missions are examined in light of the mission of God. The volume also includes a couple of appendices: a brief survey of how each book of the Bible develops the four elements of the metanarrative; a collection of a sample sermon that utilizes a biblical theological approach as well as some preaching and teaching outlines.

The end goal of this volume is both to help the follower of Jesus gain a better understanding of the depth and breadth of the Bible by expounding the big picture of Scripture and be equipped to teach and train others to be able to express the story of God more faithfully and confidently. Before one can appreciate the two parts of this volume, an appropriate framework needs to be given. One needs both a more complete definition of biblical theology, and an under-

⁶ Kevin Rodgers, *African Theology Series, Introductory Volume* (Niamey, Niger: AXIS Resources, 2021), p. 9.

⁷ In some chapters there is no discernible difference (i.e., Roman Catholic Church and Creation).

⁸ In summary, the four chapters of Part One will follow the same basic pattern: 1. Exposition of the Foundational Biblical Narrative for the given element (i.e., creation, fall, rescue, consummation); 2. The Role of the element in Biblical Narrative; 3. The Element and Biblical Themes (i.e., Temple; Kingdom of God; Image of God; Covenant); 4. The Element and Other Worldviews.

standing of the distinctives of biblical theology when compared to other theological disciplines, most notably systematic theology.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?

The term ‘biblical theology’ is applied with some nuance to the task of interpreting Scripture with a view to the entire canon. In broad terms, biblical theology holds the tension between the value of the individual books of the Bible—each with their own historical context and setting with particular emphases and unique literary style—and the larger unified picture of the biblical narrative as a whole: how the sum of the individual parts equals a greater whole! One of the strengths of such an approach is that God remains central—not only as the topic of Scripture, but as the ultimate author who has revealed his desire and plans for all of creation. The authors of *The Story* evangelism training express this idea: “This approach to the Bible sees everything in it—all the accounts, all the poems, all the prophecies, all the parables—as a unified whole that points to the redemptive plan of God.”⁹ While one must certainly keep the metanarrative in focus, one must not lose the individual components that make up this narrative so that the reality of God’s engagement in history is forgotten. This necessity has resulted in a variety of approaches to—and definitions for—biblical theology; nevertheless, significant overlapping can be observed as illustrated below. While many definitions and approaches can be addressed, three prominent areas of focus are highlighted here: the progressive historical revelation of God; the unity of the canon; and the controlling theme(s) within the metanarrative of Scripture.

Biblical Theology and the Progressive Revelation of God in History

In approaching the definition of biblical theology, a reasonable starting point is with “the grandfather of biblical theology amongst evangelicals,”¹⁰ Geerhardus

⁹ No author listed. “Understanding the Story” in *The Story Guide: Leader Edition* (Bloomington, IL: Spread Truth Publishing, 2011), p.8. The authors argue that the “Bible is nothing less than the grand narrative of history—history written by God Himself. It is *the* story, the one God has been telling throughout the ages, detailing His loving plan for all of creation.” (ibid.) Further, they argue for four important aspects of this story: 1. The Bible is one big story; 2. The story has a plotline (creation, fall, rescue, restoration); 3. The theme of this story is God’s grace: Jesus’ rescue of sinners and redemption of the world; 4. We are all participants in this ongoing story. (Ibid.). The last point is used as a call to evangelism and ministry.

¹⁰ Michael Lawrence, “3 Ways to Define Biblical Theology” n.p. retrieved from: <https://www.crossway.org/articles/3-ways-to-define-biblical-theology/> on 30 May 2020.

Vos, who places biblical theology as a branch of exegetical theology focusing on “the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible... Biblical Theology deals with the revelation as a divine activity, not as the finished product of that activity.”¹¹ Key to his approach, then, is the focus on God’s revelation. Vos unpacks his approach by identifying four aspects of revelation that impact the study of biblical theology:¹² (1) the historic progressiveness of the revelation-process; (2) the actual embodiment of revelation in history; (3) the organic nature of the historic process observable in revelation; (4) its practical adaptability. For Vos, then, the focal point is on God’s engagement in history and the tracing of that observable reality with an eye to its significance for the follower of Jesus. The focus is not on the final canonical form of God’s revelation as much as it is on the activity of God. Lawrence summarizes Vos’ approach: “This definition of biblical theology tells us that revelation is first what God says and does in history, and only secondarily what he’s given us in book form.”¹³ It is critical to understand that God’s revelatory process is not discerned through a reflective, meditative introspection, but can be grasped through a thorough examination of God’s engagement in history as recorded in the biblical texts: “History, not the heart, is the locus of divine revelation.”¹⁴ This approach is not to be confused with a purely descriptive approach seeking to discern what was believed by a given people at a given point in time so as to make biblical theology equal to the exegetical task of contextual interpretation.¹⁵ Rather, it is an understanding that while acknowledging and engaging historical

¹¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology {Old and New Testaments}*, (re-published Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), p. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 5-9.

¹³ Lawrence, n.p.

¹⁴ Scott J. Hafemann, “The Covenant Relationship,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, Eds. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Nottingham, England: Apollon, an imprint of Inter-Varsity Press; 2007), p. 21.

¹⁵ A “Biblical Theology as Historical Description” is one of the five types identified by Edward Klink and Darian Lockett in *Understanding Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), pp. 22-25 as summarized in the article “5 Things Bible Scholars Mean when They Use the Term ‘Biblical Theology’” retrieved from: <https://www.zondervan.com/p/biblical-theology/five-ways/> on 30 May 2020. Such an approach is a concern for “what it meant” with the consequence that any theology observed is “the theology of the Bible as it existed within the time, languages, and cultures of the Bible itself; it is a purely historical and descriptive discipline. For this reason, there can be no whole-Bible theology since the theology of different authors... is hardly uniform or unified.” Scholars identified with such an approach include Krister Stendahl and James Barr. (*Ibid.*) While one can appreciate the desire to maintain historical context, such an approach underestimates the wonderful connectedness of Scripture and is an inadequate approach for the task of biblical theology as expressed in this volume.

contexts, biblical theology ought to move “along the axis of redemptive history. It’s particularly concerned with the development and therefore with questions of continuity and discontinuity, the movement from seed to tree.”¹⁶ One must be aware of the movement of the revelatory process throughout the whole of Scripture. Such an awareness has demands upon any approach to the task at hand, as Carson notes, “...precisely because so many of the theological claims of Scripture are claims about revelation in history, biblical theology is committed to using rigorous and responsible historical methods.”¹⁷ This commitment does not ignore the varied literary traditions of the Bible; rather, “Equally, because the texts are literary pieces, diverse in genre and other features, biblical theology seeks to be sensitive to literary structures.”¹⁸

Biblical Theology and the Canon of Scripture

A second crucial element that has been engaged in seeking to define biblical theology is the focus on the whole of the canon because “...*biblical* theology at its most coherent, is a theology of the *Bible*.”¹⁹ Sounds obvious, but it is not a simple matter; rather, the *manner* of engaging the larger biblical text is relevant. When one understands the canon as the scope of biblical theology, two important dynamics surface: the nature of the relationship between the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT); and the importance of the canonical order and form of the books within Scripture, especially with reference to the Hebrew canon vs the Christian canon of the OT.

One must be honest in acknowledging that for the follower of Jesus, it is impossible to move through the biblical texts with a truly unbiased chronological perspective. As a Christian, one does not find oneself in the same predicament as the Ethiopian official in Acts 8 who, when reading from Isaiah, did not know to whom the prophet was referring (Acts 8:32-34). The Christian has

¹⁶ Lawrence, n.p.

¹⁷ D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” n.p. retrieved from: <https://www.beginningwithmoses.org/oldsite/articles/systematicandbiblical.htm> on 16 June 2020. Originally published in *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T.D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press and Downer Grover: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), pp. 89-104.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ D.A. Carson as cited by Paul R. House, “Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture: Steps Toward a Program for the Future,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 276 [Carson’s quote is found in D.A.Carson, “Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 30].

heard the same good news about Jesus that Philip explained (Acts 8:35) and cannot unlearn that perspective when engaged with the promises of the OT. Scott correctly argues that for the follower of Jesus, "...a comprehensive biblical theology must start with the NT as the Archimedean point toward which the whole project is oriented."²⁰ For in truth, "It is inevitable that a comprehensive biblical theology will read the so-called OT in light of the NT, since the latter exemplifies how the OT—the Bible of Jesus and the early church—was understood by the nascent Jesus movement."²¹ In other words, we know the identity of the redeemer who is promised throughout the OT and we cannot unlearn that truth, nor does one have to in order to engage in biblical theology, indeed, one must not! One must, however, utilize the historical contexts of OT passages to help bring an understanding of the progressive nature of the revelation of God building toward the climax of the NT. As Carson reminds the reader: "God did not provide his people with all of the Bible at once. There is a progression to his revelation, and to read the whole back into some early part may seriously distort that part by obscuring its true significance in the flow of redemptive history."²² A proper understanding of the relationship between the OT and NT is important while moving through the canon. That a clear intertextual relationship exists is demonstrated most plainly by the use of the OT by the NT writers—almost every author in the NT will either quote or allude to texts found in the OT.²³ In light of the obvious relationship of the OT and NT, "biblical theology attempts to ascertain the inner points of coherence and development within the biblical narrative and exposition. It does its work inductively from within the Bible in an attempt to bring out the Bible's own message."²⁴ A

²⁰ James M. Scott, "Jesus' Vision for the Restoration of Israel as the Basis for a Biblical Theology of the New Testament," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 129. Archimedean point is defined as: "a reliably certain position or starting point that serves as the basis for argument or reasoning" by Merriam-Webster Dictionary, retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Archimedean%20point> on 10 June 2020.

²¹ Ibid.

²² D. A. Carson, "What is Biblical Theology," n.p. Retrieved from: <https://www.zondervan.com/p/biblical-theology/what-is/> on 30 May 2020.

²³ Perrin does rightly raise the question as to whether or not such usage of the OT in the NT indicates unity: "The question in this connection is whether conceptual or verbal agreement between the texts is constitutive of unity." Nicholas Perrin, "Dialogic Conceptions of Language and the Problem of Biblical Unity," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 214.

²⁴ Scott J. Hafemann, "Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 16.

critical assertion that must be understood is that the unity of the canon is not based upon the collected texts so that one must strive to find some cohesive strategy; rather, “that which gives the canonical documents their unity is that, for all their enormous diversity, one Mind, one Actor, stands behind them...”²⁵

Closely connected to the question of the nature of the intertextual relationship within Scripture is an exploration of the significance of the canonical structure of Scripture. This element is most evident in the OT books where the order of the canon is significantly different between the Hebrew and Christian traditions. In other words, does the sequence of reading have any bearing on the task of biblical theology? House suggests—especially in the OT—in light of the Bible as a “connected, canonical, theological whole” it is “possible to use the shape of the canon as a structuring device for biblical theology.”²⁶ Clearly, the order in which one studies the larger canon has value if one is to discern the movement of revelation through history, but does canonical structure supersede chronological order? While House rightly notes that “It remakes students’ minds to read Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings as the Former Prophets rather than as the Historical Books. It alters one’s perception of Ruth if one reads Ruth as the successor to Proverbs or Judges. Reading strategies do matter.”²⁷ At the same time, one must acknowledge that canonical structure does not always reflect interpretive intent. For example, the order of the latter prophets is not altogether obvious. While the larger books seem to be arranged according to size, little clarity is found among the twelve minor prophets. In such a case, greater value is seen in a chronological order whereby the progression of the message of God to Israel is more readily seen. This volume will maintain the larger categories of Law, Prophets, and Writings within the OT canon, but will have an awareness of the chronology within those categories as an aid to identification and interpretation of themes. Similarly, the NT epistles are structured by size and author rather than with an understanding toward interpretation; therefore, a chronological reading of NT epistles is utilized here to aid the identification of the development of key themes and ideas such as Christology and Suffering and is the format followed in this volume. At the same time, an eye toward the development of themes across the whole of Scripture is maintained so that this “canonical biblical theology” has as its content “a theology of the

²⁵ D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” n.p.

²⁶ Paul R. House, “Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture,” p. 269.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

whole Bible, not a theology that merely has its roots in the Bible, or merely takes the Bible as the place to begin.”²⁸

Biblical Theology and the Unifying Theme of Scripture

In addition to the recognition of the progressive nature of revelation within history as critical for perspective in biblical theology and the necessity of the entire canon as the scope of biblical theology, a final element to be considered in clarifying any definition of biblical theology is an understanding of the focal theme or themes of the metanarrative of Scripture. In other words, is there an appropriate lens through which the Bible is seen as a unified whole? The realization that Scripture not only has a coherency around the general subject matter but also has a coherent underlying *narrative* is critical. Carson notes, “the Bible has many human authors but one divine Author, and he never contradicts himself.”²⁹ In considering the unity of Scripture, Hafemann warns against simply “...reducing the biblical witness to that general proposition that is found to some degree in every book of the Bible.... For there to be unity within the Bible, every corner of the canon need not repeat the main theme of every other corner....”³⁰ In raising the question of the unity of the Bible, a distinction is made between a ‘centre’ of Scripture and a unifying ‘theme.’ The former seeks to identify a specific idea, biblical image, or doctrine that is the single unifying matrix for the entirety of Scripture.³¹ The latter carries the idea of the integration of multiple strands toward a thematic movement across Scripture. Köstenberger in noting the difficulty or impossibility of identifying one ‘center’ for New Testament theology highlights the approaches of both Meier and Carson before concluding, “...that the search for a single center of the NT should be abandoned. It seems more promising to search for a plurality of integrative NT motifs.”³² Meier, as summarized by Köstenberger, concludes that a single centre is not possible; rather, he interestingly settles on a triad of ‘centers’ for the NT

²⁸ Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” n.p.

²⁹ D. A. Carson, “What is Biblical Theology,” n.p.

³⁰ Hafemann, p. 20.

³¹ In the introductory chapter to *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), Hafemann highlights different approaches in identifying the center for biblical theology found in that volume (i.e., eschatology [John Sailhamer], new creation [G.K. Beale], restoration [James Scott]), p. 19.

³² Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Diversity and Unity in the New Testament,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 154.

narrative: a personal center found in the person of Jesus, the Son of God and Messiah; a dynamic-historical centre culminating in his redemptive work; and the fact that God speaks to us in the entire Bible.”³³ Moving away from a single centre, then, one can identify the presence of “clusters of broadly common themes.”³⁴ The most profitable exploration for biblical theology is in a reading of salvation-history as the unifying theme. “The history of redemption is visible through tracing the major themes and overarching structural ideas (e.g., covenant, kingdom, and promise and fulfillment) as they develop along a sequential and historical timeline.”³⁵ Carson identifies five foundational statements in highlighting the significance of salvation history for biblical theology:³⁶

1. The story line of the Bible, the sweep of salvation history, provides the framework on which so much of the Bible depends.³⁷
2. The Bible’s salvation history largely establishes the direction of its movement.
3. The trajectories that run through and are part of the history of redemption gradually point to the future and become predictive voices.
4. Very often these trajectories (or “typologies,” as they are often called) in the history of redemption become intertwined to form rich tapestries.
5. Above all, salvation history provides the locus in which God has disclosed himself in events and in the words that explain them.

The content of ‘salvation history’ will be explored more thoroughly in the first part of this volume both in unpacking the primary elements of such a narrative and also in highlighting the multiple themes which are intertwined in this history.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. D. A. Carson as cited by Köstenberger. The entire quote is: “the pursuit of a [single] center is chimerical’ and that what is most promising is the pursuit of ‘clusters of broadly common themes’”

³⁵ “Five Things Bible Scholars Mean when They Use the Term ‘Biblical Theology’” The particular quote is from their explanation of the second type of biblical theology—the History of Redemption.

³⁶ D. A. Carson, “A Biblical-Theological Overview of the Bible,” n.p

³⁷ Ibid. Carson rightly concludes that “...the discipline of biblical theology is grounded on an appropriate grasp of salvation history.”

Toward a Working Definition of Biblical Theology

The three concepts of the progressive historical nature of the revelation of God, the entire canon as scope, and salvation-history as the unifying theme of the biblical narrative provide a foundational understanding of biblical theology as explored in this volume.³⁸ How can one define biblical theology keeping these elements in focus? Morgan and Petersen provide a starting point:

Biblical Theology: The study of God's unfolding story as it progresses from creation of the heavens and the earth, to the fall of our first parents into sin, to redemption in the person and work of Christ, and to his return, the final resurrection, and the new heavens and earth. This biblical story line reveals, frames, arranges, and links biblical teachings.³⁹

Take a moment to unpack this definition. First, note the beginning point of this definition: *God's* unfolding story. One cannot lose the important truth that God is central to the biblical texts. As Hafemann writes, "At its most fundamental level, the subject matter of biblical theology is the *Bible's* understanding of *God's* character and purposes."⁴⁰ Somehow, many tend to move toward humanity as the central figure so that the Bible is seen more as a self-help guide on how to be healthy, wealthy, and wise; rather, than the incredible revelation of an amazing God who extends amazing grace so as to rescue us—further revealing his character and resulting in his glory!

Superhero movies have made a noticeable move into the centre of culture again. One cliché scene that played out in early movies and television was the

³⁸ While not exhaustive, such an approach does incorporate the three central understandings of biblical theology out of the five primary expressions used by scholars as discussed by Klink and Lockett and summarized online: (2-4) Biblical Theology = The History of Redemption, A World-view Story, and a Canonical Approach. The two approaches which are not a part of this volume are (1) Biblical Theology = A Historical Description which is primarily an examination of particular understanding at different points in the history of the Bible without an attempt to come to a unified theology of the Bible; (5) Biblical Theology = A Theological Construct which sees the theology as defined by the confessing church. "Five Things Bible Scholars Mean when They Use the Term 'Biblical Theology,'" n.p.

³⁹ Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, "Biblical Theology" in *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), p. 17. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearch-bible.lifeway.com/> on 20 June 2020.

⁴⁰ Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," p. 20.

image of a person driving a car which, for some unknown reason, stalls upon railroad tracks. Of course, a train is coming and, suddenly, the driver can neither remember how to unfasten the seatbelt nor open a door to escape and is at the mercy of the speeding train, only to be rescued by a superhero. None of those movies or television shows were ever entitled, *Driver on the Tracks*. The one rescued was never the central figure, and so it is with Scripture. God is the central figure. A primary consideration in this volume, then, is the perception of God's activity across history as revelatory of both his nature and his desires.

The second element in Morgan and Petersen's definition is that God's story *progresses* through a *narrative*. In other words, there is a unity to the larger story of the Bible that is evident as one moves through Scripture. Robinson states "God is the master communicator and He chose to use a narrative (story) as a means of disseminating the gospel."⁴¹ The biblical metanarrative has a plot line reflecting God's purposes. One can argue that this metanarrative has the crucial narrative elements of exposition-rising action-climax-resolution.⁴² These components correspond to key elements of the biblical metanarrative: creation, fall, rescue, and consummation.⁴³ In unpacking the larger narrative, one realizes that this story line moves literally through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Each of these four primary elements are explored more fully below in part one of this volume.

A final element from Morgan and Peterson's definition is that this story line of the Bible impacts all of Scripture as it "reveals, frames, arranges, and links

⁴¹ George Robinson as quoted in *The Story Guide: Leadership Edition*, p. 28.

⁴² *The Story Guide: Leadership Edition*, p. 29. The evangelism method expressed in "The Story" is to understand this metanarrative and plotline so well that one can tell this story easily and competently. The training views these elements in light of God's purposes: Exposition: Creation in which God's purpose for humanity is revealed—to fill the Earth with worshippers; Rising Action: the Fall in which God's purpose for humanity is replaced as humans chose to worship other things; Climax: the Rescue in which God's purpose is made possible as Jesus rescues humanity from the bondage of sin; and Resolution: the restoration in which God's purpose is fulfilled and the Earth is filled with redeemed worshippers.

⁴³ Similar to summary of salvation history found in the definition provided by Morgan and Peterson, Carson provides "the simplest outline of salvation history: we begin with *creation*, with God as the Creator and all that he makes declared to be good; we move to the *fall*, which establishes the nature of the problem throughout the rest of the story; we arrive at *redemption*, which is God's answer to the horrible defiance of human rebellion and guilt, turning as it does on the cross and resurrection of Jesus; and we finally reach the *consummation*, when in the wake of redemption God finally brings to pass all his purposes, secured in Christ and now brought to completion." Carson, "A Biblical-Theological Overview of the Bible," n.p.

biblical teachings.”⁴⁴ One must not only see salvation history as the framework for biblical teaching, but also the lens for revealing the meaning and purposes in those teachings. Further, salvation history provides the matrix for how the larger narrative of Scripture is arranged and linked. As a result, multiple themes are bound together in the progression of the narrative.⁴⁵

The task of biblical theology undertaken in this volume is to attempt to bring the entire story of the Bible into focus so that one might more completely understand the character, actions, and purposes of God throughout human history in order to aid the follower of Jesus to worship God more fully and to serve God more faithfully. Carson wisely identifies four priorities that are essential for biblical theology. These priorities provide helpful boundaries for the methodology employed in this volume:⁴⁶

- Read the Bible progressively as a historically developing collection of documents.
- Presuppose that the Bible is coherent.
- Work inductively from the text—from individual books and from themes that run through the Bible as a whole.
- Make theological connections within the entire Bible that the Bible itself authorizes.

In considering reading the Bible progressively, Carson explains that this critical task “requires not only organizing the Bible’s historical material into its chronological sequence, but also trying to understand the theological nature of the sequence.”⁴⁷ One way to help understand these theological connections is “to trace the trajectory of theme straight through the Bible.”⁴⁸ Before moving into this combination of unpacking the larger biblical narrative through an inductive engagement with the Bible while seeking to understand the connectedness of Scripture by identifying “turning points in the Bible’s storyline” and

⁴⁴ Morgan and Peterson, *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ The book, *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, explores this reality by highlighting a different theme in each chapter: The Covenant Relationship (pp. 20-65); The Commands of God (pp. 66-101); The Atonement (pp. 102-127); The Servant of the LORD (pp. 128-178); The Day of the LORD (pp. 179-224); The People of God (pp. 225-253); before providing a final summary chapter: The History of Redemption (pp. 225-308).

⁴⁶ D. A. Carson, “What is Biblical Theology,” n.p.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, n.p.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, n.p.

“observing how later Scripture writers refer to earlier ones”⁴⁹ employed in the following chapters, one should understand the relationship of biblical theology with other theological disciplines, most notably, systematic theology.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

In the ATS, the majority of the planned volumes rightly fall under the category of systematic theology (ST). Is a volume on biblical theology (BT), then, necessary and what is the relationship between BT and ST? One could include a number of other disciplines as well (exegesis, historical theology, practical theology, etc.), but the dynamics are similar enough so that for time and focus, only BT and ST are examined. By way of illustration, consider the discipline of coaching sports (American Football; Soccer; Basketball). One of the more tedious, yet necessary, jobs is breaking down film of upcoming opponents. While all the coaches watch the same film, each coach focuses on the positional play that is his or her responsibility on the team. For example, a defensive coach seeks to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing offense and develops a game plan to counter and exploit the opponent. It is not that there is no concern for the larger game; rather, there is a necessary focus on a particular aspect of the game to best help the team prepare and train to achieve the goal of a victory. In a broadly similar manner, one can perceive a fundamental relationship between BT and ST as the head coach with the overall game in mind and the positional coach with specific aspects in mind yet both moving toward a common goal. In order to understand more fully this relationship, one can briefly glimpse the points of similarity and the critical distinctions between the two disciplines.

Consider the most fundamental points of contact between biblical and systematic theology: authority and content. As with biblical theology, systematic theology ought to find its basis for any authority in Scripture. The Bible—the inspired word of God, is the only true authoritative source of God’s revelation and, thus, must be the primary source for any discipline of ‘theology’. While other sources and disciplines can be engaged, “the theologian cannot treat them as if they enjoyed the same revelatory status as Scripture.”⁵⁰ In light of this foundation, ultimately the content of any systematic volume must be ‘mined’ from the treasure of Scripture; thus, for both disciplines, careful exegesis is required.

⁴⁹ Ibid., n.p.

⁵⁰ Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” n.p.

While a foundational similarity exists between the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology, significant differences can be found in approach, goals, and role within the practice of theology. Biblical theology “works inductively from the diverse texts of the Bible, seeks to uncover and articulate the unity of *all* the biblical texts taken together, resorting primarily to the categories of those texts themselves.”⁵¹ On the other hand, systematic theology as the name implies is focused on identifying some form of “systemic wholeness” which impacts the manner of engaging Scripture in that it “attempts to organize what the Bible says according to some system.”⁵² While both engage Scripture, biblical theology tends to reside closer to the specific biblical texts since it is necessarily more descriptive in its approach than systematic theology:

Although both are text based, the ordering principles of the former [systematic theology] are topical, logical, hierarchical, and as synchronic as possible; the ordering principles of the latter [biblical theology] trace out the history of redemption and are (ideally) profoundly inductive, comparative and as diachronic as possible.⁵³

As a result of such process, systematic theology tends to have a greater attention to cultural engagement. Indeed, by engaging the biblical testimony on the topic of God, humanity, salvation, etc., systematic theology helps the follower of Jesus put words to a biblical understanding of the world and God’s interaction with it—the articulation of a Christian worldview.⁵⁴ Biblical theology, on the other hand, seeks to help the disciple of Christ best understand God’s story highlighting God’s answers to the great worldview questions raised by most of humanity: “What is our origin?” “Why is there so much suffering?” “Is there any hope?” “What does the future hold?”⁵⁵ What, then, is the relationship between the roles of biblical theology and systematic theology (and the larger theological disciplines)? While biblical theology does have an important end in

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Carson argues that ST “openly attempts worldview formation, worldview transformation” and acknowledges “its pursuit of a large-scale, worldview-forming synthesis.” Ibid.

⁵⁵ The connecting of the biblical metanarrative with “four questions that define everyone’s worldview” is a crucial idea in The Story evangelism training. The training voices the four questions in a more personal manner: “How did it all begin?” “What went wrong?” “Is there any hope?” “What will the future hold?” *The Story Guide: Leader Edition*, pp. 35-36.

sight, the discipline is better seen as a foundational discipline. In his recent systematic volume, Morgan acknowledges the influence of biblical theology in establishing the framework and initial content for an effective systematic volume: “This volume also shows how the standard topics and their order flow from the biblical story line of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. It frames doctrines in light of the biblical story, substantial biblical exegesis, and biblical theology.”⁵⁶ Carson, in seeking to illustrate the interrelationships of various theological disciplines envisions a ‘feedback loop’ (see illustration below) as opposed to a hermeneutical circle in which he acknowledges that theological disciplines tend to influence and “reshape how one does any exegesis or theology”, nevertheless, “the line of final control is the straight line from exegesis right through BT and HT to ST and PT. The final authority is the Bible and the Bible alone.”⁵⁷

FEEDBACK LOOP

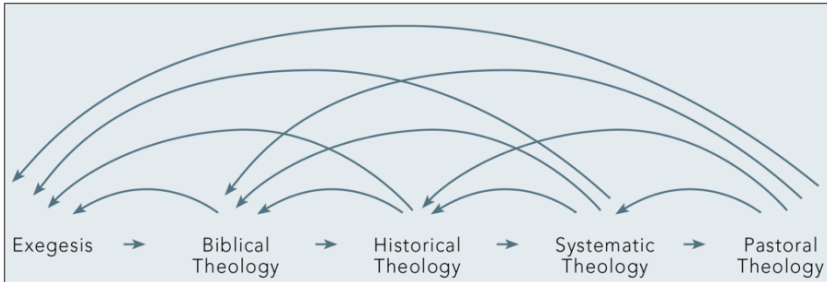


Illustration one: The “Feedback Loop” of Exegesis and Theology

⁵⁶ Christopher W. Morgan, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), p. 1. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com> on 22 June 2020. Morgan reiterates and expands this statement in his definition of his approach to ST: “...this volume is a systematic theology, a study of God that strives to summarize and synthesize the doctrines (teachings) of the Christian faith. As we will develop later, this means that we study biblical passages and themes, church history, and insights from general revelation to work toward theological syntheses. We view the various doctrines in light of the biblical story line: creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. We introduce key truths of the Christian faith: God, his revelation of himself, humanity, sin, Jesus, Jesus’s saving work, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the church, and the future. Along the way, we will increasingly know more about God, ourselves, and how God shapes our identity and mission—all for our good and his glory.” *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ D. A. Carson, “The Bible and Theology,” n.p. taken from the NIV *Biblical Theology Study Bible* retrieved from: <https://www.zondervan.com/p/biblical-theology/what-is-copy/> on 30 May 2020.

This “feedback loop” highlights the two simultaneous engagements of linear progression beginning in exegesis and eventually concluding with pastoral theology and the constant reflection backwards to the various disciplines that helped form its understanding. Thus, a healthy pastoral theology must engage in moments of exegesis, understanding of biblical narrative, and reflections in both historical and systematic theology. The various disciplines are neither isolated nor static. In comparing the disciplines of systematic and biblical theology, systematic theology is the more comprehensive of the disciplines in its scope and engagement. “Exegesis and BT have an advantage over ST because the Bible aligns more immediately with their agendas. ST has an advantage over exegesis and BT because it drives hard toward holistic integration.”⁵⁸ In other words, “systematic theology tends to be a culminating discipline; biblical theology, though it is a worthy end in itself, tends to be a bridge discipline.”⁵⁹ For this reason, this volume precedes all the anticipated systematic volumes in the ATS.

CONCLUSION

Biblical theology provides a framework and essential content for the remaining theological disciplines. Hafemann and House provide a passionate perspective on biblical theology:

...we are convinced that to do biblical theology is not merely to survey the content of the Bible. In pursuit of an understanding of God and his ways, a biblical theology that spans the canon seeks not only to unpack the content, but also to establish the conceptual unity of the Scriptures as a whole as they unfold in human events. Thus, this type of biblical theology endeavors to reflect synthetically on the history and significance of the relationship between God and his people and God and his world, past, present and future, as delineated in the Scriptures. To achieve this goal, whole-Bible biblical theology does not settle for describing the discrete theological emphases of *individual* writers or sources. Nor does it settle for focusing on reconstructing the religious experiences or historical events *behind the text* that gave rise to the

⁵⁸ Ibid., n.p.

⁵⁹ Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” n.p.

text. Instead, *biblical* theology seeks its content and coherence in the final propositions and basic ordering of the Old and New Testaments read in their entirety, in their final form, and in concert with one another.⁶⁰

In the chapters that follow, this volume takes seriously such admonition and seeks to engage as fully as possible in the space available. The chapters in Part One are organized according to the four key plot line developments of the metanarrative of Scripture (creation; fall; rescue/redemption; restoration/consummation). Within each chapter, an exegetical exposition of the key elements is provided as well as a tracing of that element across the biblical narrative so as to maintain a ‘whole-Bible’ perspective. Further, additional themes that explain, compliment, or are consequences of these plotline lenses are explored. The chapters in Part Two will engage practical ministry issues in light of biblical theological perspective identifying and unpacking themes as they relate to culture, mission, and the task of proclamation. Moving through Scripture together with the story of God firmly in mind, the goal is for a ‘Road to Emmaus’ experience. As one may remember, the Holy Spirit through Luke records Jesus’ approach in his engagement with the two disciples on the road from Jerusalem:

“Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus] interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House, “Introduction,” *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*, p. 17. Emphasis by the original authors (Hafemann and House).

⁶¹ Luke 24:27.

PART 1:

THE GRAND NARRATIVE

CHAPTER 1

CREATION

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”¹

How did we get here? How did it all begin? Such worldview questions about the origin of life and matter have been asked in some form in most every culture. Similarly, most cultures have offered answers that spoke to their understanding of the order of creation. Africa is no different with varied, yet similar answers pointing to a unique creator god:

The Bushmen in southern Africa believe that Käng, the Great Master and LORD of all, created everything with life in it, even the rain, sun, and plants. He created animals and people to live together peacefully. The Boshongo of Central Africa believe the universe emerged from the belly of Bumba, the great god. Among the Efik of Nigeria, Abassi is thought to have originally created men and women to live with him in heaven so they could have fellowship. Later his wife persuaded him to allow them to come to earth.²

Many more examples exist across the continent. Within Scripture, the creation narratives in Genesis provide the foundation for the metanarrative of Scripture. The biblical story is truth, and the narrative is not simply a story; rather, it is THE story which addresses all of the major world view questions of humanity. Glen Watson argues that “The Christian metanarrative is still the only story that can truly satisfy even a postmodern heart and mind. If not this story,

¹ Genesis 1:1

² “Creation” in *Africa Study Bible* (Oasis International Limited, 2018), p.6.

what other story would we tell?”³ While acknowledging the truth of the revelation of God’s Word, one can see the function of literary exposition in the initial chapters of Genesis. As an exposition, these chapters provide the setting, protagonist, antagonist, and supporting characters that are important to understand in order to grasp the rising action, climax, and resolution to follow in the biblical metanarrative.⁴ The setting is Earth and the Garden of Eden; the Protagonist—hero of the story—is God; the antagonist—one who opposes the hero—is Satan (which will be discussed in Chapter Three); the supporting characters who help move the story are Adam and Eve.⁵ In considering the significance and role of creation in this metanarrative, three aspects must be considered. First, one must unpack the biblical story of creation itself. Second, one must look at the role of creation in the larger biblical picture moving through the whole of Scripture. Finally, a brief look at other key biblical themes that have their foundation in the creation narratives and are developed throughout the Bible.

THE CREATION NARRATIVE IN GENESIS

The Bible provides a clear and concise account of the creation of the universe in the first two chapters of Genesis. More than a ‘blueprint’ of how to make a universe, the opening chapters establish an understanding of what is to come in the biblical narrative. As Bruce Waltke notes, “The creation account is a highly sophisticated presentation, designed to emphasize the sublimity (power, majesty, and wisdom) of the Creator God and to lay the foundation for the worldview of the covenant community.”⁶ In unpacking the biblical narrative, three critical

³ As cited in *The Story Guide: Leader Edition* (Bloomington, IL: Spread Truth Publishing 2011), p. 28.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.27. In approaching Scripture as a metanarrative, one should expect to encounter the crucial elements of a narrative in the development of the plotline. The elements are identified by the authors of the study in the following manner: Stage 1 is exposition where the story begins establishing the setting—where the story takes place, the protagonist—the hero, the main character, the antagonist, the villain who opposes the hero, and supporting characters who help move the story forward; Stage 2 is rising action as the stage has been set, the characters introduced, and the story is moving toward a high point; Stage 3 is the climax where the agendas of the protagonist and the antagonist collide as conflicts rage and then is resolved when the hero wins; Stage 4 is the resolution where the conflict has been laid to rest, and the end of the story unfolds—the protagonist has won.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 56, as cited in Christopher W. Morgan, *Systematic Theology: Knowing God and the Biblical Story* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), p.8. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com> on 22 June 2020.

elements are brought into focus: the centrality of God, the comprehensive nature of God's creation, and the initial quality of God's creation.⁷

In the Beginning, God...

The opening line of the Bible provides the appropriate focus for the reader—God. The creation narrative begins with the declaration that God, alone, is ‘in the beginning.’ God is the eternal one who is already in existence before any created element of matter, space, or time. Contrary to many Near Eastern or Western creation stories, there is no ‘cosmic conflict’ that resulted in creation as there is only one God. There is no opponent, there is no one with whom God must strive or counter in order to create. In contrast, we are told of the activity of God and the moving of God's Spirit. God, alone, is the eternal one.⁸

The simple declaration that God is, also highlights the truth that God is completely self-sustaining. God does not NEED any created thing to exist: “The creation is neither God nor a part of God; he is absolute and has independent existence...”⁹ It is critical to understand the declaration of Scripture that “God is not the sky, sun, moon, water, trees, animals, or anything else created.”¹⁰ Rather, he is the transcendent one who is absolute in power and authority.¹¹ The opening picture of the biblical narrative is the majesty of God powerfully declared. To what purpose? R.C. Sproul rightly notes that “men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.”¹²

⁷ In *The Story Guide* training materials (2011), the authors similarly identify three key components of the Creation narrative: God; created everything; and there was harmony, pp. 43-56.

⁸ For many Christian authors, the use of the plural pronoun in the final creative act of God is seen as a foundational expression of the Trinity. While the role of the Spirit is, indeed, clearly mentioned as well as the plural pronoun, “us”, it is only in light of the New Testament revelation of Jesus as the agent of creation (see Colossians, Hebrews, etc.) that one can confidently read Genesis 1 with a Trinitarian lens.

⁹ Morgan (2020), p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹² R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2000), p. 68 as cited in *The Story Guide*, p. 47.

God, Creator of All Things

The declaration of Scripture is clear: all that exists does so because God created—both the seen and the unseen.¹³ Genesis 1:1-2:3 describes the completeness of the scope of creation with the repetition of “light-water-land; light-water-land” over the six days where it states that God alone is the source of **light** (day 1), God separates ‘**waters**’ and creates an expanse (day 2) into which God calls **land** into being (day 3). God creates the objects connected to **light**—the sun, moon, and stars (day 4), creates the creatures that live in the **waters** as well as the sky (day 5), and finally, creates the creatures and plants that live upon the **land** (day 6). This simple pattern of ‘light-water-land’ repeated illustrates both the orderliness and the completeness of God’s creation. Nothing that exists does so apart from God’s activity. He is doubly thorough in his creative activity. Another way of viewing the relationship between the first three days and the second three days is the dynamic relationship of “forming” and “filling.” In days one to three, God forms the components of the created universe: day and night; waters; land and vegetation. In days four to six, God fills these forms with appropriate creation: sun, moon, and stars; fish and birds; humanity and all land animals. This relationship is highlighted in the illustration below:¹⁴

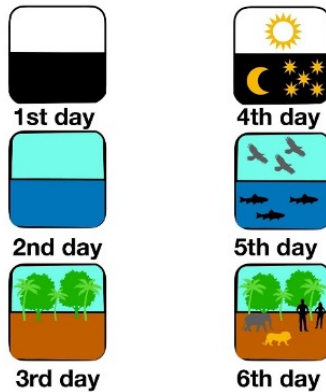


Illustration two: The relationship of “Forming” and “Filling” in Creation

¹³ See Colossians 1:16.

¹⁴ Mark Phillips accessed by e-mail on 18 Oct 2021.

The focus of the narrative, however, is not simply upon the complete scope of creation; rather, it is upon the authority and dominion of God. One Greek philosopher was struck with the biblical narrative and argued that it “formed a worthy conception of divine power... ‘God said’—what? ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. ‘Let there be earth,’ and there was earth.”¹⁵ God does not need to struggle to create. God does not need to battle some opponent. God desires, speaks, and it is so. “As the chief character in Genesis 1, God ‘creates, says, sees, separates, names, makes, appoints, blesses, finishes, makes holy, and rests.’”¹⁶ The narrative does not simply denote a God who acts, but a God who, alone, can act—the only one with such authority. “He further displays his authority over all creation by calling and naming the elements.”¹⁷ In the act of designating the elements of creation, God demonstrates not only that he understands their nature, but that he has designed each element. Further, each element is placed according to God’s plan and order.

The more liturgical narrative of Genesis 1 is balanced with the intimate picture found in Genesis 2. God not only speaks into existence, God ‘makes’ and ‘forms.’ Throughout the entirety of the creation narrative, the truth that God is personally engaged with his creation is evident. As Morgan notes:

The transcendent, sovereign Creator is also personal. On each day of creation God is personally involved in every detail, crafting his world in a way that pleases him and benefits his creatures. In dramatic fashion, on the sixth day he personally creates man in his own image, breathing life into him. The personal God has made humans personal as well, with the ability to relate to him, live in community, and have dominion over creation... By making us in his image, God distinguishes us from the rest of creation and establishes that he is distinct from us—we are not gods, but creatures made in the Creator’s image.¹⁸

¹⁵ Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime*, ix.9, trans. W.H. Fyfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927).

¹⁶ Morgan (2020), p. 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

God is interested and engaged with his creation. The act of creation is not some abstract experiment, but an expression of God's character and purposed for God's glory.

The Significance of Day Seven

Any discussion of the creation narrative in Genesis one is incomplete without some acknowledgement of the seventh day in the narrative. While day seven is neither composed of forming a component of the created universe nor filling it with an appropriate creation, the final day has great importance. Four elements are highlighted in Genesis 2:1-3 in the recounting of day seven. First, there is a recognition that "the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed" (2:1). The next verse will declare that "God completed His work that He had done". The word completed also carries the force of "finished." A plan begun has been finished! There is an emphasis on the fullness of creation according to the intentions of God. Second, the declaration is given that God "rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done" (2:2). This rest is not from fatigue; rather, the rest is an act of reflective satisfaction in the work that is good. This pattern of God's completed activity followed by a promised or realized rest will be encountered later in the biblical narrative! Third, to signify the significance of this rest, "God blessed the seventh day..." The blessing of a day seems unusual. Barnes notes: "Blessing results in the bestowment of some good on the object blessed. The only good that can be bestowed on a portion of time is to dedicate it to a noble use, a special and pleasing enjoyment."¹⁹ This truth is reflected in the fourth element, God "declared it holy." The day is set apart by God as a day of reflection and celebration in recognition of the character, power, and work of God: "...for on it He rested from His work of creation" (2:3).

Humanity as the Climax of Creation

A critical observation of creation is the unique nature of humanity. In contrast to the beliefs of other ancient cultures which often saw the creation of humani-

¹⁹ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testaments, Vol 1: Genesis* as published on BibleHub.com accessed at: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/genesis/2.htm> on 16 Nov 2021.

ty as either an accident, an afterthought, or out of a need for servants²⁰, the biblical narrative is very clear that God intentionally created humanity as unique among all of creation. Humanity, alone, is in the “image of God” which is discussed more fully below. Further, humanity, alone, is given stewardship over creation. Further, the creation of humanity as male and female is highlighted in the narrative and is deemed “good.”

And Creation Was Good

Five times in Genesis 1, the declaration is made that “God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, as well as an additional statement that “God saw that the light was good” in verse 4) in response to the creative activity of God. Furthermore, the final declaration that “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good” (Gen 1:31) is proclaimed as God reflected on his creation after the final act—the creation of humanity. God’s declaration on the ‘rightness’ of creation reflects the truth that God, alone, is the holy and righteous judge of every created thing.²¹ The fundamental declaration of ‘goodness’ is important, as Morgan notes:

God is also good, which is reflected in the goodness of his creation... The inherent goodness of creation leaves no room for a fundamental dualism between spirit and matter, such that spirit is good and matter is bad. Indeed, material creation reflects God’s goodness, which is also evident in his generous provision of light, land, vegetation, animals, and creeping, crawling things. These are blessings given for humanity’s benefit, as are the ability to relate to God, fertility to procreate, and authority to use the earth’s abundant provisions for humanity’s good. Although creation reaches its summit in God’s creating man in his image, Gen 1:1-2:3 culminates in the rest of God. By the seventh day God finishes his creative work, rests, and blesses and sanctifies the day as holy, as a Sabbath to be kept. In doing so, God displays his joy and satisfac-

²⁰ Most of the Ancient Near Eastern cultures did not see humanity as an original intent of the creative activity of their gods. For example, Babylonian myths saw humanity as a consequence of spilled blood of gods during a cosmic battle. Similar stories are found among the Sumerians, Hittites, and other Canaanites.

²¹ *The Story Guide*, p. 46.

tion in his creation and his celebration of completion, and he commemorates this special event.²²

As one reads the narrative, the harmony of the creation is evident. This harmony is seen in three dimensions. First, the harmony is noted between God and humanity. The intimacy shared in the garden as God interacts directly with Adam and Eve (2:15-25) and is heard “walking in the garden” (3:8) reflects the reality that humanity—in all of creation—has a unique relationship with God. Similarly, D.A. Carson states: “We are accorded an astonishing dignity,” and “there is implanted within us a profound capacity for knowing God intimately.”²³ Paul David Tripp highlights the striking contrast in this initial relationship of Adam and Eve and God and that of our own experience:

They worshipped the Creator and managed creation; they didn’t give in to worshipping creation and trying to manage the Creator. There was no doubt of his goodness, no fear of his anger. There was no overt rebellion or subtle disobedience. They obeyed his words and listened to his wisdom. There were no corrupting idols or competing systems of faith. No one was ever angry at God, and God had no cause for anger with the people he had made. People loved God’s glory and in no way lived for their own.²⁴

A second aspect of the harmony seen in the creation narrative is that of Adam and Eve and creation. The picture of the idyllic garden reflects this truth—there is peace with humanity and the physical world. This harmony is reflected in the roles given in the naming of the animals and the tending of the garden. A final aspect of harmony is seen in the relationship of Adam and Eve—harmony with each other so that one is given a glimpse of the intentional relationship of man and woman without barriers and without shame.²⁵ Morgan aptly summarizes the reality of such harmony:

²² Morgan (2020), pp. 9-10.

²³ D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 205 as cited in Morgan (2020), p. 9.

²⁴ Paul David Tripp, *A Quest for More* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), p. 39 as cited in *The Story Guide*, p.52.

²⁵ *The Story Guide*, p. 52.

God provides the garden of Eden as a place in which man and woman may live and work. God “forms the man, plants the garden, transports man there, sets up the terms of a relationship with man, and searches for a helper fit for the man, which culminates in the woman.” Man is formed from the dust of the ground but is more than dust; his life comes directly from the very breath of God (2:7). In planting the garden and moving man there, the Creator and covenant LORD provides a delightful and sacred space in which humans can enjoy a harmonious relationship with him, each other, the animals, and the land.²⁶

The creation narrative, thus, ends with a clear expression of God’s perfect design as well as God’s expectations for humanity within those designs. It is noteworthy to recognize that God’s design included both “wonderful privileges and significant responsibilities in the garden of Eden.”²⁷ In other words, there is an expectation of human activity (work) among creation as a part of God’s design. Humanity experiences a unique role among all of creation as stewards of creation and a unique relationship with God in whose image they are created.²⁸ The creation narrative completes its function as exposition for the larger biblical metanarrative with the revelation of the expectations placed upon humanity to remain in the harmonious existence. “They experience an unhindered relationship with God, intimate enjoyment of each other, and delegated authority over creation. God establishes the terms for living in his presence and graciously puts forward only one prohibition: they must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”²⁹

THE ROLE OF CREATION IN SCRIPTURE

While the creation narrative may be found in Genesis, creation is addressed throughout the larger biblical narrative. The foundational ideas that God, alone, is outside of creation; that everything in existence only exists because of God’s creative work; and that God’s design is good have significance as the remaining

²⁶ Morgan (2020), p. 10.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The significance of created in the image of God will be explored further below.

²⁹ Morgan (2020), p. 10.

Scriptures unfold. One encounters two key roles of creation in the larger meta-narrative that deserve attention: creation as a revelation of God and creation as an instrument of God.

Creation as Revealing God

When the psalmist under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote that “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of his hands,”³⁰ he was not simply speaking poetically; rather, an important truth is revealed: something of God is discerned in creation. Specifically, here the works of God and God’s glory are seen. The writer continues to explain that the heavens “pour out speech” and “communicate knowledge” (verse 2). Such communication is expressed throughout the earth (verse 4). In truth, God’s hand and glory are seen in creation. What is to be understood?

The first aspect of such general revelation encountered in creation is the goodness of God. Not only was creation deemed ‘good’, but the very goodness reflects the character of the God who created. As a part of an interview connected to the application process, a prospective student for the Cape Town Baptist Seminary was asked to identify his favourite book of the Bible and the reason. The young Xhosa man responded without hesitation: “Genesis.” He explained that the evidence of God’s love is found before reading John 3:16—it is seen in the opening verses of creation where the love of God is seen in the manner and care in creation.³¹ The creation narratives not only describe a God who provides good for his creation, but also a God who is not limited in the scope of his creation. The omnipotence of God is reflected in the ‘declarations’ of the heavens. God is one without limits. Further, the structured accounts reveal a God who instils order and design as opposed to chaotic nothingness. While such an understanding of the providential, orderly, and omnipotent God as demonstrated in creation is found throughout Scripture, three key passages will be considered for the sake of time.

First, the two speeches of God in Job 38-41 combine all these elements powerfully. In response to all of Job’s questions and searching around the reality of suffering and God’s role, God speaks about creation. In the first speech, God

³⁰ Psalm 19:1

³¹ Zoom conversation between the authors (in their role as faculty at CTBS) and a prospective student conducted via Zoom (Dec 2020).

reflects upon his own role and understanding of the created order. The first half of the speech centres on the inanimate aspects of nature—not only the existence of elements (i.e., earth, mountains, stars, seas), but also the natural phenomena (i.e., dawn, storms, floods) and includes statements of the details of the scope of creation (the ordering of constellations, the amount of rain to disperse, etc.). The speech continues with a survey of life in creation from the knowledge of and control over wild animals—including those in the most distant places such as mountains or desert—to a summary of the superiority of God’s understanding of the animals domesticated by humanity: God knows them better! The second speech focuses on the fantastical creatures—leviathan and behemoth. Those creatures that cause terror or fear in humans are not only created and understood by God, but are also tame to him and move at his will. So, even the most unexplainable elements of creation are known by God. How do these speeches begin to not only answer Job, but also reflect the character of God? As seen by Job’s response of humility in chapter 42, Job realizes that he had too small a vision of God when he had focused on suffering and circumstance; rather, God’s control and ordering of the incredibly immense and complex creation convinced Job that God’s providence was more than sufficient for him, and no circumstance had escaped God’s notice. Thus, creation was used to illustrate God’s care for detail and the breadth of the scope of God’s providential care, ability to bring order without limit or hindrance to his providential role in the life of his follower.

A second important text is found in Acts 17:22-31. In the book of Acts, one finds over 20 speeches recorded which include one major speech in each of Paul’s missionary journeys. While the speech in the first journey focuses on the Jewish audience, this speech in the second journey has a completely Gentile audience. As a result, Paul does not refer to Scripture as a starting point of authority; rather, Paul uses the evidence of creation as an authoritative beginning point. For Paul, then, the existence of creation (vs. 24) is an absolute foundation to understand that God exists. Based on this foundation, Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit states four truths that can be made. First, the God who is “LORD of heaven and earth” will not be limited to a shrine or an idol. In other words, a God who could create cannot be limited to a space or adequately depicted in a shape. Second, a God who created all things does not need to be served as though he had some lack or need; rather, God who creates is the author of all life and breath—is the very source of life and, thus, has no lack or need (vs. 25). Third, the God who created everything is not limited in space to

any one nation, time, or region (vv. 26-27). Finally, the reality of a creator God places a special place for humanity in creation— the one part of creation that can relate to God and be declared ‘God’s offspring’ (vs. 28). Creation, then, is not silent in its communication about God.

A final passage to be considered here is Romans 1:18-25 where creation is explicitly connected to the revelation of God with the introductory statement “...what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them” (vs. 19). Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit explains that “From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made” (vs. 20a). Two conclusions are to be drawn from this verse. First, in the act of creation, God demonstrated both his power and nature (see discussion above). Second, these aspects of God are ‘clearly’ displayed. Some misunderstand ‘clear’ to mean that everything about God can be discerned so that no further, specific revelation is needed. More accurately, the reality of God’s power and nature are clearly seen. One can look at the magnitude of a mountain and begin to understand the power of God. The psalmist saw in the destructive power of a storm a glimpse of the strength of God. The fact that one can draw the conclusion of the existence of God and correctly discern that such a god is powerful and good does not mean that one understands everything about God. Rather, it is a beginning, a foundation. Paul, then, will argue “As a result, people are without excuse” (vs. 20b). The passage moves on to demonstrate the failure to understand the clear revelation in the creation in two actions. First, the failure to glorify God or offer thanks (vs. 21a) which led to the second failure which was to “exchange the glory of the immortal God for images...” (vs. 23a). In those moments, the glory that is being declared by the heavens is ignored in favour of their own wisdom.

Creation as an Instrument of God

Creation not only serves as a means of revealing God in Scripture, but creation also serves as an instrument in the hands of God. Creation is used both as a means of provision for the needs of humanity and the means of delivering judgment for sin. Both realities can be illustrated from Scripture.

Creation as an Instrument of Provision

One of the more evident examples of God's blessing is the provision for the needs of people. Such provision is often seen through some demonstration of God's authority and power over creation. While this reality is seen clearly in the creation narrative with the provision of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2), this truth is not limited to that instance; rather, one can find a great number of examples in the Old Testament books of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, as well as in the New Testament. Within the first five books of the Bible: God provides years of good harvests for Egypt under Joseph's administration (Gen 41); God opening a path through the Red Sea to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors (Ex 14); God provides manna in the wilderness for the people of Israel (Ex 16); the promised land as a "land flowing with milk and honey" (the very bounteous nature of the land was proof of God's provision). Within the former prophets:³² God stops the flow of the Jordan River to allow the Israelites to cross into the promised land (Jos 3); God lengthens a day by halting the sun's movement so that Israelites could defeat the alliance of southern kings (Jos 10); God sends ravens to feed Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 17); God multiplies the oil and the meal of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17). In the Gospels, one encounters a number of miracles of Jesus which demonstrate his authority over creation: the changing of water into wine (John 2); the multiplication of fish and loaves to feed a multitude (the only miracle recorded in all four gospels—Mt 14, Mk 6, Lk 9, Jo 6); the quieting of the storm (Mt 8, Mk 4); the healing of leprosy (Lk 17), paralysis (Mk 2), illness (Jo 4); the casting out of demons (Mk 5); the resurrection from the dead. The moving of the Spirit in Acts likewise demonstrates God's authority over creation—the gift of languages at Pentecost (Acts 2) and multiple instances of healing. The ultimate example of creation connected to the blessing of God is seen in Revelation with the creation of a New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21). This promised reality will be considered in detail in chapter five below.

Creation as an Instrument of Judgment

God not only uses creation as an instrument of blessing, but often demonstrates his authority over creation in acts of judgment or punishment. Such acts can be directed to individuals such as the striking of Miriam with leprosy after

³² The designation "former prophets" comes from the book order of the Hebrew Bible and refers to the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings.

her sin (Num 12) but are more often directed against groups of people or nations. In the early stories of Genesis, the use of creation as an instrument of judgment is seen most clearly in the sending of the flood in Genesis 7. The language around the flood calls to mind God's creative activity—now acts of 'un-creating' as the waters which were separated and gathered so that land could appear in the second day of creation are now let loose resulting in a complete destruction of all the living creatures outside of the ark. In Exodus, God uses a series of plagues to punish Egypt so that the Israelites could be freed from their slavery. These plagues affected the various aspects of God's creation—the rivers, animals, heavens, people (Ex 7-12). The grumbling and rebellion of the Israelites in the desert are met with a plague of serpents (Num 21). The sin of the nation of Israel results in God sending a devastating drought that lasts for over three years (1 Kings 17-18). The sending of locusts in Joel. Many additional examples can be found throughout Scripture. Repeatedly, God demonstrates his authority over creation as he engages with humanity across history. Creation, then, is an important component of the biblical narrative.

Creation and Spiritual Beings

While the creation narrative does not specifically address the origin of spiritual beings (i.e., angels, demons), the narrative is very clear that *everything* comes into existence because of the creative activity of God. God, alone, is the eternal one. As to the sequence of creation, Job 38:1-7 describes God laying the foundation of creation after which, the sons of God shouted for joy. As MacDonald aptly concludes, "As for how long the angelic host existed prior to the event [of the creation of the earth], the Scriptures do not say. But the realm of the invisible powers is older than humanity."³³ Other biblical narratives give glimpses into the nature of these spiritual beings through names, descriptions, and statements of function. The most familiar term or description of spiritual beings is probably "angels." While the term is most often connected to the role of delivering a message, the term is also connected with "heavenly hosts" who bring praise and worship of God. Occasionally, a more definitive "Angel of the LORD" is encountered. The Angel of the LORD not only engages with a human (i.e., Hagar, Gideon, Joshua), but delivers a specific message—often a call to task, promise

³³ Scott D. MacDonald, *Demonology for the Global Church: A Biblical Approach in a Multicultural Age* (Langham Publishing, 2021). Kindle format, location 1912.

of deliverance, or instruction to be obeyed. Beyond “angels”, one encounters other spiritual beings as well. Cherubim are the first spiritual beings specifically mentioned occurring in Genesis 3:24 being stationed at the entrance to the garden of Eden as a deterrent for humanity seeking to return to the garden after God’s judgment on Adam and Eve. The next occurrence of the term is in connection to the fashioning of the covering of the ark of the covenant and the building of the tabernacle in Exodus. Most often, cherubim are depicted with wings and seen as attendants of God (as in visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John) providing testimony of God’s holiness or guardians of boundaries as in Genesis. They are often seen in parallel with “Seraphim” and “the living creatures” at times synonymous with angels and elsewhere distinctive from the generic term “angels.” Collective terms such as “sons of God” in Job 1 are used to describe groups of spiritual beings as they gather.³⁴ Another common collective term is “heavenly hosts.” Interestingly, in the birth narrative of Jesus, Luke provides a description of the shepherd encounter with the Angel of the LORD, followed by a gathering of “a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel...” (2:13). In verse 15, Luke equates the heavenly host with “angels”. In the Luke narrative, therefore, the term is synonymous with angels. Just as collective terms can be used, one does find individual angels mentioned by name, most specifically Gabriel and Michael. One final note is that some form of structure, order, or hierarchy seems evident in the use terms like “powers,” “princes,” and “authorities” or of the term “archangel” in Daniel, Thessalonians, and Jude. Nevertheless, the clear message is that all spiritual beings are created beings. The various “angelic” beings are very clearly servants of God in submission to him. The reality of fallen angelic beings or demons as well as Satan will be discussed in chapter three, the Fall.

THE CREATION NARRATIVE AS FOUNDATION FOR OTHER BIBLICAL THEMES

While the crucial elements of creation surface throughout the biblical narrative, one should also acknowledge that other biblical themes have their genesis in the creation narrative. It is in the creation story that the groundwork is established

³⁴ The term “sons of God” is one that can cause some debate as the term also occurs in Genesis 6:2 but seems to be linked with sin or disobedience or even fallen angels. The term has also been linked with the idea of a heavenly court.

for the understanding of critical ideas ranging from the Temple/Tabernacle of God to the Kingdom of God. In this final section four such themes will be considered, highlighting the role of creation narratives in providing the initial understanding of each theme.

Tabernacle/Temple

At first glance, one might not think of Eden in terms of the Tabernacle or the Temple; however, Morgan appropriately describes the Garden of Eden as a “sacred space”³⁵ that “highlights God’s presence with humans.”³⁶ Indeed, the initial creation of the cosmos becomes the first temple filled with the presence of God. More pointedly Morgan notes Waltke’s observation that “The Garden of Eden is a temple-garden, represented later in the tabernacle.”³⁷ The whole of the garden, itself, establishes in narrative form the hopes of the later tabernacle and temple. Consider the narrative of Genesis 2 once again. First and foremost is the wonder of ‘walking’ in the presence of God. The location of the Tabernacle was determined by the pillar of cloud which would stop wherever the Tabernacle was to be set up. By this means, the Tabernacle was always to be placed under the presence of God (Num 9). In the dedication of the Temple, the climax was the glory of God completely filling the space so that none could enter (2 Chr 7)! Conversely, one of the tragic moments of the exile is when Ezekiel observes the glory of God leaving the Temple (Ezek 10). Yet, in Genesis, there is no need for a place to be set aside to encounter the presence of God as God is encountered throughout the garden. A hope expressed in both the Tabernacle and the Temple is that the worshipper might encounter God or make necessary restitutions so that a relationship with God could be restored. In the garden, the ultimate expression of such a relationship is described—standing and moving in the presence of God.

Beyond moving in the presence of God, the garden also provides ultimate expressions of our desired relationship with God: worship of God, conversation with God, and instruction from God. The worship of God is seen in an uncluttered form. It is not simply being in the presence of God, but an opportunity to acknowledge, worship, and give glory to the God who created all. In

³⁵ Morgan, 2020, p. 10.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Waltke, 2001, p. 85, as cited in Morgan 2020, p. 10.

the garden, Adam and Eve worship and move before God without shame. In the context of the garden, Adam and Eve converse with God directly. Throughout Scripture, the Tabernacle and the Temple become places where one sought God. At the initial dedication of the Tabernacle, one is told that Moses entered the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD. He heard the voice speaking to him from above the ark of the covenant (Num 7:89). Another example is found in Hannah's going to the LORD's house to worship and to plead favour of God (1 Sam). Beyond seeking God, the garden was the place where Adam and Eve received instruction from God—direction for their daily life. So, too, the Temple was a place of instruction—a place from where one might find guidance. Further, Adam can be seen as the first priest given tasks of service within this temple-garden and moving in obedience to the commands of God. It is not surprising that one finds Jesus teaching at the Temple (Luke 19:47). In the garden, then, one finds an idyllic expression of the hope of the Tabernacle and Temple: a place of unfettered worship of God, of direct communication with God, of clear direction from God.

The Kingdom of God

Creation provides a glimpse of the intended nature of the Kingdom of God. In Eden, God creates, establishes boundaries, and freely engages with his creation. Similarly, Vaughan Roberts writes that Eden “is an idyllic picture of the good life: life as it was meant to be. We see in the garden of Eden a pattern of the kingdom of God. God's people, Adam and Eve, live in God's place, the garden of Eden, under God's rule; as a result, they enjoy God's blessing.”³⁸ Eden, therefore, provides the expectation for God's kingdom.

Moving through the Old Testament, the ideal of Eden is contrasted with the reality of the experience of Israel. This reality is highlighted in the final speech of Moses in Deuteronomy where God provides the boundary for Israel's experience in the promised land. God clearly provides the requirements for Israel to live in covenant with Him while living in the promised land. This final speech establishes the means of experiencing God's blessing or curse in the land and becomes the standard for Israel from Joshua through Kings. The prophets will hold this standard for Israel in multiple oracles.

³⁸ Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Story-Line of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), p. 32 as cited in *The Story Guide*, p. 52.

The kingdom of God is a major theme in the synoptic gospels, occurring in over sixty passages—over eighty if parallel passages are considered separately. Matthew, alone, will use the parallel phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” over thirty times. While the theme will be discussed more fully in chapter 4 in conjunction with rescue/redemption, it is important to acknowledge that the image of the kingdom as the ideal in the gospels has its foundation with the creation narrative. Nevertheless, several aspects of the Kingdom are addressed. The phrase is used in numerous parables describing the value of the kingdom (such as the pearl of great price, Mt 13) and the nature of the kingdom (such as the sower and the seed, Mt 13). It also appears in the sermon on the mount describing the reward for followers of Jesus (Mt 5). It also occurs amid warnings identifying those who “by no means” will enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:20).

The ultimate depiction of the Kingdom of God is found in Revelation and will be discussed in chapter 5 in connection to consummation. One finds nearly every element of Eden expressed in its fulness in the final declaration of the new heaven and the new earth. The foundation laid in the opening chapters of Scripture reaches its fulfillment in the final chapters of the Bible.

The Image of God

The climax of the creative activity of God in the creation narratives is the creation of humanity—male and female. Three elements can be noted in the narrative which help highlight this distinction. First, God’s discussion around the creation of man declares the desire to create “in his own image.” Humanity, then, has this distinction among all of creation! One should note that both man and woman are created in the image of God. There is no distinction provided in Genesis 1 in that regard. Even as the story unfolds in Genesis 2, the sequence of creation (man before woman) does not negate the unique place of both male and female as created in God’s image. Second, the declaration of the goodness of the day is changed from simply “God saw that it was good” to “God saw that it was very good.” Third, stewardship over creation is granted to this man and woman! Not only are they created uniquely, but they are given instructions and responsibilities by God. This three-fold expression of the value of humanity stands in stark contrast to most of the other Near Eastern and African cultures. Contrary to the idea that the creation of humanity was either an accidental result of battle with some monster (as in some Canaanite stories), an afterthought following victory over forces of chaos (as in some Mesopotamian

stories), as a means of creating slaves for labour such as tilling the land (as in the Sumerian and Akkadian stories), or from the discomfort of loneliness (as in the Kuba stories of creation from vomit³⁹), the biblical record reveals that the creation of man and woman was the intentional activity of God—and deemed ‘very good.’

The reality of the significance of humanity and the value place upon humanity as image bearers of God is critical in Scripture. The value of life is found in multiple stories beginning with the tragedy of Cain and Abel wherein a man murders his own brother (Gen 4). With the revelation of the Law at Sinai, God expressly prohibits the murder of another person (Ex 25). The Levitical laws are filled with not only prohibitions for murder but compensation for causing death accidentally. The prohibitions on murder are not simply boundaries of acceptable actions, but also reflect the character of God. The taking of human life is prohibited because God values human life.

In the remainder of the biblical narrative, the theme of the image of God resurfaces in several passages and different contexts. The reality of sin and spiritual death is understood as having impact on humanity. In the Chapter Three below, the theme of the image of God and humanity will be examined in light of the reality of sin and fallenness.

This reality of man and woman as created in the image of God also brings some insight to the prohibition against the creation of idols or attempts to represent the image of God in material form. In the New Testament, Jesus is declared the image of God (Col 1:15) and the exact expression of God’s nature (Heb 1:2). The follower of Jesus is then called to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:28-29). These aspects of the image of God will be explored more fully in chapter 4 in connection to rescue/redemption. The language of “image” is also used to describe our future hope (1 Cor 15:49) and will be considered more fully in chapter 5 in connection to consummation.

Covenant and Creation

A final prominent theme that is developed throughout Scripture and has its foundation in the creation narratives is the theme of covenant. Specifically, the idea of covenant between God and humanity. The covenant relationship between God and humanity is at the heart of salvation history (and will be consid-

³⁹ P. Allen and C. Sanders, *Bumba: African Creator God*, 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.godchecker.com/pantheon/african-mythology.php?deity=BUMBA>, on 17 Feb 2021.

ered in some detail in chapter 4 in connection to rescue/redemption). While the term ‘covenant’ does not explicitly occur in Genesis 1-2, the relationship established between God and humanity does reflect a covenantal expression and provides a foundation and a pattern for later expressions of covenant. While the early covenants of God with Adam and Eve, as well as the covenant with Noah, are usually seen primarily as covenants of provision, they go beyond simple provision. Hafemann identifies a threefold covenant structure of the relationship between God and his people which he outlines in the following manner:⁴⁰

God’s Unconditional Acts of Provision (as King/Father)
by which he Establishes the Covenant Relationship
(The Provisions and Promises of the Covenant,
given by grace in the *past*)

which leads to

The Covenant Stipulations or ‘Conditions’
upon which the Covenant Relationship is Maintained
(The Commands of the Covenant,
kept by grace in the *present*)

which leads to

The Covenant promises or Curses
based on Keeping or Not Keeping the Covenant
(The Consummation of the Covenant Promises or Curses,
to be fulfilled by grace in the *future*)

Hafemann will go on to identify several critical implications of this covenantal structure:⁴¹ first, God always initiates the covenant relationship; second, God’s acts of providence and deliverance are not isolated; rather, “every act of God’s provision in the *past* brings with it promises for the *future*”⁴² so that God’s actions provide “both the basis and motivation for responding to God with the

⁴⁰ Scott J. Hafemann, “The Covenant Relationship,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, Ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2007), p.35.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 36-40.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 36.

trust and hope that honour him as one's LORD... Faith, hope, and love are thus shorthand summaries of the covenant stipulations;⁴³ third, the development and movement of covenants and the covenantal relationship indicate that the "focus of the covenantal relationship is on the future,"⁴⁴ fourth, in the covenantal stipulations one realizes an important tension in that "although all the promises of God are conditional, the provisions of God that make inheriting those promises possible are given unconditionally;"⁴⁵ finally, the covenantal structure "destroys all attempts to define 'faith' as a passive, mental assent to data from the past, or as an emotional attachment centered in private, religious 'experience.'"⁴⁶ In other words, obedience to covenant on the part of the one in relationship with God is not something in addition to faith; rather, "it is the organic expression of faith."⁴⁷ The conditions of a covenant, the commands of God, are a clear example of "what trusting God looks like in concrete circumstances. Hence, every command is an implicit call to trust God's provisions and promises."⁴⁸

The engagement of God with Adam and Eve can be seen to reflect this threefold pattern suggested by Hafemann: "we see that God's provisions of creation for Adam and Eve in the *past* (Gen. 1:3-25, 29; 2:8-14) were the foundation upon which they were to obey him in the *present* (Gen 1:26-28; 2:15), the result of which would be continuing in his covenant blessings in the *future* (Gen.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.39. This passage is critical to understanding Hafemann's perspective. He identifies the tension well earlier in the paragraph when he writes: "the fact that the covenant stipulations of faith, hope, and love are the essential link between experiencing God's provisions in the past and present and inheriting his blessings in the future signifies that all the promises of God are conditional (Eph. 2:8b: we are saved *through faith*). Nevertheless, there is no such thing as a merited or earned promise in the Bible, in the sense of deserving God's blessings by virtue of our own abilities, efforts, ethnic identities, personal accomplishments, feelings or beliefs. In the words of Ephesians 2:8a, we are saved *by grace*" (pp. 38-39). He continues in considering the unconditional provision of God with regard to the promises: "These include not only the acts of redemption culminating in the first and second comings of Christ, but also the provision in our personal lives needed to fulfil God's covenant conditions. In the words of Ephesians 2:8c: 'this [entire process of salvation by grace through faith] is the *gift of God*. And again, the fundamental provision of God is the presence of God himself.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Hafemann writes: "The inextricable link between the provisions, stipulations, and promises of the covenant reveals that to live in relationship with God is to respond with Spirit-determined obedience to God as the expression of one's ongoing trust in God. In Jesus' words, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15). Thus, 'Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him' (1 John 2:4; cf. 4:20).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

2:16).⁴⁹ God's rest following the creative activity can be seen to indicate that God is "now reigning over his creation for the good of his people, having given them *everything* they needed to fulfil their mandate (Gen 2:1-3)."⁵⁰ This critical pattern of God's provision followed by some expression of boundary and expectation which is connected to future promise or hope is going to be repeated numerous times throughout Scripture. While they will be considered more in later chapters, the successive covenants with Abraham, the people of Israel at Sinai, and the new covenant promised in Jeremiah and fulfilled in Jesus will all reflect the same pattern. The hope of real covenantal relationship with God is grounded in the real relationship established at creation.

The Covenant of Marriage

In addition to expressing the establishment of covenant between God and humanity, the creation narrative also reveals the establishment of the marriage covenant relationship between Man and Woman. The elements that Hafemann identifies in connection to God's covenantal relationship to humanity undergird this relationship between Adam and Eve.

In the narrative, the relationship is only possible because of God's unconditional provision. In the second chapter of Genesis, one encounters the journey of Adam in the finding of a helpmate. Initially, God places Adam alone among the rest of creation tasking him with naming the animals. After "The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal..."⁵¹ the revelation is made that "...for the man no helper was found who was like him."⁵² God, then, acts and creates Eve. The initial encounter between Adam and Eve marks the climax of God's creative activity. The creation of man and woman in the image of God is complete when they come together. One can observe the intentional creation of two separate sexes—these two genders are by design and are "good." God's creation results in the potential for a covenant relationship between the man and the woman. The joy expressed in the initial response of Adam is difficult to capture in translation: "This one, at last..."⁵³ The New Living Translation attempts to capture the emotion in its punctuation: "'At last!' The man

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 40. Hafemann will go on to state that "this interplay between the past, present, and future in relationship to God is at the very centre of biblical theology."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Genesis 2:20a.

⁵² Genesis 2:20b.

⁵³ Genesis 2:23a. Other translations: "This at last is..." (ESV); "This is now..." (NIV and NASV).

exclaimed...” and reflects the excitement and response to God’s unconditional act of grace in the creation of the perfect helpmate!

The narrative reflection to the revelation of Eve and the declaration of Adam provides insight into both the conditions expected and the promise established. The conditions of this new relationship establish the expectation of a singular relationship between the man and woman. This relationship is covenantal in tone. The man is expected to leave all other relationships and to bond exclusively to his wife (the implication of reciprocal action of the wife towards her husband is evident). This condition is the basis for the promised continuation of this covenantal relationship. The final declaration of the results of this new relationship is that they will become one flesh. While this phrase does reflect the physical intimacy of the marriage relationship, it moves beyond that limitation as expressed in the final observation of the lack of shame at their nakedness.

The first human relationship is reflective of the parameters of the established covenant between God and humanity. This reality emphasizes the importance of this relationship among all human relationships. This truth is reinforced by the repetition of this declaration in the New Testament both by Jesus and by the Holy Spirit directing Paul. The context of Jesus’ proclamation in Mark 10:6-7 (and the parallel passage in Matthew 19:4-5) is on the topic of divorce, where Jesus not only connects divorce to hardness of hearts, but also affirms the covenantal aspect of marriage after quoting the Genesis passage; he concludes: “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate.”⁵⁴ Jesus connects marriage to an act of God—the creation of this relationship. In Ephesians 5:22-33, the Holy Spirit led Paul to include the Genesis declaration in the context of establishing relationships in the home for believers. He connects the role of husband and the role of wife to acts of worship and service to God. Further, the marriage relationship is declared to be a profound mystery in that it also reflects Christ and the church.⁵⁵

BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CREATION AND OTHER WORLDVIEWS

In the context of Africa, one can find worldviews competing with the biblical picture. While creation is probably the worldview element with the greatest

⁵⁴ Mark 10:8b-9.

⁵⁵ Ephesians 5:32.

points of contact, differences can be noted. Faith expressions common to Africa need to be examined in light of the biblical expression of creation with the emphasis on God alone as the creator of all things who made all things good. In the Africa Theology Series, the four worldviews that are identified as imperative to engage are African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam, Prosperity Gospel, and Roman Catholicism as found in Africa. The goal is to provide a summary of the teaching of each worldview considering its application or implication, and then provide some summary of both bridges and barriers to the Gospel message. In relation to the understanding of creation, Roman Catholicism as expressed in the African context does not really deviate from the biblical understanding in either content or implications; therefore, RCC will not be discussed below. Similarly, Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity movement do not deviate in terms of the content of creation narrative; however, there is some significant difference in application and implications as will be discussed below. ATR and Islam will be given more full treatment as they have the greatest differences from the biblical narrative and meaning.

African Traditional Religion (ATR)

What then is African Traditional Religion (ATR) and what is its understanding of Creation? To profit from the double-barreled question, one must first consider the nature of religion in general and understand how ATR beliefs impact the African way of life. Mbiti points out that the nature of African religion can be observed in five parts namely 1) beliefs, 2) practices, ceremonies, and festivals, 3) religious objects and places, 4) values and morals, and 5) religious officials or leaders.⁵⁶ Mbiti continues to elaborate that “No part by itself constitutes the entire meaning of religion.”⁵⁷ All five parts must be understood as working together to give a complete picture of African Religion.

Beliefs in ATR show the way people think about the universe and their attitude towards life. ATR beliefs consider topics such as God, spirits, creation of the universe, human life, and after death issues, among many others. The topic of practices, ceremonies, and festivals is essential to a discussion of any religion as in ATR. Mbiti writes, “Religious practices show how people express

⁵⁶ John Mbiti 1985. *Introduction to African Religion*. Heinemann: London pp. 10-14.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

their beliefs in tangible ways.”⁵⁸ This attribute of definition include prayers, sacrifices and offerings, rituals, ceremonies, and observing customs.

Mbiti sees African Religion as integral to the African heritage:

“African Religion is the product of the thinking and experiences of our forefathers. They formed religious ideas, they formulated religious beliefs, they observed religious ceremonies and rituals, they told proverbs and myths which carried religious meanings, and they evolved laws and customs which safeguarded the life of the individual and his community.... Religion is found in all African peoples. Their different cultures have been influenced very strongly by religion as it is found in each people.”⁵⁹

It is commonly believed all over Africa that the universe was created by a creator god. There is no agreement, however, on how the creator created the world. It is a common belief of Africans that the universe was created by the creator; the universe could not have come into existence on its own. God the Creator is the explanation for the source of the universe comprising both visible and invisible realities. Consequently, in many African languages, the name of God means ‘Creator’: even where there is another name, He is often called the ‘Creator’ as well.

While there are many different accounts of the creation of the universe it is commonly agreed that human beings occupy its centre. In some creation stories it is told that God first made the heavenly part of the universe and then he created the earth. In other myths this order is inverted. Some African accounts hold that the whole universe was created in a single act. It is also a common view among African peoples that God continues to create, and creation of the universe is an ongoing process which will perhaps never stop.

The Nature of Creation in ATRs

In many African cultures it is held that the universe is divisible into two; the invisible parts (heavens or sky) and the earth; however, some believe the universe is in the form of a three-tier creation: the heavens, the earth, and the un-

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

derworld (below it). Importantly, though, Africans do not view these divisions as separate but understand them as connected in existence.

The heavenly part of the universe is home of the stars, sun, moon, meteors, sky, the wind, and the rain (including all the phenomena such as thunder and lightning, storms, eclipses of the sun and moon, 'falling stars', and so on). Heaven is also the home of god, even though people cannot precisely establish where he dwells, other than saying that he lives in the 'sky', in 'heaven' or 'beyond the clouds', or they simply say that 'god does not live on earth like human beings. It often believed that god has other beings living with him who oversee various departments of the created world, others are his messengers and servants or ministers, and others are like his children. There are other Africans, however, who believe that god (being all-powerful) dwells completely alone and does everything himself. Broadly, it is believed that the heavenly world is not empty but is teeming with its own types of life in addition to the visible objects mentioned above. This means that the heaven world is the complement of the earth, even though what happens in that realm is invisible to humans.

The earth too, is occupied by created things. Some people groups consider the earth as a living being, and term it, 'Mother Earth', 'the goddess earth' or 'the divinity of the earth'. Figuratively, in this sense, the earth is viewed as the mother of all creation, while the heavenly part is the father. Among some African people groups rituals are performed to show reverence to the earth. For example, in Zambia, when the rains start, people must cease working on the ground in the fields for a few days. While in other parts of Africa when a major catastrophe like an earthquake or a murder occurs, sacrifices are offered to the divinity of the earth. Still in many other places on the continent of Africa many things are revered, such as mountains, rocks, waterfalls, some forests and trees, birds, animals, and insects.⁶⁰

The link between heaven and earth

According to ATR, human beings are at the centre of creation and function as priests linking it with god its creator. Hence human beings awaken creation, speak to it, listen to it, and try to make a harmony with it. Mbiti explains that, "It is humans who turns parts of the universe into sacred objects, and who uses

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 33.

other things for sacrifices and offerings. These are constant reminders to people that they regard it as a religious universe.”⁶¹ Mbiti further elaborates:

In many African myths it is told that at one time in the distant past, the heavens (sky) and the earth were united as one. This union is pictured as being like the place where the earth and sky seem to touch each other at the end of the horizon. Other myths say that the union was formed by a ladder or rope between the two. These accounts go on to say how the separation took place. According to some, animals bit the leather rope into two, so that one part went up to the sky and the other fell to the ground, thus severing the heavens from the earth. Some myths say that it was through man’s fault or error that the two parts of the universe were divided up. These are simply attempts to explain the fact that the universe is divided into two parts, as it appears to be to the ordinary person, and also to explain the fact that God and man are separated.⁶²

As described above the African view is that creation is both visible and invisible, and unending. This perception entails that since the universe was created by God it is dependent on him for its stability. God is the sustainer, the keeper and upholder of creation.

Humanity at the Centre of Creation

In many African myths of creation, humans put themselves at the centre of creation. Since humans consider themselves at the centre of creation, they consequently see it as meant for their exploitation to exist. It is as if the whole world exists for humankind’s sake. Meaning that African peoples seek the usefulness (or otherwise) of creation to humanity: what it can do for human beings, and how they can use it for their own good. This mindset towards creation is deep-rooted in African peoples.

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

As far as ATR is concerned, the principal point of contact with the biblical narrative of creation is on the loftiness of the Creator. Almost every culture on the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid, p. 33-34.

African continent acknowledges that the Creator of the universe is the only Supreme Being worthy of worship. The African clearly gets the message of general revelation that a greater Being than human beings is responsible for the creation and sustenance of the universe. It is, therefore, from this point of contact with the African worldview that the gospel can be presented by introducing the need for special revelation in Scripture and the person of our LORD Jesus Christ.

Although there is unanimity on the existence of the Creator as the Supreme being in most ATR, there is a plethora of views on how to approach him for favour or appease him in the face of calamitous experiences. The answer in many African cultures is the introduction of spiritual mediators—most often in the form of ancestors or some other spirit. It is at this point where either ancestral mediation or contact with the spirit world can become a barrier to gospel work. The expression of the absolute sovereignty of God and the understanding that God, alone, establishes the manner of mediation is one way to begin to bridge this barrier. A second barrier is the place and role of humanity in creation. While the biblical narrative has a high view of humanity in the creation narrative, God is clearly the centre of all creation. This reality must be communicated clearly.

Prosperity Gospel/Neo-Pentecostalism

Whereas the Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel movement do not deviate in terms of the content of creation narrative, there is significant difference in application and implications in the creation account. To begin with, it will be helpful to clearly understand the difference between Classical Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals as being discussed in this work. Matthew A. Ojo makes a useful distinction between the two types of Pentecostalism when he writes,

Pentecostals are those Christians who believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a definite experience after conversion, either accompanied with speaking in tongues or not, and who belong to the classical Pentecostal churches where these beliefs have been institutionalized. On the other hand, Charismatics, or Neo-Pentecostals, also accept the beliefs of baptism of the Holy Spirit with or without speaking in tongues as private experiences, but many

have their membership in mainline Protestant churches, or from the 1990s in the independent Charismatic churches.⁶³

Matthew A. Ojo, in his *History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa*, further notes that several Baptist churches in West Africa since the 1990s have embraced Neo-Pentecostal teachings and practices despite these expressions of faith and practice being “syncretistic variations of classical Pentecostal teachings and worldviews of African Traditional Religion. Responses to this challenge of Neo-Pentecostal emphases have been varied, but generally concerns have been expressed on how to uphold evangelical faith in this contemporary era.”⁶⁴ In this section therefore, we will look at some of the variant application and implications of the biblical account of creation by Neo-Pentecostalism.

Characteristics of Neo-Pentecostalism

Before we sketch the application and implications of creation in Neo-Pentecostalism, we must observe that although Neo-Pentecostal organizations in Africa boast of their wide variety, seven essential characteristics are identifiable among them.⁶⁵ First, they have a large membership, mainly comprising of educated young adults who are upwardly mobile and fluent in the English language (or French in the Francophone countries). Second, they are predominantly an urban phenomenon and a middle-class religion. Third, they promote a religion that is market-oriented, success-driven. Fourth, despite their modern outlook, they are immersed in primal worldviews which have been flexible to adapt existential questions about life, whether in its traditional beliefs or in its modern perspectives. Fifth, the administrative structures are hierarchical and centralized. It is not unusual to find authoritarian rule vested in their founders or leaders. Sixth, in the 1990s some political leaders associated themselves with Neo-Pentecostals to gain political advantage. A good example was the President of Zambia, Fredrick Chiluba, who tried to use the platform of Neo-Pentecostal Christianity to perpetuate his stay in political power beyond the period mandated by the country’s constitution. Seventh, and lastly, they have a contemporary and

⁶³ Matthews A. Ojo. “History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa.” In Philip W. Barnes et al. 2021. *Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁴ Matthew A. Ojo, “History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa,” p. 24.

⁶⁵ Matthew A. Ojo, pp. 24-27. For a more complete discussion of neo-Pentecostalism, the introductory volume to the Africa Theology Series will be a helpful resource.

media savvy approach to ministry propagate their faith and achieve a phenomenally large membership.

Application and Implications

Whereas Neo-Pentecostals do not deviate from the content of the creation account in Genesis 1-2, they posit some unbiblical interpretation issues which need to be highlighted. First, Neo-Pentecostals conclude that because God created the universe by the spoken word, God gave the Christian ‘power to speak things into being.’ They maintain that a Spirit-filled Christian has the ability, like the Creator, to speak into existence what they want. For example, Regina M. Baldwin in her online article titled *What does it Mean to Decree and Declare?* writes, “Decrees are used to fulfil Matthew 6:10 ‘Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth, as it is in heaven’. *Decrees cause truths from the Word and the heavenly realm to be manifested in our earthly realm*”⁶⁶ (emphasis mine). Baldwin continues to argue and concludes, “We see when we decree we:

- Speak God’s blessings upon our lives
- Institute the very will and purposes of God
- Separate and destroy the plans of the enemy
- Impose a judgment the enemy cannot oppose.”⁶⁷

Therefore, Neo-Pentecostals believe that Christians can use the terms “decree and declare” for their prayers to be more effectual. And the “declare” admonition means “‘make known’ or ‘to set forth an accounting’”⁶⁸

The second erroneous application of the creation narrative by Neo-Pentecostals is in the application of the mandate given to the first human couple in Genesis 1:28: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.’” Neo-Pentecostals use this text in support of their teaching on prosperity. They argue that the words *And God blessed them* means that Christians are intended to be materially rich in earthly possessions in the same way as Abraham was blessed and

⁶⁶ Regina M. Baldwin. What Does Decree and Declare Mean? Available at: <https://www.biblicalinterventions.com/single-post/2016/11/15/what-does-decree-declare-mean>, 26 Aug 2021.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

therefore rich. So, according to Prosperity Gospel proponents, when a Christian has financial difficulties then they are not experiencing the blessing of God.

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

As for bridges and barriers to understanding the message of the Gospel for Neo-Pentecostals, the first bridge is the fact that they approach the creation account in a literal sense and hold that God is the Creator of the universe. Second, they have a high view of the Bible as God's authoritative word in matters of faith and practice, despite their faulty and inadequate interpretation approaches to Scripture. Third, they rightly interpret and apply the image of God concept in Genesis 1 to personal holiness ethic.

The barriers to ministry to Neo-Pentecostals found in the application of the Creation narrative are significant and will need to be addressed. First, their zeal for a literal interpretation of Scripture causes them to apply literal phrases without attempting to understand the original meaning in its context. As consequence, Neo-Pentecostalism does not see the need for, and importance of, faithful exegesis and application of Scripture and usually want to make the Bible say what they want to hear. It becomes critical, then, to use the Bible as a reference for the entire context when engaging in conversations around Scripture and scriptural promises. Second, Neo-Pentecostals are reluctant to interrogate traditional worldviews (beliefs) when making application of God's Word to the local context. Conversation, then, must include the application of Scripture to traditional practices and beliefs.

Islam

The creation story in Islam is not found in just one passage in the Qur'an as in the Old Testament (Genesis 1-2). The creation account is addeuceable from several passages in the Qur'an. The Qur'an says that, at the beginning, Allah created everything that exists and sustains everything, "God is the Creator of all things and He is the Guardian over all things" (Qur'an 39:62).⁶⁹ Schirmmacher writes that, "Apart from frequent and general observation that God created heaven and earth and mankind, the Koran [sic] does not contain any detailed report of the creation as in the Old Testament, except in Surah 41:9-13, which

⁶⁹ Imam Mufti 2016. The Story of Creation. *The Religion of Islam*. Available: https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/11041/story-of-creation-part-1/#_ftn29920 30 Jun. 21.

describe the creation as having been completed in six days.⁷⁰ The Qur'an says that Allah created heaven and earth in two days, out of a forming mass; then he set mountains, rivers, and plants on the earth. Out of water he then made the various animals and created man to rule over them. Nowhere in the Qur'an, however, is the understanding that Allah created man "in his image", as emphasised in the Old Testament (Genesis 1:27). In Islam this idea would be irreconcilable with the greatness and uniqueness of Allah, who cannot in any way be compared with mankind. Furthermore, Surah 40:57 describes the creation of heaven and earth as a 'great wonder' rather than the creation of human beings. As noted above, Genesis 1-2 describes the creation of humanity as the climax of the narrative.

The Qur'an assents with the biblical account of creation that the whole of mankind is descended from one pair of human beings (6:98). It also notes that Adam was formed from a lump of clay. Allah spoke, 'Be!' (Arabic: "*Kun*"), and Adam was created (3:59). Islam also holds that the creative word of Allah causes things to happen: "When he has decided something, he only has to say 'Be!' and it happens."

Islam teaches that after the completion of creation, Allah ascended an angel-borne throne in the seventh heaven, and from there he rules the eternal realms. In the lower heavens are the moon, sun, and stars. In the lowest level of the heavens, a watcher stands guard to prevent the evil spirits from eavesdropping on the angels' council (37:1-9). The Qur'an also teaches that Allah has created the sequence of the day and night. The sun and the moon give light in the day and at night, and, by their regular courses, they give mankind the means of measuring time (10:5). Islam teaches that Allah supports the heavens, which have no pillars, so that they do not fall onto the earth (22:65). The Qur'an emphasises that Allah was not tired after the creation and did not rest, as did the God of the Bible: "We created the heavens and the earth, and everything in between in six days, but no tiredness came over us" (50:38). In short, the Qur'an posits that Allah does not suffer tiredness and does not require sleep. Consequently, Allah does not require Muslims to hold a Sabbath, and so, up to date, there is no official weekly day of rest in the Islamic world, although Friday has a special status. In some countries, however, Sunday has been accepted as a day of rest because of earlier European colonization.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Christine Schirrmacher 2008. *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings: The Role of Jesus, Sin and Forgiveness*. World Evangelical Alliance: Bonn, p. 29.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* pp. 29-30.

Islam posits that Allah put human beings on the earth as ‘followers’ or ‘representatives’ (Arabic: *khalifa*) and has entrusted them with worldly possessions for the short span of life, giving them authority over creation, allowing them to flourish, but requiring an account from them at the end of their life for the way in which they have managed these things and for whether they have recognised Him as the giver of all earthly goods. The Qur’an teaches that it is Allah’s will that there should be the rich as well as the poor in the world and that both the rich and the poor recognize Allah as the creator and giver. The Qur’an holds that Allah tests everyone, by the circumstances of their life (see, examples 6:245) to see how they conduct themselves. It says that Allah’s provision is a sign for mankind by which they can identify Allah as the creator. “It is he, who allows rain to fall out of the clouds... in this is a sign for those who can receive instruction.... Maybe you would learn gratitude” (16:10-14).⁷²

Adam and His Wife in the Beginning

The Qur’an has an account of Adam being in Paradise although its precise location is unknown. Again, it is true that Adam plays a vital role in the Qur’an and is even named as one of the greatest prophets of Islam, together with Noah, the family of Abraham (Ibrahim) and ‘Imran he belongs to those who have been chosen by Allah “above all people of the whole world” (surah 3:33). The Qur’an rightly designates Adam as the ancestor of mankind (4:1). It says that Allah formed him out of dust and clay (15:26) and gave him “spirit... [36] hearing... seeing and hearts to understand” (32:9). Notably, if the Qur’an says that Allah gave ‘spirit’ to Adam, according to Qur’an and Islamic commentators, it does not mean that he breathed his spirit into humankind as the Old Testament teaches (Genesis 2:7). The act of Allah is breathing into Adam is only an illustration of the fact that Allah gave life to human beings.⁷³

While the Qur’an does not teach that the first human beings were created in the image of God as stated in Genesis 1: 26-27, Islamic theology holds that the first humans were created only a little lower than Allah himself, as Psalm 8:5-7 says. Allah can never be compared with mankind who is merely his creatures and servants. The Qur’an is unflinching that Allah is hidden from mankind and can never be compared to humankind in any aspect.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Christine Schirrmacher 2008. *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings: The Role of Jesus Christ, Sin and Forgiveness*. World Evangelical Alliance: Bonn pp. 36-37.

Contrary to Genesis 2:19, Allah in the Qur'an does not ask Adam to give names the animals. The Qur'an instead teaches that Allah taught Adam the names of the animals. Allah later asked the angels what names had been given to the animals. The angels did not know but responded: "Praise be unto thee, we have no knowledge, but you teach us, for you are knowing and wise" (surah 2:32). Adam is asked to tell the angels the names of the animals. In Islam, this event evidences the pre-eminence of Adam above the angels. This Qur'anic story gives the impression that the focus of interest lies on the question of who is in a position of power to command and who must submit. Finally in this Qur'anic account, Allah orders the angels to bow down before Adam. All angels obeyed Allah's command except *Iblis* (Qur'anic word for 'Satan'). Satan disobeys Allah because of his pride (surah 2:34). In this way the first sin entered the universe and will be further explained in the following chapter.⁷⁴

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

Matthew Bennett helpfully writes, "I want Christians everywhere to see the Great Commission opportunity presented by our Muslim neighbours rather than viewing them as a threat. So, I am sympathetic to those who call Christians to 'cross bridges to Islam' by highlighting similarities between Islam and Christianity."⁷⁵ The similarities of teaching offer the opportunity of building bridges of evangelism to Muslims. As Bennett explains, "bridges to Islam can often be constructed by highlighting superficial similarities. Inspecting those bridges carefully will enable us to have more meaningful conversations with our Muslim friends and help us present the good news of Jesus in ways that are not just understandable but also faithful to Scripture."⁷⁶ Bennett further counsels that caution be taken when Christians focus on the commonalities without carefully inspecting the bridges they are attempting to cross from a Scriptural standpoint. A great example of this approach is found within the topic of Creation. On the surface, a bridge seems to exist in that both the Christian and the Muslim understand God, alone, to be the sole author of creation. Creation does bear testimony to the authority and power of God for both the Christian and the Muslim.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 37.

⁷⁵ Matthew Bennett August 6, 2019. Inspecting the Bridges We Use to Evangelize Muslims. *IMB*. Available at: <https://www.imb.org/2019/08/06/inspecting-the-bridges-we-use-to-evangelize-muslims/> 29 July 2021.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Creation can, nevertheless, become a barrier to communication if one does not understand the significant differences and thus, ‘talking past each other.’ In this manner, unrecognised differences become barriers to understanding as Rick Brown notes.⁷⁷ Consider the following four potential barriers due to misunderstandings around the doctrine of Creation—a topic which seems to be one of unity—adapted from Rick Brown’s⁷⁸ discussion of barriers (and differences) between Islam and Christianity emanating from creation accounts. The first barrier to Muslim evangelism we would note is the Islamic belief that Allah created all things through knowledge. The biblical counter position is that God created all things through His Word, who is Jesus Christ. The second barrier to Muslim evangelism is encountered in the Islamic teaching that the garden of Eden was probably not on earth. In Islam the Garden of Eden is the same as paradise. The Bible however teaches that the garden of Eden was on earth, and it is not identical to paradise. A third barrier is in the Islamic teaching that a man may marry four wives and have slave concubines. Whereas the biblical position is that one husband and one wife should become like one flesh, clearly proscribing polygamy. A fourth barrier is the Islamic teaching that although men and women are said to be equal before Allah, women have different responsibilities towards Allah. In fact, women are said to be deficient in intelligence, piety, gratitude, and reliability. Furthermore, in Islam, compensation for a woman’s life is half that of a man’s life.

For the Christian, then, the creation story can very well become a starting point to enter into a conversation about God with the Muslim—much as Paul used creation with the Greek philosophers in Athens in Acts 17. Like Paul, however, the Christian needs to move from the beginning understanding of a creator God to the more specific revelation of God in Jesus. This move can involve an understanding of the significance of God as creator—the implications of God’s nature and character—that lend themselves to an expectation of God’s engagement with humanity. A more stable bridge to get to the good news of Jesus.

CONCLUSION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CREATION

The significance of the creation narrative moves so far beyond the first chapters of Genesis. In truth, the creation narrative truly establishes the exposition for

⁷⁷ Rick Brown 2006. Muslim Worldviews and the Bible: Bridges and Barriers. Part I: God and Mankind. International Journal of Frontier Missions.23:1 Spring 2006. PDF available: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Muslim+Worldviews+and+the+Bible%3A+Baridges+and+Barriers+Part+I> 31 Jul. 21.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the rest of the biblical narrative. In the creation narrative, one glimpses God's perfect design which is not only contrasted with the reality of brokenness following the fall of humanity, but also provides a type of the promised consummation of faith. Similarly, Rodgers highlights the significance of understanding the importance of creation:

...almost every ethical question in life can be answered by scripture when it is framed in the context of the creation narrative... A robust creation theology gives us the framework by which we can easily answer all of the things that modern man wants to pervert. Conversely, I think that the Darwinian bent of many is what leads to the pre-eminence of man and by default a "whatever I want to do is right for me because I am the centre of everything" mentality. More than ever, I am convinced that Biblical theology grounded in the creation narrative is the key to unlock many of the tougher issues. In short, we can see what God desires for us today by his design for everything in the beginning when it was all "good".⁷⁹

The understanding that the narrative is not simply giving one a picture of the idyllic; rather, a theological assertion is being made by declaring God's intention in creation and God's judgement on what is to be deemed "good." As noted in the previous section, multiple themes that can be traced throughout the biblical narrative have their "genesis" in the creation narrative. Creation provides the necessary foundation.

Of great importance for the follower of Jesus is the allowance of a robust creation theology to impact one's hermeneutical approach and insight into both the biblical narrative and ethical issues of the day. A proactive approach to engaging current issues is to view them against God's creative activity. For example, in considering the sanctity of human life, one can readily appeal to the teaching of Jesus such as his expansion of the prohibition on murder found in Matthew 5; however, the true starting point should be the creation narrative. In the creation narrative, the unique position of humanity among creation is described, as well as humanity's unique role in creation and unique relationship with God. Similarly, any discussion of the equality of the value of women and

⁷⁹ Kevin Rodgers, Unpublished e-mail correspondence on the importance of Creation. Accessed 31 May 2021.

men should rightly begin with God's declaration of male and female being created in the image of God. One can move through recent issues such as the redefinition of marriage, the nature of gender, stewardship of creation, social injustice, and racial inequality and find a proactive stance in the creation narratives: the covenant of marriage is first defined; male and female are established as image bearers; humanity (the man and the woman) are to care for the created order as God's stewards; woman and man experience both the expectation of obedience to God and the hope complete providential care without lack for anyone; the reality of a single human race before God without division or hierarchy. One could and should continue to examine pressing issues for the default established by God in creation. A proper biblical theological hermeneutic *must* begin with the creation narrative!

As one comes to understand the incredible image of the creation as designed by God with its implications and promise, the reality of our current brokenness and the truly devastating consequences of the fall of humanity can be grasped more easily. Further, the amazing grace of our rescue is all the sweeter. Finally, the hope of the consummation of our faith in the future has some meaningful point of comparison. Everything finds its genesis in the incredible statement:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

CHAPTER 2

FALL

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹

If God’s perfect design is reflected in the creation story, why is this world so broken? Why is there suffering in the world? What is wrong with the world today? These questions, or similar reflections, frequently surface in discussions on faith and the character of God as people consider the current state of human experience in contrast to the peace-filled harmonious design expressed in the creation narrative. Clearly there is a shift between the first two chapters of Genesis and the remainder of the biblical narrative (and, indeed, human experience). The primary question, then, seems to be “What changed?” or “What went wrong?” While some might suggest the fault lies in God’s design, the reality is that the current state of human experience is directly connected to the activity of the man and woman in the garden. The intentional act of disobedience against the boundaries of God resulted in the state of brokenness. This intentional action, or sin, is often referred to as “the Fall” of *humanity*. This specification is intentional as some scholars note the reality of the fallen state of spiritual beings in terms of the “first sin.”² The implications of this reality are considered later in this chapter. While there may be some ambiguity around the story of the sin of the spiritual beings, the fall of humanity is very clear in the biblical narrative. To understand the significance of fallenness in the biblical metanarrative, one needs to examine the story of the initial sin and disobedience of humanity as recorded in Genesis 3, identify the critical elements of the “Fall”, examine the evidence of fallenness in the larger biblical narrative, and consider how the Fall impacted major themes in the biblical story.

¹ Romans 3:23

² Kevin DeYoung, “Sin” in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, e-version, location 301256.

INITIAL FALL NARRATIVE IN GENESIS

Following the declaration of God’s design of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis, the narrative takes a momentous turn which explains the reason for the current state of brokenness in the world. In Genesis 3:1, the reader is introduced to the tempter in the form of a serpent who engages Eve and Adam with disastrous results, not only for humanity, but also for all of creation. In Genesis 3, three elements around the Fall are revealed: there is (1) an intentional act of disobedience which (2) leads to real consequences and (3) leaves humanity in a place of need.³ One needs to unpack these elements in Genesis 3:1-24.

An Act of Disobedience

The critical centre of the narrative in Genesis 3 is the decision to set aside the boundaries established by God—an intentional decision to disobey God. In Genesis 2:17, God provided some boundaries for Adam’s life in the garden—specifically, the prohibition of eating fruit of one tree—the tree of knowledge of good and evil—and expressed the consequences: “...for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.” The boundary established is clear and a part of the covenantal relationship between God and the man. In Genesis 3:1, the serpent enters the story and is described as “the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made.” The narrative takes a turn as the serpent engages with the woman and calls into question the actions and intentions of God. Note the subtle move to undermine her confidence in God as he begins to question her understanding and to create doubt: “Did God really say...?” (Gen. 3:1b). The woman’s reply indicates that she was, indeed, aware of the prohibition God had established; however, she does add to God’s restrictions in that not only does she state a prohibition on eating, but also on “touching” the fruit (3:3). The tempter immediately contradicts the declaration of God: “No! You will not die...” (3:4). Further, the serpent suggests that God has some ulterior motive, some secret reason for the prohibition on eating the fruit: “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (3:5). Morgan summarizes this initial engagement: “The account begins with a tempter who calls into question God’s truthfulness,

³ In *The Story Guide* training materials (2011), the authors identify these same three key components of the Fall narrative: Disobedience; Ultimate Consequence; and Need, pp. 59-74.

sovereignty, and goodness. The tempter is ‘cunning’ and deflects the woman’s attention from the covenantal relationship God has established.”⁴

The climax of this narrative occurs in verses 6-8. Note the rapid development of this “fatal sequence”⁵: she **saw** the appeal of the fruit that it was “delightful to look at”; she **took** some of the fruit; she **ate** it; she **gave** some to her husband who was with her; and the climactic completion—*he ate*. Lest the reader concludes that the woman was simply distracted by the beauty of the fruit and was hungry, insight into her motive is given in verse 6: not only was it delightful to look at, but also “it was desirable for obtaining wisdom.” These words reveal the truth of the situation—the deception of the serpent was believed. The woman and the man do, indeed, believe that God is hiding something from them and desire to know what they are missing. In their act of disobedience, they are directly challenging the character of God and rejecting his defined covenantal relationship.

Dire Consequences

The intentional actions of the man and woman have devastating and lasting effects. As is often the case with the promise of sin, the real consequence fails to meet the imagined benefits. Wenham notes the action of eating in 3:6, which is the climactic act of sin in the narrative, is placed squarely between “the woman’s inflated expectations in eating (the fruit is good to eat, is a delight to the eyes, and gives insight) and its actual effects: the man’s and woman’s eyes are opened, they know they are nude, and they hide among the trees.”⁶ “The contrast is striking: the forbidden fruit does not deliver what the tempter has promised but brings dark new realities warned about by the good and truthful covenant LORD.”⁷ The Batswana proverb rings true, “Be not deceived by the looks of the berry. The taste is bitter and poisonous.”⁸

⁴ Christopher W. Morgan, *Systematic Theology: Knowing God and the Biblical Story* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020) retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com> June 20, 2020. Pp. 10-11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p. 75 as cited in Morgan, p. 11.

⁷ Morgan, p. 11.

⁸ The literal proverb: Se bone tholwana borethe teng ga yona go a baba. “Obey and Live” in Africa Study Bible (Oasis International, Limited, 2016), p.9.

The narrative provides insight into both immediate consequences and lasting consequences to the sinful disobedience of the man and the woman. The immediate consequence of the “opening of their eyes” is the realization that they are naked. Why is this consequence so important? At the end of chapter 2 following the establishment of the covenantal marriage relationship, the declaration is made that “Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame” (Gen 2:25). The failure to stay within the boundaries established by God has immediate impact on the very perception of humanity as well as their most intimate human relationship—marriage. The recognition of nakedness and the corresponding shame highlights the impact of sin on both the way one sees oneself as well as how one views others. From this point forward, the man and the woman will never be able to see themselves or their partner with the eyes of innocence and without shame and sin entering their perspectives. This reality continues in modern culture as the battle with both self-image as well as the expectations on others—seen in the array of definitions of beauty, bravery, personhood, and so many other aspects of human life and relationship—ravage society. The sin of viewing self and others with shame-filled eyes can be seen in so much of the sexism, racism, and hatred expressed today. The second immediate consequence is the desire to hide from God. As God comes to meet with the man and the woman, they hide, prompting God to call out and invite them to join him. This desire to hide from God, however, is connected to their awareness of their nakedness as Adam explains: “I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid” (Gen 3:10). The awareness of ‘nakedness’ brought with it a baring of the state of their standing before God—they knew they had sinned against God and rightfully fear the consequence.

In addition to this immediate fallout from their actions, the narrative continues with God’s declaration of righteous judgment against the man and the woman. The narrative relates a series of “blaming” by the man and the woman as God confronts them with the reality of their disobedience and highlights their own growing alienation from each other:⁹ the man blames both the woman and more subtly, God, as he declares that “The woman You gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate” (3:12); the woman blames the serpent as she declares that “It was the serpent. He deceived me, and I ate” (3:13b). “This initial act of human rebellion brings divine justice... The conse-

⁹ Morgan, p. 11.

quences of their sin are fitting and devastating.”¹⁰ Ross highlights the unique relationship between the sin and the judgment declared: “They sinned by eating, and so would suffer to eat; she led her husband to sin, and so would be mastered by him; they brought pain into the world by their disobedience, and so would have painful toil in their respective lives.”¹¹ The consequential hardship, pain, sorrow, and grief stands in stark contrast to the radical provision, comfort, and joy of the garden. The climactic judgment comes in the form of their banishment from the garden—and the presence of God as they had previously enjoyed it.

What of God’s declaration that if they eat of the fruit, they would “certainly die”? Morgan provides a helpful perspective: “Upon eating the forbidden fruit, they do not immediately fall over and die from something like cardiac arrest. But they do die. They die spiritually, and their bodies also begin to experience the gradual decay that leads ultimately to their physical deaths (3:19).”¹² The consequences initiated with Adam and Eve impacted all of creation and, ultimately, all humanity: “Most devastating is that these consequences do not only befall Adam and Eve but extend to their descendants as well.”¹³ The reality of the consequence of death is made more and more evident as the biblical narrative progresses.

A Need for Rescue

God’s appearance in the narrative presents a very clear picture that something changed, and humanity is powerless to fix it. One can see the shift as the man and the woman are characterized by doubt and fear rather than peace. They recognize their disobedience has resulted in a life-altering change. Upon hearing God, they run and hide in shame, no longer experiencing delight in the encounter. The incredible garden where God has placed them is no longer the source of joy. “Sin enters the picture and brings disruption and alienation in each human relationship—with God, oneself, one another, and creation.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), p. 148 as cited in Morgan, p. 11.

¹² Morgan, pp. 11-12.

¹³ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Into this new experience, the man and woman can only manage to cover their nakedness with leaves. They have no hope of restoring what was lost. It is God who must begin the process of rescue. God, alone, can address fully the state of existence for humanity. The saving activity of God will be examined in the next chapter; however, one can see the glimpse of hope even in this initial response of God to the disobedience of Adam and Eve—the promise of one who will bring judgment on the serpent and address the consequences of their disobedience (Gen 3:15). Even the rationale for the banishment from the garden of the man and the woman reveals that there is hope. The banishment occurs so the man and the woman will not take of the tree of life and be in their current state forever (3:22-23).

THE IMPACT OF THE FALL EVIDENCED IN THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Before turning one's attention to the wonder of the Rescue of humanity by God, one needs to grasp the significance of the Fall. The reality of this new state of humanity is expressed and developed throughout the biblical narrative. To conserve time, this development of the impact of the fallenness of humanity will be examined in a few specific sections of Scripture: the pre-history narratives of Genesis 4-11; a brief overview of patterns of behaviour of Israel as a nation; and a New Testament examination of this truth found in Romans 1-3.

The Progression and Impact of Sin in Genesis 4-11

The first eleven chapters of the Bible are sometimes referred to as the “Primeval History” as it tells of the universal history of humanity that pre-dates the specific history of people groups such as the history of Israel. These eleven chapters are crucial to understanding the impact of sin as humanity moves from the Garden and encompasses the world. The progression of sin and its consequences are highlighted in these chapters in primarily two focal areas: the genealogies and the three subsequent ‘fall’ narratives—Cain and Abel; Noah; and the Tower of Babel.

The Role of the Genealogies in Genesis 1-11

One may be tempted to skip over the genealogies as seemingly irrelevant; however, in the initial chapters, the passages provide a couple of vital roles. At face

value, they explain how humanity moved from the original couple in the garden to come to populate the nations in Genesis 11. They also illustrate the impact of sin. God had declared to Adam and Eve that sin would result in death. As each genealogical table is given, one notes that the physical lifespan is, indeed, impacted with subsequent generations. In the first tables, one encounters individuals who lived 800 years or more climaxing with Methuselah who lived 969 years (see Genesis 5). Yet even with this amazing longevity, the promise of death is heightened: “Genesis 5 reminds us that God creates humans in his image and blesses them; the chapter offers hope through mention of Enoch and Noah but soberly underlines the domain of death with the refrain ‘then he died’ eight times.”¹⁵ By the final table in this section, 400+ years is the new maximum (see Genesis 11). The final verse of Genesis declares that the hero, Joseph, lived 110 years—and it is presented as a long life.

Three “Fall” Narratives

While Genesis 3 and the story of Adam and Eve is appropriately referred to as the Fall of humanity, Genesis 4-11 includes three narratives that expound upon the continued impact of the Fall and the growth of sin. Each narrative reveals new areas of human life and relationships that have been tainted by the prevalence of sin.

Cain and Abel

The first additional narrative is found in Genesis 4 as sin impacts the family. The immediate consequence of sin which resulted in the man and the woman seeing themselves and others differently now progresses to sinning against another. While the initial Fall narrative highlights the disruption of the relationship between humanity and God, this narrative highlights the impact on family relationships. One encounters the same dimensions of disobedience that bears consequence and leaves the person in need of rescue. The narrative begins as both Abel and Cain are engaged in acts of worship to God—the bringing of offerings. Cain’s reaction to God’s favourable response to Abel’s sacrifice leads to a choice. As Morgan notes: “In 4:7, God warns Cain that sin is ‘crouching at the door’ and that its ‘desire is for [him], but [he] must rule over it.’ Sadly, Cain refuses to heed the advice and kills his brother Abel. Cain is consequently cursed by God, alienated from the ground, and banished from God’s presence (vv.

¹⁵ Ibid.

10-16).¹⁶ The consequences of his disobedience and sin impact both his human relationships, as he is forced to leave, and his livelihood as his work is cursed. Most devastating is that he “went out from the LORD’s presence” (4:16). Once again, a glimpse of hope is seen in that God acts graciously toward Cain and preserves his life and prevents others enacting judgement against Cain—God, alone, has that role.

Noah

Before introducing Noah, Genesis 6 begins with a couple of short passages to set the stage for the account of the calling of Noah and the building of the ark. The first is a declaration by God in 6:3 after witnessing the behaviour of the “sons of God.” God declares: “My Spirit will not remain with mankind forever, because they are corrupt”(6:3). This corruption is explained further: “Genesis 6 clarifies the extension and intensification of sin, which is portrayed as massive, pervasive, continual, and characteristic (vv. 5-11).”¹⁷ In this explanation, one realizes that sin has moved beyond the relationship of humanity to God and the relationships within a family; rather, sin has impacted entire communities so that sin results in more sin until it has become the normal behaviour of communities.

These multiple acts of disobedience and sin once again have consequences. Human relationships have deteriorated, and God is ignored. God brings righteous judgment against the larger human population. Amidst judgment, a glimpse of hope is once again given as God expresses grace to Noah—not only in the preservation of Noah, but also in the offer of covenant blessing: “God graciously establishes a covenant with Noah and appropriately judges humanity with the flood (Genesis 6-9). After the flood, God reemphasizes the creational blessing and mandate and offers a covenant promise (9:1-17).”¹⁸ Noah and his family are offered a role like that of Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, sin will continue to impact this new start.

Tower of Babel

The final narrative in Genesis 1-11 relates the sin of hubris and pride. The community begins to value themselves as equals of God. Their very labour and goals are reminiscent of the serpent’s engagement of Eve to “be like God”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

(Genesis 3:4). While the woman desired to have the knowledge of God, the builders at Babel want to have the perspective of God and a name as famous; thus, they strive to build a tower with its top in the heavens. Ironically, God must “come down” to view this wondrous tower. God responds to the human effort to supplant his name with their own and, once again, judgement follows sin. “God judges proud, self-seeking humans who attempt to make a name for themselves and to multiply their influence rather than serving as God’s image bearers and advancing his name (11:1-9).”¹⁹ One element that is conspicuously absent in this narrative is some word of grace or hope. Instead of a declaration of safety or covenant, this narrative leads to another genealogy. This genealogy, however, leads to Abram. The declaration of grace is found in God’s calling of Abram in Genesis 12.

The Impact of Fallenness in the Narratives of the History of Israel

The history of Israel is developed over the course of the entire Old Testament. Throughout the narratives found in the law, former prophets, latter prophets, and the writings, the reality of sin and the impact of fallenness is a recurring motif.²⁰ As an illustration, three particular portions of these larger narratives will be considered: the people of the Exodus; the period of the Judges; and an overview of the period of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

The Disobedience of the Exodus Generation

The single generation that best models the picture of disobedience and distrust of God is the generation of the Exodus. The children of Israel had been miraculously delivered from slavery by God through his servant, Moses. Not only did this first generation witness the plagues and judgment upon Egypt, but they also witnessed the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and experienced the provision of food and water in the desert. The climax of their experience of deliverance was at Sinai where God established a covenant with the people. In this context,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The separation of the prophets into two categories follows the Hebrew organization of the Old Testament. The former prophets are Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings which are the “prophetic” history of Israel. It is the view of Israel’s history through the lens of God’s promises and warnings in Deuteronomy. More specifically, Israel’s life in the promised land is understood as directly related to the curses and blessings pronounced by God prior to Israel’s crossing of the Jordan in the final speech of Deuteronomy. The latter prophets are Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the twelve “minor” prophets. These are sometimes called the “writing” prophets as well.

God promised to journey with them and to provide for them an amazing home. This generation not only grumbled against God repeatedly but also against God's chosen leaders. Exodus 16:2-3 provides a glimpse of the depth of their self-centered position:

The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!

The Israelites not only dismiss a covenantal relationship with God, but they also voice disdain for the miraculous deliverance from slavery by suggesting that slavery itself was a better life!

The height of their disobedience is seen in Numbers 13-14. God had brought Israel to the brink of the promised land in which they were to settle. The spies were to go into the land to scout the land to see the inhabitants and to confirm the wondrous bounty of the land which God had promised. Upon their return, ten of the twelve spies argued against entering the land even though it was as wondrous as God had promised. Their opposition was a distrust of God's ability to deliver the land—even though he had promised. As a result, the people choose to deny the promise of God and rebel. Once again, disobedience and sin had consequence—in this case, they did not enter the land, but died in the wilderness.

This single generation that saw the incredible activity of God in delivering them from Egypt yet refused to believe God could establish them in the promised land, is considered the greatest example of non-faith in the biblical narrative. To be compared to this generation was the greatest of insults to a person of faith. Psalm 95:8-11 uses this generation as a warning:

Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah in the wilderness where your fathers tested Me; and tried Me, though they had seen what I did. For 40 years I was disgusted with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray; they do not know My ways." So, I swore in my anger, "They will not enter My rest."

In the New Testament book of Hebrews, this same passage is used as a warning and negative example for the disciple of Jesus who has received even greater assurance in the presence of the Holy Spirit and should be even more certain of following Christ boldly (see Hebrews 3-4).

The Cycle of Disobedience in the Book of Judges

The book of Judges opens with the final days of Joshua and the initial actions of the tribes in settling their allotted land. In Joshua, every major alliance in Canaan had been defeated, but each tribe needed to enter and secure their portion. The first chapter of Judges relates a few successes such as Judah and the house of Joseph, but also the failure of most of the tribes. Following the death of Joshua in chapter two, the people of Israel begin to sin against God by engaging in the worship and practice of the people of Canaan who continued to live in the land. Judges 2:11-23 relates a series of actions and events that will become the normal behaviour for Israel:

1. Israel sins against God and follow the worship of others.
2. God hands Israel over to an enemy.
3. The Israelites cry out in their oppression.
4. God raises up a judge.
5. The Judge is used by God to deliver Israel from the power of the enemy.
6. After the death of the Judge, Israel once again sins against God.

In considering the actions of Israel, God declared that the violation of covenant by Israel would have a significant consequence: “The LORD’s anger burned against Israel, and He declared, ‘Because this nation has violated My covenant that I made with their fathers and disobeyed Me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died’” (Judges 2:20-21). Consequently, the tribes of Israel will have to contend with enemies throughout their history. Furthermore, when confronted with other nations, they will consistently move into the cycle of disobedience and sin illustrated above and join in the worship of other peoples’ gods instead of remaining faithful to their covenant with God. The refrain “The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD’s sight...” is repeated twice in chapter three (vs. 7, 12) as the people of Israel quickly fall into this pattern of disobedience. From the first judge, Othniel (3:7-11), to the last

judge, Samson (Judges 13-16), the narrative relates again and again the inability of the tribes of Israel to maintain their covenant relationship with God.

The final chapters of Judges reveal the depth of the depravity of Israel. The chapters open and close with the refrain: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted" (17:6; 21:25) as a means of explaining the growth of sin. As an illustration, consider two critical interconnected stories. The first story found in chapter 17 relates how a man named Micah not only makes an idol from his wealth, builds household shrine, and installs his son as a priest (17:3-5), but he later entices a Levite who had served the clan of Judah to serve as priest of his household shrine. And he concludes that it is a sign of God's blessing that a Levite has become his priest! The arrogance and misunderstanding of God is incredible!

The second story described in chapter 18 relates the trouble of the tribe of Dan, which had not been able to secure their allotted land. As a result, they travel from the southern portion of Canaan to the northern area. On the way, they encounter the home of Micah and his gods and homemade temple. They do not, however, destroy this temple or punish this wayward Levite; they take it for their own and the Levite becomes the priest for the tribe (along with the idols): "So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image that he had made, and it was there as long as the house of God was in Shiloh" (18:31). The depravity of Israel was found in every level of the community.

The Reality of Sin in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

While the behaviour of the people during the period of the judges is excused because of the lack of a king, one finds that the existence of a king does not ensure that the people are faithful to their covenant with God. While the potential of the king to lead the people in worship of God is made evident in the story of David, the reality is that nearly every king led the people away from God and toward idolatry. David establishes the ideal early in his reign. He is called "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22) and God establishes a covenant with David promising an everlasting royal lineage (2 Sam 7:1-14; Psalm 89:28-29). During the latter portion of his reign, even David experiences a moral lapse; however, he continues to seek God. Under David's son, Solomon, the kingdom expands its territory, but the king introduces the worship of false gods and idols from his wives (1 Kings 11:1-11). The result is the end of a unified Israel and the division of the nation into the tribes of the north,

Israel, and Judah in the south. In the history of the divided kingdoms, the impact of fallenness is seen more fully.

The northern kingdom is shorter lived than the southern counterpart, largely due to the immediate and consistent sin of the kings. Jeroboam sets the pattern by establishing the worship of false gods as the new state religion (1 Kings 12:25-33). His motivation was to keep the people from traveling to Jerusalem for worship as he thought it would weaken his rule (12:26-27). He not only made two golden calves, but declared to the nation: “Israel, here is your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (12:28). These idols were set up in two cities in different regions of the nation, Bethel and Dan, for convenience. Further, he built shrines and high places, set up priests, created new festivals, and offered sacrifices on these new altars (12:31-33). This action became known as “the sins of Jeroboam” and plagued the northern nation for the entirety of its existence. The example set by Jeroboam and his sins are mentioned specifically in describing the reigns of at least nine of the kings of Israel²¹ and is included in the summary statement explaining the reason for the destruction of Israel in 2 Kings 17:21-22: “...Then Jeroboam led Israel away from following the LORD and caused them to commit great sin. The Israelites persisted in all the sins that Jeroboam committed and did not turn away from them.” In the entire history of the northern Kingdom of Israel, not a single king followed God or led the people in obedience to the covenant with God. As with previous sin and disobedience, the consistent sinfulness of Israel had consequences as God explains in 2 Kings 17:23: “Finally, the LORD removed Israel from His presence just as He had declared through all His servants the prophets. So, Israel has been exiled to Assyria from their homeland until today.” The result of the generations of sinfulness is the complete destruction of the northern kingdom and the scattering of the people.

The southern kingdom, Judah, fares slightly better. While there are some very good kings—most notably, Josiah and Ezekiah, most of the kings of the south also abandoned their covenant with God and led the people into sin and idolatry. Most notably is King Manasseh whose sin was so pervasive that God declares that he will destroy Jerusalem and Judah and hand over the remnant to their enemies (2 Kings 21:11-15). Even though reform is introduced with King Josiah, much like the pattern of the Judges, once Josiah dies, the people return

²¹ In 1 Kings: Nadab (15:25); Baasha (15:34; 16:5); Omri (25:26); Ahaziah (22:52). In 2 Kings: Joram (3:3); Jehu (10:29); Jehoahaz (13:2); Jehoash (13:11); Jeroboam II (14:25).

to their sinful ways. Because of his covenant with David, God does not destroy Judah in the same manner of the judgment of the northern Kingdom. Rather, Judah is taken into exile for 70 years.

The reality of the pervasiveness of sin and disobedience is demonstrated throughout the history of the Israelites. Despite God's continued activity on their behalf and sending of prophets to bring warning and call to repentance, Israel fails to serve God faithfully reflecting the devastating and lasting impact of the Fall.

The Impact of the Fall and the Universality of Human Sin in Romans 1-3

In the letter to the Romans, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to expound upon the understanding of righteousness that comes by faith (1:16-17). A critical element is the demonstration of the reality of the universal need for a saviour due to the condition of sin in every human. This reality is explained clearly and definitively in the first three chapters of Romans—every person regardless of their starting point has fallen short of the glory of God (3:23) and stands in need of rescue. In the span of these three chapters, three different groups of people are highlighted that cover, essentially, all of humanity.

The first group of people considered in 1:18-31, are those who were not part of large Greco-Roman cities or communities and were not familiar with organized temple; rather, this first group is better characterized as animists. The only revelation they had received was creation (vs. 20). Note that they are held accountable not for the revelation they had not received (the full message of the Gospel), but for the revelation they had received: creation (in which truths of God are evident and can be known, vs 19). Rather than seeking the creator, this group began to elevate creation and made idols to worship. This group deserves the wrath of God (vs. 18) because they were unrighteous in their sin and without excuse (vs. 20). The consequence of the rejection of the God behind creation is that God delivered them over “in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity...” (vs. 24) and “to degrading passions...” (vs. 26), and “to a worthless mind...” (vs. 28). The result is various types of unrighteousness (vv. 29-31).

The second group of people highlighted in 2:1-16 focus on those who had a sense of morality and conscience so that they felt confident in being able to judge what is right and wrong (vv. 1-2). Remarkably, some of the same laws and rules that were developed among the Gentiles do, indeed, reflect God's laws as they “...instinctively do what the law demands...” (vs. 14). Nevertheless, this group cannot claim righteousness as they are not able to keep these laws fully

and they violate the testimony of their own conscience (v. 15). So, while they recognize and seek to observe some law of common good, they ultimately fail, and deserve the judgment of a righteous God. Note, again, they are judged not on the revelation they did not receive, but for the revelation they did receive—the activity of God in the testimony of their conscience as the “work of the law written on their hearts” (vs. 15).

The third group considered in 2:17-29 are the Jewish people. The Jews had received the exact Law of God and had clearly revealed the expectations of covenant with God. Those who believed they could “rest in the law, and boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are superior, being instructed from the law” (vs 17-18). Yet, in truth, no one kept the whole law and they “dishonour God by breaking the law” (vs. 23). Even though the clearest revelation had yet been given, the result is the same: failure to achieve righteousness is due to sin.

In chapter three, the conclusion is now made that “There is no one righteous, not even one.” (3:10) and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). In truth, the same three groups of people can be seen today. The beginning point is irrelevant whether one grew up in an atheistic or agnostic home acknowledging creation without a creator, an animistic society venerating creation over the creator, a “moral” community that stresses the call to “just be a good person”, or in a Christian home hearing the word of God taught. No one lives without sinning and, thus, falls short of the standard of God. No one is righteous, no not one! Everyone stands in need of a Saviour.

The testimony of Scripture is very clear regarding the lasting impact of the Fall and the growth of sin in human history. The world experiences the reality of brokenness. The harmony of creation has been impacted so that human relationships are broken, human stewardship of creation is broken, and human relationship with God is broken. A need exists for God to act. Our God, thankfully, is the God who delivers!

The Fall and Spiritual Beings

While the initial fall of some angelic beings (what some scholars call “the first sin”) is not clearly explained in the biblical narrative, some conclusions can be drawn from the larger biblical narrative, as DeYoung summarizes:

We know very little about the first sin except that it manifested itself in an angelic rebellion. Jude 6 explains that some angels “did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these [the LORD] has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.” 1 Tim 3:6 suggests that the fall of the devil was the result of pride (see Ezek. 28:11-19 for another possible allusion). However it happened, Satan (“the adversary”) fell. It’s important to note that sin originated in the world of spirits, not in the world of human beings. Moreover, it is critical to see that these spirits did not sin by some external power or temptation, but in and by themselves. The devil’s sin came out of the devil’s own self-twisted arrogance and deception (John 8:44).²²

Neither the creation of the angelic beings nor the fall of some of these spiritual beings are explicitly addressed in Scripture; rather, “Scripture seems unconcerned to discuss the matter at length.”²³ One can, however, find some passages that note demonic activity and some insights into nature or hierarchy (although one should acknowledge that the fact that there is no lengthy discussion in Scripture should give some understanding that the role of the demonic pales in comparison to the primary narrative and the work of God).

The Genesis 3 narrative discussed above provides the essential pattern for demonic activity as found throughout the biblical narrative. MacDonald identifies a progression through six demonic strategies found in the account of the fall of humanity:²⁴

First, Satan²⁵ appears...Second, the antagonist corrupted and bent God’s “very good” creation (1:31) to wicked ends. Third, Satan

²² DeYoung, location 301256-301263.

²³ Scott D. MacDonald, *Demonology for the Global Church: A Biblical Approach in a Multicultural Age* (Langham Publishing, 2021). Kindle edition, location 1898.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, location 947-955.

²⁵ The identification of the serpent with Satan requires some work beyond the initial narrative. MacDonald notes Jesus’ statement describing the devil as “liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44) as Jesus “authoritatively referencing the initial and ongoing ‘ministry’ of Satan” which was being emulated by the opponents of Jesus in John 8. MacDonald concludes that “The interpretation is straightforward: Jesus understood that the original deception had its origin in the devil, and the serpent was an instrument of that deception.” (*Ibid.*, location 940-947).

lied where he claimed that Eve would not die (3:4). Fourth, he deceived her by misrepresenting the consequences of disobeying God (3:5)...Fifth, the devil introduced scepticism regarding the intentions of God and his divine commands. Satan stimulated doubt...Sixth, the sum of all Satan's effort was a full-fledged rebellion against the Creator...

In considering the ongoing activity of demons as found in Scripture, one can separate them into general activities and corporate activities. It is important to acknowledge that the demonic is defeated because of the work of Christ, but that truth will be examined in the next chapter. In considering demonic activity, MacDonald has highlighted nine categories that can be gleaned from the biblical texts:²⁶

1. Deception: Deception is the foremost evil of the demonic. Satanic power and falsehood, mislead and obscure the truth. MacDonald reminds the Christian that not all deception is a stark contrast to the word of God; rather, some lies are very subtle as Paul warns Timothy of the danger of false teaching, more precisely, "...deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons..." (1 Tim 4:1-2).
2. Corruption: Here MacDonald speaks specifically of the corruption of human morality with a primary focus on the chapters from Genesis 6 building to the flood.
3. Dominion: MacDonald argues for the connection of supernatural influence over nations based on several biblical texts: the reference of the 'sons of God' in connection to physical boundaries in the song of Moses in Deut. 32:8; the dialogue of the angel Gabriel to the prophet Daniel where Gabriel mentions a conflict with the "prince of Persia" (Dan 10:12-14, 20).
4. False Worship and Occultism: Paul describes the former worship practices of the Galatians as being enslaved to things and forces (Gal 4:8-10). The implication is that the demonic fostered worship and formation of worship practices.

²⁶ MacDonald, chapter 4 (location 893-1375). He does include a 10th category, Defeat, which will be considered in the next chapter.

5. Spiritual Warfare: MacDonald uses the term not for human struggles with temptation or demonic activity which fall under other aspects, but specifically for the “skirmishes between angelic and demonic powers...” He relies on biblical testimony of passages found in Daniel 10 and Revelation 12.
6. Temptation: The exploitation of a person’s desire to sin (1 Cor 7:5).
7. Accusation: The literal translation of devil or Satan is one who slanders or one who accuses. MacDonald highlights the narratives of the first chapters of Job and of the high priest Joshua (Zech. 3:1-2) where Satan’s primary activity was the bringing of accusations.
8. Inhabitation: MacDonald rightly notes that the Bible does not elevate inhabitation to the primary demonic activity and its engagement should not become the chief activity of the church. Nevertheless, such demonization is an obvious type of demonic activity observed in Scripture. MacDonald rightly notes that “... the Bible does not outright portray inhabitation as a threat against the church...” Although some distinction is made for “oppression” over against “possession” when speaking of Christians.
9. Affliction: MacDonald uses this term for the more ambiguous activity of causing strife or harm such as is found in the narrative of Job. Sometimes, the term is applied to physical illness in which the idea of inhabitation is not present (Luke 13:11-13).

This brief survey provides a good picture of the scope of malevolent demonic activity described in the larger biblical narrative. MacDonald also considers activity beyond the individual—the corporate influence of demons. He identified four primary areas of influence or attack: the breakdown of families; the creation of false religions; corruption and false teachings in the Church; and impact in politics.²⁷

²⁷ Ibid., chapter 7, location 2038-2234.

THE IMPACT OF THE FALL REFLECTED IN OTHER BIBLICAL THEMES

As with the Creation narrative, the reality of the Fall is seen in the development of most major biblical themes and motifs. As a means of illustrating this truth, the four biblical themes introduced in the previous chapter will be considered reflecting on the impact of the Fall: Tabernacle/Temple and the Presence of God; Kingdom of God; Image of God and Humanity; and Covenant.

Tabernacle/Temple

In the creation narrative, no “Temple” existed, yet the radical engagement with the presence of God was highlighted as God “walked” with the man and the woman in the Garden. The deepest grief from the Fall is the loss of this radical relationship with God. Adam and Eve are not only removed from the Garden, but they also no longer stroll with God in the same manner. This reality is not to suggest that God has abandoned humanity;²⁸ rather, God engages with individuals. For example, in the book of Genesis alone one observes that God confronts Cain (4:6ff), walks in close fellowship with Enoch (5:23-24), speaks with Noah (6:13ff) and Abram (12:1ff), and sends dreams to Jacob (28:10-22) and Joseph (37:5-7, 9).

Following the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, God gathers the Israelites around Mount Sinai in preparation for his appearance. In contrast to the image of Adam and Eve walking in the Garden with God, God establishes a perimeter around the mountain and forbids anyone—even an animal—from approaching the mountain. Further, the entire people must spend two days in preparation for God’s appearance on the third day (Ex. 19:10ff). The holiness of God is demonstrated and displayed as his presence overwhelms the mountain (Ex. 19:16-20). After accepting the covenant with God, the sinfulness of the people, however, is also on display in that while Moses was meeting with God again, the Israelites made for themselves an idol in the form of a golden calf patterned after the idols they experienced in Egypt

²⁸ One African proverb says, “It is the wayward child who goes to sleep on an empty stomach.” “The child who disobeys the instructions of parents and elders will most likely fall out of favour with those who feed him.” (“God Never Disowns His Children” in *Africa Study Bible*, p. 10). The consequences of disobedience and fallenness are real but should not be seen as God’s lack of compassion or concern.

(Ex. 32). The Israelites continue to fall into unhealthy patterns of ignoring God in favour of their own preferences—much as Adam and Eve in the Garden.

Unfortunately, this pattern of disobedience and sin consistently impacts Israel in their worship, whether in the Tabernacle or the Temple. Shortly after the Israelites had built the Tabernacle according to God's specifications, God gave instructions for corporate worship and actions within the Tabernacle. These instructions included very specific instructions for the Levites who would be conducting the activities in the Tabernacle (see Lev. 1-7). Following the instructions, the priests are ordained (Lev. 8) and the ministry of the priests in the Tabernacle begins (Lev. 9). Almost immediately, the sons of Aaron decide to disobey the instructions of God regarding the use of incense in the Tabernacle (Lev. 10:1)! Their disobedience and disregard for God's boundaries result in their deaths (vs. 2). The pattern of misuse continues with the Temple. As the people of Judah began to see the Temple as the source of security (thinking that God would not bring judgment on Jerusalem if his Temple was there), they began to abuse the sacrificial system. Such abuse is highlighted by the prophets who denounce sacrifice without obedience (see 1 Sam 15:22; Jer. 7:21ff) and blemished offerings brought to God (see Mal. 1:7-14). Considering the sin and disobedience of the people, Ezekiel has a vision of the presence of God exiting the Temple and Jerusalem (Ezekiel 10), and the people are unaware! The presence of the Temple was not their protection; rather, it was the presence of God (Ez. 11:1-13). The two are not the same! In the New Testament, the gospels reflect a similar picture as the Temple is juxtaposed with a fig tree that does not bear fruit in Mark 11:12-25. The inability of humanity to engage the presence of God consistently and faithfully throughout the biblical narrative reveals the need for a new Temple. Jesus words in John 2 come to mind as he promised that if the temple was destroyed, he would rebuild it in three days—a clear allusion to his death and resurrection and his own body as the true Temple (John 2:21).

The Fall and the Kingdom of God

In the survey above of the history of the Israelites, both during the period of the judges as well as the period of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the reality of the shortcomings of any human kingdom is very clear. Indeed, the temptation to equate any human kingdom to the kingdom of God fails! The narrative of Samuel perfectly highlights the tension that exists between Israel and the kingdom/people of God. In the waning days of Samuel and considering the

sinfulness of the sons of Samuel (1 Sam 8:1-3), the people cry out for a king like other nations. They feel that they are less as a nation. Samuel is indignant and considers their demand sinful (8:6) and inquires of God who rightly defines their request: “But the LORD told him [Samuel], ‘Listen to the people and everything they say to you. They have not rejected you; they have rejected Me as their king. They are doing the same thing to you that they have done to Me, since the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, abandoning Me and worshipping other gods.’” (1 Sam 8:7-8). Interestingly, God compares their desire to be ruled by a king to seeking other gods. Not that the king would be an object of worship directly; rather, the people are declaring that they should be able to determine what form the kingdom of God’s people should take. Once again, the sin of Adam and Eve is reflected in these actions of the elders of Israel. They reject God’s boundaries and design as undesirable—they want to determine the “right and wrong” of their existence as a nation. God will instruct Samuel to warn the people that a human king can have negative results so that they will understand—not that they will listen. One is reminded of the story of the mythic bird, the Sandrophia, told by the Akan people of West Africa: anyone coming close to the bird experiences misery, yet moving away from the bird distances a person from happiness.²⁹ So, the people align themselves with a king and are either led in their covenant with God (as with David, Josiah, and Hezekiah) or are led to sin against God (as with most of the other kings).

The Kingdom of God, then, was never to be seen as the equivalent to the nation of Israel. The impact of sin and the Fall is seen in this distorted understanding of being God’s people. On the one hand, a false sense of security, superiority, and pride because of God’s mercy to their ancestors; on the other hand, a false assumption that God had no concern of other nations or peoples. Throughout the period of the kings, God used prophets to provide guidance and direction. This also included some understanding of the Kingdom of God. The idea that other nations would be a part of this kingdom is found in several prophets, such as Isaiah.

In the New Testament, the Kingdom of God moves to the front in several books, but most emphatically in the Gospel of Matthew. Not only is the opening genealogy of Jesus centred around David, but a number of Jesus’ teachings on the nature of the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven are present. The fallen

²⁹ “Sandrophia” in *Africa Study Bible*, p. 391.

perspective of the kingdom of God in nationalistic ethnic terms is rejected. Such a narrow understanding is a direct result of human sin and needs to be redeemed.

The Impact of the Fall on the Image of God in Humanity

As mentioned above, an immediate consequence of the disobedience of the man and the woman was their perception of themselves, others, and God. The disobedience did not “uncreate” them in that they were no longer created in the image of God; rather, the image became marred and distorted. This reality is played out in several ways. First, a lack of recognition of the value of the personhood of others. Almost immediately, the biblical narrative reveals a false perspective of others. Not only does Cain kill his brother, but violence and injustice becomes the normal behaviour. Further, the view of self is changed so that oneself establishes truth and value. This reality is highlighted above in the narrative of Judges in which “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” An effect of brokenness is the magnifying of self. Over and again, this brokenness is illustrated, even in many people who are godly examples for much of their lives (see David). In the book of Romans, the reality of the struggle with brokenness and its impact on the image of God in humanity is well illustrated in chapters 6-7 in which the struggle with our sinful nature is explained. One should note, however, that as humanity is created in the image of God, even though the image is broken and tarnished by sin, the image remains. John Calvin likened this reality to “ruined statues on which we can still trace the outlines of their former glory.”³⁰ The stamp of God’s image on fallen humanity can be in the ability to care, make moral choices, and create.³¹ “Our conscience or ‘moral compass’ is a vestige of that original state. Whenever someone writes a law, recoils from evil, praises good behaviour, or feels guilty, he is confirming the fact that we are made in God’s own image.”³² The need for a redemption of humanity to restore us to a fulness of what God intended when he created humanity in his image is evident!

The Implications of the Fall and Covenant

A final theme for consideration is that of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity. In creation, God established a unique relationship with hu-

³⁰ As cited in *The Story*, p. 124.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

³² Got Questions Ministries, “What Does it Mean that Man is Made in the Image of God?” <http://www.gotquestions.org/image-of-God.html> as cited in *The Story*, p. 126.

manity. In the previous chapter, Hafemann's illustration of the "past-present-future" dynamic of grace experience in covenant was highlighted with God's unconditional acts of providence leading to covenantal stipulations which lead to covenant blessing or curses.³³ In considering the implications of the Fall and the continued sinfulness of humanity for covenant and covenantal relationships, Hafemann's three-fold elements are helpful to highlight the consequences. While God's unconditional acts of providence and care continue—and are illustrated repeatedly throughout the biblical narrative, sin is seen in the inability of humanity to maintain the stipulations of covenant so that the consequences of breaking covenant with God are encountered repeatedly. In other words, both the present dynamic of being in covenant and the future dynamic of acts of judgment for breaking covenant are illustrated repeatedly in the biblical narrative. As mentioned above, the generation of Israelites delivered from the Exodus could not maintain covenant even for a few days! Similarly, the nations of Israel and Judah both experience destruction at the hands of foreign powers due to the sin of the kings and the people.

What, then, are the implications of this repeated inability of humanity to maintain a covenant relationship? God provides an answer to the prophet Jeremiah—there needs to be a new type of covenant. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, God declares the need for a covenant that can be placed upon the hearts of his people. A radically new form of covenant—not because God has been at fault in the establishment of covenants, but because of the unfaithfulness of the people of God. God borrows the images of marriage as an illustration of this need for something different: "This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant they broke even though I had married them" (31:32). The implication of the Fall on covenant is then seen most clearly in the need for a new type of covenant. This reality will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. There is a need for Rescue!

The Impact of the Fall on the Covenant of Marriage

As mentioned above, an immediate consequence of the Fall was the impact on how the man and the woman saw each other and themselves—they recognized their nakedness and experienced shame. This fundamental shift impacted not

³³ See the section on "Covenant and Creation" in chapter two above. See also, Scott J. Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, Ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2007), p.35.

only their relationship with God, but their relationship with one another as well. Moving through the biblical narrative, the image of marriage does not always match the declaration of God in Genesis 2 and the expectation of the joining of man and woman in a new relationship. Rather, as the narrative unfolds, one encounters stories of rape, violence, and abuse. God establishes five explicit boundaries for sexual expression with prohibitions against adultery (Ex. 20:14), sexual activity outside of marriage (1 Cor. 6:13, 18-20; 7:2, 9), incest (Lev. 18:6-18), same sex encounters (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10), and sexual encounters with animals (Lev. 18:23). Nevertheless, one sees the growing impact of sin. This reality is particularly highlighted in the failure of the kings of Israel so that even David, who was a man after God's own heart, fails to avoid sexual temptation and commits adultery followed up with murder. Solomon is led astray by his multitude of wives who desired to worship false gods.

Consider Jesus' engagement with the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3-12. The Pharisees seek to test Jesus around the issue of divorce and marriage by asking about the right to have a divorce on any grounds. Jesus initially replies by restating the declaration of God from Genesis 2 as the ideal created by God: one man and one woman in covenant the whole of their lives. This understanding is expressed well by the Bamiléké of the Cameroon for whom "the word divorce is expressed as *nkhu meye*, which means to run away from one's own blood."³⁴ Concerning allowance for divorce in the Mosaic law, Jesus concludes that it only exists because of the hardness of their hearts. Divorce and the dissolution of marriage is a direct result of the Fall and sin.

BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE FALL AND OTHER WORLDVIEWS

The biblical narrative is not alone in recognizing the state of brokenness that exists in the world. The recognition of suffering and evil often leads to the question of its nature and purpose. Across Africa, competing worldviews seek to provide understanding or significance to the reality of the fallenness of humanity. The four primary worldviews of African Traditional Religion, Islam, Prosperity Gospel, and Roman Catholicism as found in Africa will, again, be considered.

³⁴ "An Indivisible Union," in *Africa Study Bible*, p. 1410.

African Traditional Religion (ATR)

In the previous chapter, the understanding that most ATRs relate a belief in a creator god was expressed. Further, most African cultures express an understanding of an initially benevolent relationship, as Mbiti notes, “From many a story we hear that God and [human beings] were in a very close relationship. Some people picture God as living among [human beings] or visiting them from time to time. It was like a family relationship in which God was the parent and the [human beings] were the children.”³⁵ Similarly, multiple stories also exist in various ATRs to explain the current state of sin and suffering in the world which stands in contrast to the initial idyllic state.

While a single uniform account of the fall of humanity does not exist across the many peoples across Africa, some repeated patterns do emerge. A common theme among many people groups is the understanding that human disobedience is at the foundation of the reality of suffering. Some stories are straightforward such as the Baroste belief that their god initially lived among humans and animals, but the relationship was broken when men killed and ate the animals which their god had forbidden them to do as these were men’s brothers. God withdrew himself from the first men.³⁶ Similarly, the Banyarwanda of Rwanda tell a story that explains both the break in relationship with their god and the cause of death entering the world. According to their story, their god ordered all the people to stay indoors so that death, characterized as an animal, would not find a hiding place while he hunted it. An old woman, however, went out to work in her banana plantation. When the fleeing death begged for her protection, she had pity on him and hid the animal under her skirt. When their god saw what had transpired, he punished human beings by permitting them keep death among them.³⁷ These two stories highlight what is often understood as the real tragedy of human disobedience: the loss of a close relationship with their god. Other stories seem to parallel the biblical narrative more closely with both the idea of a forbidden food and a deceiver. Among the Meru of Kenya, a myth says that when their god created the first human being, he gave them food but prohibited them of eating the fruit of one tree. Then a crawling creature (*mugambi*) approached them and deceived them into eating the

³⁵ John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970), p. 171.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

forbidden fruit. “The woman climbed up the tree, picked one fruit, ate it, picked another, and gave it to her husband. At first the man refused to take it, but she threatened to leave him alone. He succumbed and ate it. ‘Having eaten it his throat-apple ... came out. It is since then that man has got a throat-apple.’”³⁸ Similarly, The Chagga story of Tanzania says that their god used to visit the first human beings every morning and evening, to greet them and ask about their welfare. God used to provide his people with bananas, yams, and potatoes. He prohibited them, however, to eat one yam called the *Ula* or *Ukabo*. God warned the Chagga that should they break his commandment, their bones shall break, and they shall finally die. A stranger visited the first human being, deceived him into eating the forbidden Yam, and he disobeyed. Instantly disease broke out among the first human beings.³⁹

In addition to direct disobedience, the Barundi of Burundi tell of the intentional rejection of their god who lived among the first human beings and used to create children for them as a sign of his care for them by meeting their greatest need. One day, however, their god created a crippled child, and its parents were so angry that they threatened their god with a spear or knife. Therefore, he withdrew himself from humans and flew to the skies.⁴⁰

A final explanation used to explain the break in the relationship between humanity and God is invention and human pride. The Yao of Malawi and Mozambique explain that their god in the beginning dwelt on earth with human beings until they learned the art of making fire by friction. A fire they started set

³⁸ Ibid, p175.

³⁹ Ibid, p 172-173. Interestingly, the story continues with a hint of mercy. When their elders prayed to their god for mercy, he answered with the message that when the first human being grew older, he would throw his skin as the snakes do, and grow to be young again. This process of removing the skin was to be done in secret, so that none of the other people would see him in course of rejuvenation. When this time came for casting his skin, he sent away the granddaughter who took care of him, to draw water from the river. While alone in the house, he cast off the skin from half of his body, but before he could remove the rest, the daughter arrived and saw him with half his skin unremoved. Immediately the process ended, and the gift of rejuvenation disappeared forever. The old man wept aloud:

So be it, I have died,
All of you will die,
I have died,
All of you shall die,
For you granddaughter,
Entered while I cast my skin,
Woe is me, woe is you! (Ibid., pp. 174-175).

⁴⁰ Ibid, p 173.

the grasslands ablaze, and their god abandoned them into heaven, leaving the instruction that all human beings must now follow him after their death.⁴¹ The Ashanti of Ghana speak of the arrogance of trying to reach the abode of their god. They believe that a long time ago their god lived in the sky but still close to human beings. A woman, however, kept knocking her long pestle against his home as she was pounding the Ashanti's staple food (*fufu*) which annoyed their god so much that he decided to move up higher away. The woman then instructed her children to build a tower of mortars stacked one on top of each other. The children obliged but when they had used up all their mortars, there remained a short distance to reach their god, about the size of a single mortar. The woman ordered her children to remove the bottom mortar to breach the very last gap. When her children removed the bottom pestle, the whole tower came tumbling down and killed a great number of people. The survivors gave up their attempt to reach their god.⁴²

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

The brief survey provides some of the more common explanations for the reality of sin and suffering in the world as well as the understanding of the cause of a break with God. These stories can help create opportunities for gospel conversations as well as alert the Christian to potential barriers that need to be engaged before gospel conversations can occur.

Bridges to the Gospel

The most apparent point of contact is the universal understanding of the reality of sin and suffering in the world as outside of the initial intention of creation. This belief that the current experience of humanity is not the intended design of God is critical. By starting with the reality of the brokenness of this world, one can more readily move to an explanation of God's original design in the biblical narrative. By contrast, if one starts with creation in this context, the difference of beliefs around the Creator may become a point of disagreement. A second truth that can be explored from the starting point of the brokenness of our current world is the reason for this broken and fallen state. The reality of the experience of suffering of all humanity lends itself to an investigation into

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 172-173.

⁴² Mbiti, p. 171.

the universality of the sin of all humanity. From this point, one can readily move to the proclamation of the Gospel.

Barriers to the Gospel

As mentioned above, the greatest barrier is the multiple understandings of the nature of the Creator. One can get side-tracked into a discussion of “which creation story is correct” or “which Creator is the True God” if not careful. While the identity of God as the Creator will need to be addressed, it is not necessarily the place to start the conversation due to the multiplicity of beliefs across the continent. Rather, start with the agreed reality—the certainty of sin and suffering.

Prosperity Gospel/Neo-Pentecostalism

In as far as the teaching of the Fall of mankind is concerned, Neo-Pentecostalism does not seem to depart from the biblical account as related above. Prosperity gospel preachers, however, tend to attenuate the gravity of the Fall of humankind by saying that mankind’s grand malady is not rooted in their alienation from God through Adam’s disobedience, but powers of evil which must be overcome by one who has access to God’s Presence—the man or woman of God. James N. Amanze, writing on the Resurgence of Christianity in Africa in the 21st Century, makes a helpful observation,

It appears that the new Pentecostal-charismatic churches have a good grasp of the African psyche whose main concern is to overcome the powers of evil, which are considered to be the source of all kinds of diseases, poverty, misfortunes, bad luck, human suffering and ultimately death. Therefore, there appears to be an insatiable need among Africans to have the power that can enable them to manipulate both natural and super-natural powers in order to achieve their objectives in life. Because of this psychological need to manipulate natural and supernatural phenomena to fulfil one’s aspirations, many African people in sub-Saharan Africa are readily attracted and respond positively to the new Pentecostal-charismatic Churches where they are promised abundant health and wealth amidst poverty, diseases, deprivation, suffering and death.

This accounts, to a large extent, for the fast and amazing growth of the Pentecostal-charismatic churches in Africa today.⁴³

Amanze makes a good point regarding the charismatics' faulty emphasis on defeating evil forces, perceived to be the reason behind all suffering, instead of pointing the deeper and greater need of justification through Christ's redemptive work. Neo-Pentecostalism, therefore, does not seem to appreciate the seriousness of the biblical theology of the fall of humankind. The subtle distortion of the biblical Fall in Neo-Pentecostalism/charismatics coheres with a pervasive worldview which does not see the implications of Genesis 3. At best, Neo-Pentecostalism equates wealth and wellbeing with God's blessing and approval in a person's life. "This augur well with the African psyche which looks for miracles in order to be convinced that people are indeed in the presence of God."⁴⁴

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

Bridges to the Gospel

The cardinal point of connection with the Prosperity Gospel worldview is their belief that the Fall narrative in the Bible is a factual one. Adherents of Neo-Pentecostalism have a high view of the Bible and, therefore, do not doubt the historicity of the Fall of humankind as recorded in Genesis 3. For the evangelical believer this provides an important bridge to communicating the gospel as a biblical definition of sin and the need for a saviour provides an excellent starting point of gospel conversation.

Secondly, evangelism fervour is the other point of agreement with Neo-Pentecostals. Neo-Pentecostals have a strong passion for reaching out to non-believers in Christ such that their churches have continued to grow in great numbers in sub-Saharan Africa. However, neo-Pentecostals are moving toward a relaxation of their classical 'holiness doctrine' to an emphasis on the prosperity

⁴³ James N Amanze 2013. *The Role of Prophecy in the growth and Expansion of the Synagogue Church of all Nations*. (2013:1) pp 2-3 Accessed from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-role-of-prophecy-in-the-growth-and-expansion-of-Amanze/463324b2f1ea79136f3b5d1fc6a090341b103c91>, 11th Oct 21.

⁴⁴ Amanze, p 13.

gospel and faith, deliverance, and healing at the expense of the authentic gospel of Christ.⁴⁵

Barriers to the Gospel

The first barrier to Gospel ministry in Neo-Pentecostalism is their leader's disposition to the misinterpretation of the Bible. They often twist the meaning of Scripture to suit their ambitions for financial gain. Elizabeth Mburu, writing on the need to develop balanced leaders among Neo-Pentecostals in Africa, puts it well:

They misdiagnose our greatest needs as physical, financial, and relational rather than spiritual. They empty the gospel of its power by claiming that Christ's death was primarily for our healing and prosperity in this life. They rob God of His glory by obscuring our understanding of sin, the Gospel, and the sufficiency of Christ. Much of this wrong preaching stems from a desire to make the Scriptures fit their theology.⁴⁶

The second barrier in Neo-Pentecostalism is that its leaders demand unquestionable loyalty and therefore any questions on doctrinal issues is seen as rebellion. "Leaders demand unquestioned loyalty, and any opposition is viewed as rebellion against God Himself. Followers may also fall into the trap of sycophancy, afraid to confront the leader for fear of reprisal or loss of benefits."⁴⁷ Therefore, one who may want to present a biblical view on a doctrinal is labelled an opponent of the ministry by both leaders and adherents.

Thirdly, as Neo-Pentecostal theology "fails to interrogate the African culture and worldview resulting in syncretistic and/or heretical teaching,"⁴⁸ it tends to reject any biblical teaching on the assumption that they are being enticed to espouse a form of Christianity without power. Randy Arnett, as cited by Rodgers, opines:

⁴⁵ Olofunke Adeboye 2006. *Pentecostal Challenges in Africa and Latin America: A Comparative Focus on Nigeria and Brazil*. *Afrika Zamani*, Nos. 11 & 12, 2003–2004, p 143. Accessed from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Pentecostal-challenges-in-Africa-and-Latin-America%3A-Adeboye/082d101821f0d89f89273da4c6ee29fb54db32d7>, 11 Oct 2021.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Mburu. "Develop Balanced Leaders." In Barnes PW et al (eds) 2021. *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*. AB316: Nairobi (Kindle edition). p. 236.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 231.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 229.

The lack of critical contextualization stands as one of the most obvious lessons of the process of pentecostalization.... As part of contextualization, the common issues of Traditional Religion deserve recognition and treatment: 1. Spiritual forces and powers 2. Dreams and visions 3. Illness, curses, and afflictions 4. Healing and deliverance 5. Well-being and blessing 6. Spirit-power people. Even though easily overlooked or dismissed, these issues persist and, if left unaddressed, turn people to Neo-Pentecostalism.⁴⁹

It is important, therefore, that due care is taken to listen well to African recipient cultures when communicating biblical truth. “African culture tends to connect readily with Neo-Pentecostal doctrine and expression. In short, they value the text based on culture, experience, and worldview,”⁵⁰ explains Rodgers.

Fourthly, as the acquisition of wealth has become a priority for many in Africa, Neo-Pentecostalism/Prosperity Gospel has become a sought-after expression of Christianity. Furthermore, In Neo-Pentecostal theology, a transactional understanding of a believer’s relationship with the Supreme Being like in African Traditional Religion has become pervasive.

Roman Catholic Church (RCC)

In relation to the understanding of the Fall, Roman Catholicism as expressed in the African context does not differ from the Genesis 3 account, but adds unbiblical concepts, such as the categorization of sin and the theory on the nature of the transmission of sin from Adam to all humans (except Christ and Mary the mother of Jesus). This section will therefore highlight these fundamental differences between Roman Catholicism and biblical Christianity regarding the Fall and the implications of original sin.

Original Sin in Roman Catholicism

Roman Catholic theology holds that “Original Sin is the sin inherited by all humankind from Adam in his disobedience of God’s command not to eat from

⁴⁹ Kevin Rodgers 2021. “Critical contextualization and the Abandoned Gospel.” In Barnes PW et al (eds) 2021. *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*. AB316: Nairobi. (Kindle edition) p. 153.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 160.

the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.”⁵¹ Regarding the nature of original sin, Roman Catholics explain that “Original sin is not a committed sin, but rather a contracted sin.”⁵² Catholics explain that original sin is different from all other sins, which are actions of one’s personal sin. Catholics, in short, believe that “original sin is a state of the soul, representing the fallen nature that was handed on to us by Adam who fell into death upon committing the original sin. It represents the fallen state of humanity in which we find ourselves devoid of the original grace and holiness with which humanity was created (Genesis 1:31).”⁵³

Types of Sin in Roman Catholicism

Whereas Roman Catholicism in a sense accepts the orthodox teaching of original sin, it is puzzling to learn that it also teaches that sin can be categorised into two groups—mortal sins and venial sins. According to Roman Catholic theology, mortal sin (or cardinal sin) is the gravest of sins, indicating an intentional turning away from God and obliterating love in the heart of the sinner. A mortal sin is committed in full knowledge of its gravity and with the complete consent of the sinner’s will. A mortal sin cuts the sinner off from God’s sanctifying grace until it is repented in confession with a priest. If a person dies unrepentant of the commission of mortal sin, it is believed that they descend immediately into hell to suffer the separation from God which they chose in life. The well-known examples of mortal sin in the Roman Catholic Church are breaking the Ten Commandments, suicide, induced abortion, masturbation, rape, and divorce. Furthermore, some mortal sins are deemed so grave that the church punishes them with excommunication. These severe sins include apostasy and the desecration of the elements of the Eucharist.

The second type of sin in Roman Catholic theology are venial sins. Venial sins usually involve a less serious action often committed with less self-knowledge of misconduct. According to Roman Catholic theology, although a venial sin impairs the sinner’s fellowship with God, it is not a premeditated turning away from him and hence does not completely “block the inflow of sanctifying grace.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ About Catholics Website, “Original Sin” *About Catholics: Catholic Beliefs and Catholic Teachings*. Accessed from <https://www.aboutcatholics.com/beliefs/the-original-sin/>, 15 Oct 2021.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Melissa Petruzzello 2018. Mortal sin. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cardinal-sin>, 12 Oct 2021.

Bridges to the Gospel

The Roman Catholic Church now encourages Bible reading among its membership; thus, providing a potential bridge to the evangelization of Roman Catholics. Council documents highlighted the role of the Bible in the pulpit, personal study, and devotional use by the Church's members. Therefore, the Roman Catholic adherent "will not be on the defensive when pointed to the Bible."⁵⁵

The Roman Catholic Church now considers other Christians as "Separated Brethren." The Vatican II described Protestants and others in the greater Christian society as "separated brethren"—not as "heretics."⁵⁶ This change, hence, facilitates meaningful exchange of ideas and personal relationships with Roman Catholics. The change in posture thus provides a useful opportunity for evangelism where there once was a wall, a bridge can be built.

A good number of Roman Catholic believers keep basic religious convictions. "Their beliefs include the conviction that God exists (even though he is remote) and that Jesus is God and Saviour."⁵⁷ Thus, the gulf to be spanned in presenting the gospel to Roman Catholic Christians is not as vast as the one to a secularist or a person from another religious worldview.

Barriers to the Gospel

The Roman Catholics' view of sin and forgiveness present a significant barrier to gospel presentation. As discussed above, Roman Catholics believe that there are two types (levels) of sin—mortal (or cardinal) sins and venial sins. According to Roman Catholic dogma, mortal sins are unforgiveable because they are very serious sins, whereas, venial sins are minor ones that affect one's relationship with God, but are easily forgiven. There is a difference with the biblical teaching of the unpardonable sin or "the sin that leads to death (1 John). The unpardonable sin is the sin Jesus warns against in Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-29, and Luke 12:10. Andy Naselli explains,

⁵⁵ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization 1980. Lausanne Occasional Paper: Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics. Accessed from: <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-10>, 15 Oct 2021.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The unpardonable sin is not an accidental, impulsive, or unguarded slip of the tongue. It is deliberately repudiating the truth about Jesus. God responds to such rebellion by hardening the rebel's heart and not giving that person a desire to repent and believe. The sin is unforgivable because God never enables that person to repent and believe. So, this is a sin that only unbelievers can commit.... This sin can overlap with apostasy. (Apostasy is decisively turning away from the faith. An apostate is a person who once claimed to be a Christian but has irreversibly abandoned and renounced orthodox Christianity.) Since some people who commit the unpardonable sin have never claimed to be Christ-followers, they are not technically apostates.⁵⁸

The Roman Catholic belief on the nature of sin is hence unbiblical and one presenting the gospel must rely on Holy Spirit's work of convicting the person of sin.

The primacy and infallibility of the Pope is another barrier to Roman Catholics' evangelism, as the Bible clearly teaches that all human beings are sinners (Romans 3:10,23; Ps 51:5). Closely related to this barrier are the semantics of the hierarchy. This barrier manifests itself in the use of terminology and in the interpretation of religious authority. The Roman Catholic's understanding of religious terms often varies from the Evangelical's point of view. For example, to the Roman Catholic, "born again" means baptism at birth; "Christian" means member of the Roman Catholic Church; "receive Christ" means to take communion; "to have faith" means to believe what the church teaches.⁵⁹

A third barrier to evangelism of Roman Catholics is their belief that Mary is the sinless Mother of God and, therefore, in a special relationship with Christ and God. Thus, Roman Catholics revere and pray to her almost on the same level as Jesus.

Fourthly, Roman Catholics, though accepting the divine authority of the Bible, do not consider it as the only source of spiritual truth. Popes, church councils, and tradition are also recognized as equal to it.

⁵⁸ Andy Naselli. "The Unpardonable Sin." <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-unpardonable-sin/>, 15 Oct 2021.

⁵⁹ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization 1980. Lausanne Occasional Paper: Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics. Accessed from: <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-10>, 15 Oct 2021.

Islam

Is the question about Islam's teachings on original sin and the fall and redemption humankind of little importance? At first glance it seems that way, but a closer examination of the Qur'an does point to a contrary position. Some Christians may even have the perception that Islam's dogma on original sin, the fall of mankind as recorded in the Bible uncomplicates their daily living. Therefore, a look at what the Qur'an teaches about eternal salvation may perhaps assist toward locating the place original sin and the Fall from a biblical theology standpoint. Ultimately, the question of how salvation is explained against the backdrop of original sin becomes a critically important matter.

Although the account of humankind's temptation and moral failure in Paradise is present in the Qur'an, there is no story of a 'Fall of humankind' as the Bible narrates it. Therefore, according to Islam mankind does not really need redemption from sin. To get a more accurate picture of Islamic teaching on these issues, one must examine the text of the Qur'an, listen to some Muslim theologians, and find out how these teachings have been interpreted.

The Forbidden Tree and Adam's Sin

Although the Qur'an does not mention the name of Adam's wife, some commentators have given her the name *Hawa*, adding that she was created from Adam's rib as he fell asleep. Furthermore, some Muslim apologists argue that only the Bible contains this 'humiliating' passage of Adam's wife being created from Adam's rib. The Qur'an does not have the account of *Hawa* being created from Adam's rib. Thus, by implication, introducing the idea of equality between Adam and his wife—entailing that man and woman are created equally in Islam. While one may assert that Islam implicitly teaches that perhaps men and women are created equally, there is clear evidence that men and women do not have the same rights in Islamic societies. In truth, it is a lot easier to prove from some Qur'anic statements the societal superiority of men.

Islam holds that Adam and his wife were permitted to live in Paradise with complete freedom. The only restriction on them (like the Old Testament account in Genesis 2:4-25) was that they were not to eat from a specific tree. The Qur'an does not clearly say which tree this was, but from Surah 20:120, it is implied that the fruits from this tree will grant immortality and the likeness of the angels. Again, in Surah 2:35 Allah even prohibits Adam and his wife to move toward this tree; or they will become 'transgressors.'

Up to this point, the disparities between the Qur'an and the Old Testament accounts appear minimal; however, at this point in the narrative, the Qur'an says that temptation approached Adam and his wife in the shape of Satan. Satan made Adam and his wife 'to transgress' and lose Paradise (Surah 2:36). Surah 20:120 says that Satan whispered to eyes (tempted) of Adam to transgress. Allah had previously cautioned Adam that Satan might perhaps banish Adam from Paradise (20:117-119). But Adam and his wife ate from the forbidden tree. They then realized their nakedness and made for themselves clothes out of leaves (2:121). Adam and his wife were no longer able to stay in Paradise. Allah turned them out of Paradise (7:22) and banishes them down to earth.

Interestingly in the Qur'an, Adam and his wife asked Allah for forgiveness for having eaten the fruit. Adam and his wife also emphasize that their sin affects *only themselves* (7:23): "They said: 'We have sinned against our own souls'" (7:23). The Qur'an depicts that Adam and his wife sinned against themselves, not against Allah. Therefore, they themselves were the only ones affected by the contravention of Allah's commandment. Consequently, the Qur'an teaches in many other places that human beings always commit sin against themselves and that that sin is incapable of affecting Allah (Surah 2:54; 2:57; 3:117; 3:135; 4:64; 4:997; 4:110; 7:160). Islam emphasizes that grave sins such as apostasy harm the law of Allah, but never Allah himself.⁶⁰

In the Paradise story of the Qur'an, Allah forgave Adam and his wife their transgression (2:37). Concluding that in Qur'anic terms, Adam's sin in Paradise had no effect on mankind and neither obstructed nor destroyed mankind's relationship to Allah. At best Adam's transgression in Paradise was merely a '*faux pas*,' a mistake. In the Qur'an, the trespass does not destroy a former close relationship between Allah and mankind, as there was never a relationship, since it is unimaginable that Allah as the Creator of all things (the Great and transcendent One) can be in a relationship with mortal mankind. Curiously, although the Qur'an teaches that Adam and his wife could no longer reside in Paradise due to their 'mistake' the event was not significant, nor had such painful outcomes for the history of mankind as it did in the Old Testament. Notably the condition of the relationship between the Adam and his wife is not affected by the Qur'anic Paradise story either. The only impact of their sin appears to be their expulsion down to earth and the prophecy of enmity between them and Satan in the fu-

⁶⁰ This logic is foundational to Islam's teaching that humankind does not need to reconcile with Allah because Allah has never been in relationship with them. Allah is too great to be in relationship with mankind who is one of his creatures.

ture (2:36). Despite this transgression, Adam was ‘chosen’ by Allah, and ‘he accepted him and turned unto him again and directed him.’⁶¹

The import of the Qur’anic view of humankind’s ability to live righteously is hence much more optimistic than is the biblical one. According to Islam, then, mankind after Adam is largely not ‘enslaved’ in the sin and does not need salvation to do good works or live a godly lifestyle. Human beings can live a godly life if they resist the attacks of Satan. Thus, the most wicked sin in Islam is to doubt Allah’s trustworthiness and reliability. Also, faith does not principally mean to trust God, but first to submit to him as Islam entails. In the Qur’an, mankind’s gravest sin is his desire to decide his own destiny and disregard Allah as Creator and judge. Ultimately in Islam it is mankind’s pride which prevents him from submitting to Allah.

Repercussions of the Qur’anic Paradise Narrative

Christine Schirmacher discusses six conclusions that can be taken from the Islamic version of the Paradise story.⁶²

1. The relationship between Allah and humankind is not obstructed.

The Qur’an teaches that sin does not separate humankind from Allah as there has never been another, closer relationship with him [Allah] before. Allah is the Master of Human Beings; the creator, but not humankind’s father. Further, humankind is not created in the image of God. Islam further holds that sin integrally affects humans who commit it: it never affects Allah. The Qur’an says that Allah forgives all sins, smaller and greater ones, since his mercy ‘extends over all things’, if the offender turns away from their sin and has no intention of committing it again. Muslim theology has extensively discussed the question of whether Allah forgives sin even if people do not repent. Most Muslim theologians do not hold repentance as a condition for forgiveness either. Some Muslim theologians, however, contemplate that the Muslim transgressor who does not ask Allah for forgiveness before their death will remain in hell for a limited amount of time, but eventually will go to Paradise. The exception to this dogma is when it comes to unbelief (Arabic: *Kufr*). Included to this exception is *shirk* (an Arabic term meaning associating partners with Allah e.g., the sin of

⁶¹ Christine Schirmacher 2008. *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings: The Role of Jesus Christ, Sin and Forgiveness*. World Evangelical Alliance: Bonn, pp 38-39.

⁶² Schirmacher, pp 39-42.

Christians by believing in the Trinity), or apostasy which is a form of unbelief. The sin of unbelief must be repented to receive Allah's forgiveness. Since the dogma of original sin is absent in Islam, a repentant Muslim has the ability of living a righteous life after forgiveness.⁶³

2. People's Relationships with each other are not affected since Adam's sin did not have the ability to ruin them.

There is evidence in the Qur'an that Adam's relationship with his wife changed or was damaged by what occurred in Paradise. There is no suggestion in the Qur'an about what the Bible portrays as the husband being master over his wife (Genesis 3:16) because of the Fall. According to the Old Testament, God designed man and woman to be in unity, two very different types of persons, yet a couple, living in harmony, complementing each other (Genesis 2). But then, after the Fall, envy, power struggles, harassment, distrust, and violence between husband and wife is extant. In the Qur'an, however, this dimension is totally absent.

3. After their expulsion from Paradise, mankind is still capable to live righteously if they resist the temptation of Satan.

Islam teaches that temptation approaches people from outside of human beings, not from their inner heart. The idea of sin is not understood as rebellion against Allah, but only a 'transgression' or a 'trespass' (2:36). From such a view, earthly life is likened to a time of probation and a test which Allah enacts on human beings. Therefore, the Qur'an has no teaching of human beings' inner conflict between their will to do good and their powerlessness to do what is good. This understanding is at odds with what the Holy Spirit through Paul explains in Romans 7, namely, that as human beings desperately realize that they do not have the ability to do what is good in their own strength, they reach out to God for His assistance.

In the Qur'an, however, the inner heart of mankind is not evil, but their temptation comes from the outside, from Satan, the fallen angel, who was banished from heaven and now seeks to entice them to do what is evil. Islam teaches that humans always have freedom to choose between good and evil, although many do choose evil. Islam further believes that temptation is only Allah's testing and when a person sins it is because they have given their ear to the 'whis-

⁶³ Schirrmacher, p 39.

pering' of Satan. Importantly, according to Islam, if a person truly desires to obey Allah's commandments, then they have the capacity to do so by fulfilling the five pillars of Islam and additional religious obligations.

Granted, the Bible expects people to perform good deeds, but at the same time, makes it unambiguously clear that it is not possible for people to do these good deeds without the power of God and the help of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments teach that all the good deeds a person could do would never be sufficient to earn righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-9). Any transgression of God's law can never be removed by good works as only true repentance and trusting in Jesus Christ's substitutionary death makes forgiveness of sin possible (2 Corinthians 5:21).

4. Muslim theology, fascinatingly, teaches that there are some people who have never sinned.

According to Muslim theology, no prophet mentioned in the Qur'an has committed any sin. But the Qur'an also reports several times where the same prophets asked Allah for forgiveness of their sins (Adam in 7:23; Noah in 11:47; Abraham in 14:41; Moses in 28:16; David in 38:24; Muhammad in 110:3; 48:2). In the Qur'an only the Prophet Jesus committed no sin. Schirrmacher posits that the Islamic teaching of sinlessness may have emanated from Shi'ite Muslims of the tenth century.⁶⁴

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

The foregoing discussion of the repercussions of the Qur'anic paradise brings into focus the issue of opportunities and hinderances to presenting the Gospel to Muslims. The Islamic view of the Fall may be taken as an attempt to obviate the problem of human beings' alienation from God (due to intentional disobedience) on the one hand and, on the other hand, holding that God (being the Creator) cannot have relationship with lowly creatures as humans. Thus, in essence, Islamic theology removes the need for rescue from sin which has caused separation from God, the entailment of spiritual and physical death.

Bridges to the Gospel

The Muslim view of the Fall, though different in meaning from the biblical implications as discussed above, agrees with the Bible that sin was introduced to

⁶⁴ Christine Schirrmacher, p 41.

humanity by Satan's temptation. In reaching out to Muslims, therefore, one has this point of connection to assist in explaining the implications of the Fall on Adam and all humanity who have lived on earth to this day using the Bible's teaching that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). It is critical, however, to distinguish between Jesus and humanity. Furthermore, since Islamic theology rejects the biblical tenet of original sin, one can show from this point of contact that Adam's sin has had devastating implications on all his progeny. The Bible teaches that Adam sinned as a representative for all human beings (Romans 5:12) and with this sin, he ruined the relationship of every human being to God. Therefore, Islam's tacit acquiescence to the fact that (in the Fall) sin was introduced to human beings through Adam becomes the bridge to the gospel presentation to Muslims.

Barriers to the Gospel

The subtle barrier to evangelising Muslims lies in their perception of the nature of sin. According to James SD Langford,

The doctrine of sin represents the greatest barrier which separates the world's two largest religions of Islam and Christianity. The Muslim's explanation of the origin of sin is very simple: God is the cause of everything including evil as well as good. This fatalistic philosophy prevents Muslims from feeling true guilt or remorse in the Christian sense. Therefore, the problem of sin, as Christians perceive it, does not exist in Islam.⁶⁵

It is important therefore that Christians reaching out to Muslims understand Islam's doctrine on original sin. The Islamic understanding of sin is that nature is neither fallen nor evil, but that human beings are good by nature. As opposed to the Bible's teaching that the original sinfulness of human impacted beings after the fall in Christian theology, Islam holds to a type of original righteousness doctrine. This understanding teaches that every child is born naturally disposed toward the right religion, which is understood to be Islam. Islam further holds that human beings are good by nature and that every person is born

⁶⁵ James SD Langford 1983. "Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims" (1983). Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 643. Available at: <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/643> retrieved 30 Sep 2021, p 6

in the right religion, which is Islam. Hence, according to Muslims, it is only by other people's influence to reject Islam that a person departs from Islam.

CONCLUSION

While the creation narrative established the expositional foundation for the rest of the biblical narrative as it established God's perfect design, the narrative of the fall of humanity illustrates the depth of human need. In contrast to the wonder of the creation narrative in its description of the sovereignty of God over everything, the description of the fall provides insight into the intentional rejection of the offer of God by Adam and Eve. The subsequent narratives revealing the growth of sin and its consequences identify the *normative* cycle of human life due to sin: disobedience, consequence, and need. While Adam and Eve were first in their disobedience, the consequences of their sin and the impact upon creation ensured that their disobedience would not be the last. Narrative after narrative reveals the sinfulness of humanity—regardless of the position of the individual, every person is plagued by the reality of their sin. The unfolding narratives throughout the Old Testament also highlight the amazing grace of God who continued to engage His people with patient love. This truth is incredibly important to understand. The interaction of these two themes helps bring into clarity the truth: we need a Saviour! Rodgers considers the need to understand this “negative” truth of our brokenness in his examination of the first beatitude of Jesus in Matthew 5, Jesus starts with the “poor in spirit”: “Jesus is saying that you are blessed if you realize just how spiritually bankrupt you are... you don't have anything that you can bring to the table to bargain with, instead you are absolutely, utterly dependent on the grace of God to save you.”⁶⁶ The hope and reality of Rescue is the focus of the next chapter. This chapter closes with the words proclaimed by The Holy Spirit through Paul:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

⁶⁶ Kevin Rodgers, “1) Blessed are the Poor in Spirit” Blog post on *Rodgers' Reflections* 23 August 2021. Accessed on 26 August 2021: <https://kevinrodgers.net/1-blessed-are-the-poor-in-spirit/?fbclid=IwAR3oWNN0ltgDj-DxWjC74qgbbTD7nE7O05RUWGez2QCgl4kOGsi-ctn6MGQ>.

CHAPTER 3

RESCUE¹

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”²

Is there any hope? Am I too broken? Is my sin too big to be forgiven? Such questions move to the very climax of the biblical narrative. In the face of the reality of sin—not only the sin of Adam and Eve, not only the sin of Israel, but our sin, the deserved consequences loom true: the wages of sin is death. In response to this bleak truth, the question of hope emerges. While humanity is helpless to deliver themselves from the consequences of their sin, God is not. In Matthew 19:16ff, the rich, young ruler interacts with Jesus. When confronted with Jesus’ radical call to follow completely, the man cannot accept Jesus’ call and walks away. The disciples are stunned that one who seemed so faithful and so blessed by God would struggle to follow Jesus and the disciples utter the question, “Then who can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (19:25-26). Having examined the devastation and impact of the Fall upon all humanity, the words of the disciples seem reasonable: “Who can be saved?” None are worthy. While Jesus acknowledges the futility of human effort, he also proclaims the true source of our hope: “...but with God...” The climax of the biblical narrative is

¹ Most often in considering the metanarrative of Scripture, the term “Redemption” is used for this section. The term “Rescue” was used by Spread Truth in their evangelism training material, *The Story* [*The Story: Guide, Leaders Training* (Bloomington, IL, Spread Truth Publishing, 2011), see pp. 77-96]. A more condensed updated version currently available. The reason the authors chose to use the term “Rescue” over “Redemption” for the chapter title is that Rescue is more encompassing and better conveys both the helplessness of humanity and the joy and wonder of the saving activity of God to a contemporary audience.

² John 3:16.

about the grace of God, faithfulness of God, the actions of God! Morgan expresses this truth well:

Thankfully, God does not completely eradicate humanity for such cosmic treason but graciously begins a restoration project instead. He starts the process of restoring humanity and the cosmos, particularly restoring humans as full image bearers so that we can participate in and reflect the glory, identity, and mission that we long for the whole time.³

In considering the Rescue, one must realize that God was not caught off guard by the disobedience of humanity; rather, God not only anticipated the actions of humanity, but had a plan in place as the Holy Spirit explained through Peter “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20). To unpack the climactic story of Rescue, one needs to examine the reality of God’s rescue of humanity revealed in the biblical narrative—both in the historical engagement of God with humanity, especially Israel, and in the varied promises of a Redeemer throughout the Old Testament and the fulfillment of those promises in Jesus, then examine the implications and results of Rescue for the follower of Jesus. The key themes of Temple/Tabernacle, Kingdom of God, Image of God, and Covenant will be re-examined in light of Rescue. Finally, the biblical understanding of salvation will be compared with other prominent worldviews in Africa, namely African Traditional Religions, Islam, Prosperity Gospel, and Roman Catholicism.

RESCUE IN THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

The wonder of the Rescue is found not only in the actions of God, but the magnitude of God’s plan. One finds throughout the biblical narrative two important developments that reflect this reality. First, God is one that delivers throughout the narrative. God demonstrates grace and acts as one who rescues repeatedly in the history of Israel. This truth is readily seen in any survey of the Old Testament. Second, God promises to bring about complete deliverance from the effects of sin and fallenness through the work of the Messiah. This dynamic of “promise made” and “promise kept” is an important aspect of the

³ Christopher W. Morgan, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), p. 12. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com> on 22 June 2020.

story of Rescue maintained across the biblical metanarrative.⁴ Before examining these promises and their fulfillment in the first advent of Jesus, it is crucial to understand that rescue and redemption is an act reflecting God's character. To this end, the theme of God's redemptive activity in the Old Testament narrative is clearly displayed.

God as the One Who Rescues in the OT Narrative

The survey of the impact of the Fall in the previous chapter began with a consideration of the progressive "fall" narratives in Genesis 3-11. One point mentioned was that in each incident of human failure, God extended some word and action of grace. For Adam and Eve, not only do they live, but there is hope for continued engagement with God. For Cain, his life is not forfeit and he is sealed and protected by God. For Noah, God offers not only salvation for his family, but a covenant promising not to destroy the Earth by flooding again. The final story, the Tower of Babel is the only one without an *apparent* word of hope or grace. Instead, the narrative ends not only with the confusion of the languages of humanity, but "...the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:9). The action is a reminder of the very fear expressed by the people of Babel in verse 4 where they justify the building of the tower "...otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." Once again, human wisdom failed when compared to the covenantal commands of God who had instructed them to fill the earth. Where, then, is the hope for the now scattered people? Instead of a word of grace, the narrative moves on to a genealogy that climaxes with Abram, who will later have his name changed to Abraham by God. The call of Abram does have an interesting connection to the Babel story. Where the people of Babel desired to "...make a name for ourselves..." (Gen. 11:4), God promises Abram, "I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2b). More importantly, however, the call of Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 provides the word of hope for the scattered people and the promise of God to rescue them! From Abram, God promises to create a great nation through whom "...all the peoples on earth will be blessed..." (Gen. 12:3). The call of Abram and the subsequent establishment of a nation is an integral part of the promise of rescue for a scattered people across the whole earth.

⁴ *The Story Guide*, p. 90.

As space will not permit a detailed description of every instance of God's intervention on behalf of humanity, Morgan has provided a nice summary of the history of Israel from Abraham to exile in his section on Redemption in his overview of Biblical Theology:⁵

God calls Abraham from a family of idol worshippers and enters into a covenant with him, promising to be God to him and his descendants (Gen 12:1-3; 17:7). God promises to give Abraham a land, to make him into a great nation, and through him to bless all peoples (12:3). From Abraham come Isaac and later Jacob, whose name God changes to Israel and from whom God brings twelve tribes of his people. The rest of the Old Testament concerns God's dealings with the twelve tribes of Israel.

Through Moses, great plagues, and a dramatic exodus, God calls Israel out of Egyptian bondage to be his people. He gives them the Ten Commandments, promises to be their God, and claims them as his people. He promises to be with them and gives them the Promised Land, which they occupy under Joshua's leadership after defeating the Canaanites.

After Joshua dies, judges such as Gideon, Deborah, and Samson become leaders of the people. History repeats itself as generation after generation experiences peace, then rebels, then receives God's judgment, then cries out to God, and then experiences peace once again.

God gives his people a human king—first Saul, then David, then Solomon. Under David, a man after God's own heart, the kingdom grows significantly, Jerusalem becomes the capital, and God renews his covenant promise with his people. God promises to make David's descendants into a dynasty and to establish the throne of one of them forever. God uses David's son Solomon to build a temple, where God's covenant presence is manifest. Solomon does much right but also disobeys God in major ways, and this leads to the kingdom splitting into northern and southern kingdoms (Israel and Judah).

⁵ Morgan, pp. 13-14. Reproduced with permission.

God sends many prophets to call the people to covenant faithfulness. They warn his people of the judgment that will come if they do not repent of their sins and turn to the LORD. Nevertheless, the people repeatedly rebel against him and his prophets. In response he sends the northern kingdom of ten tribes into captivity in Assyria in 722 BC and the southern kingdom of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, into captivity in Babylon in 586 BC. Through the prophets God also promises to send a Deliverer (Isa 9:6-7; 52:13-53:12).

God promises to restore his people to their land from Babylonian captivity after seventy years (Jer. 25:11-12), and he brings this about under Ezra and Nehemiah. The people rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and build a second temple. Yet the Old Testament ends with God's people continuing to turn away from him (Malachi).

Before leaving the summary of God's redemptive activity with Israel, a greater emphasis should be given to the Exodus experience. The enslaved Israelites were utterly powerless against Egypt. The opening chapters of Exodus highlight the extreme oppression of the Israelites: "They [the Egyptians] worked the Israelites ruthlessly and made their lives bitter with difficult labour in brick and mortar, and in all kinds of fieldwork. They ruthlessly imposed all this work on them" (Ex 1:13-14). The cruelty of this oppression is seen in the instruction of the Pharaoh to Hebrew midwives: "When you help the Hebrew women give birth, observe them as they deliver. If the child is a son kill him, but if it's a daughter, she may live" (vs 16). Out of this extreme oppression, God delivered the Israelites. Deliverance occurred through a series of miraculous interventions: plagues against the Egyptians, opening of the Red Sea so that the Israelites could leave the land of Egypt, provision of food in the desert, and offer of covenant at Sinai. This event was the defining moment in Israel's history. Not only did God reveal Himself as LORD over creation and all peoples, but God also entered a unique covenant with Israel and revealed Himself to be the God who is near and present.

Throughout the Old Testament narrative, the Exodus event was used in several ways. First, God used the event to identify Himself to the people; the refrain "I am the God who brought you out of Egypt" occurs over forty times in the Old Testament—over a dozen times in the books of the Law, alone, even

when addressing the generation God led out of Egypt! At several crucial turning points where God engages with the tribes or nation of Israel, this description is a key identification in the conversation—whether when calling an individual into service such as Judges 6 when God calls Gideon, or as Samuel reminds the people of this truth in his final speech before the people enter a monarchy (1 Sam 12:8), or when the prophets remind the people of this truth as they face judgement (see Amos 2:10; Hosea 11:1), or as Daniel prays in anticipation of the end of exile (Daniel 9:15), or as post-exilic leaders remind the people of their history (see Nehemiah 9:18).⁶ Why is this identification so critical? It is the foundational identity of God for Israel and evidence of grace: the God who rescues. The nature of that rescue was so improbable from a human point of view that only God could accomplish it, it was so complete in the deliverance from slavery to the promise of a new land that it was an absolute expression of the character of God. Second, the event became a crucial moment of worship and surrender for the people of Israel. The Passover feast and festival became an annual reminder of the deliverance and was a key identification for the people—they were the ones who were delivered! They were the slaves who experienced the overwhelming and amazing grace of God not because of their actions, but because of God’s mercy. Finally, in moments of despair or hopelessness, people cried out with hope to God because of his nature—the God who can rescue. These elements are critical for understanding the biblical picture of Rescue.

The narrative continues in the New Testament and will be considered below. God not only demonstrates his character as the God who rescues with his continued engagement with the nation of Israel, God also provides a great number of promises throughout the Old Testament as to the coming Messiah who would bring true rescue from sin and brokenness.

Promises Made in the Old Testament Scriptures

In the immediate aftermath of the disobedience of Adam and Eve while pronouncing the consequences of their sin, God proclaims an incredible word of

⁶ In 1 Kings 12: 28, King Jeroboam of Israel uses the refrain “your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt” but is applying it to the two gold calves he made as the object of worship to prevent the people from traveling to Jerusalem. The sin is particularly grievous in that he not only leads the people into idol worship but ascribes to the idols God’s definitive act of deliverance in their history. This passage does give insight into how important the Exodus event was to the people of Israel—as that even defined God for many.

hope and promise of deliverance for humanity even as God pronounced judgement on the serpent: "...I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Evangelism Professor, George Robinson observes: "The Bible is one long and detailed answer to one short and crucial question: Who is that seed who was promised to come?"⁷

This long and detailed answer is woven throughout the biblical narrative in both the activity of God in which the hope of true deliverance is modelled as mentioned above and in the form of prophetic revelation from God in which much about the promised one is made known. In unpacking the latter elements of this answer, one needs to consider the scope of these promises made by God and then examine how these promises were kept in Jesus. As there are hundreds of promises made by God regarding the coming Saviour, the examination of every passage is not possible. Instead, the promises will be grouped into three major categories for consideration: the work of the Messiah; the nature of the Messiah; and specific details of the life of the Messiah.

Promises Made about the Work of the Messiah

The initial promise in Genesis 3 sets the expectation for the work of God in the destruction of the devil in the promise to crush the head. The implication is the work of the tempter will be destroyed and the consequences of sin to be addressed. What does this "striking the head" entail? As the Old Testament unfolds, God makes several distinctive statements about the nature of this salvation to be won. One of the consistent expectations is that the rescuer, the Messiah, will put an end to the bondage of sin⁸ in that he will "...put a stop to sin, to wipe away injustice, to bring in everlasting righteousness..." (Dan. 9:24b). This task is accomplished specifically through the substitutionary death of the Messiah. The Messiah would be struck down "...because of MY people's rebellion" (Isa. 53:8d). His death is compared to a sacrificial lamb,⁹ a guilt offering;¹⁰ the sprinkling of his blood as an atonement of all;¹¹ the Messiah would be the

⁷ *The Story Training: Leader Notes* (Bloomington, IL, Spread Truth publishing, 2020), p. 25. Pdf format downloaded 24 May 2021.

⁸ Cf. Isaiah 61:1-2.

⁹ Cf. Isaiah 53:7 "...Like a lamb led to the slaughter..."

¹⁰ Cf. Isaiah 53:10 "...You make him a restitution offering..."

¹¹ Cf. Isaiah 52:15 "so He will sprinkle many nations..."

sin-bearer for humanity¹² bearing the punishment for the sins of humanity¹³ so that we might be justified before God¹⁴ and have peace with God.¹⁵ Additionally, the saving work of the Messiah is linked to the promise of justice,¹⁶ care for the poor,¹⁷ and the creation of family.¹⁸ The ideas and terminology of “restoration” and “redemption” are often used to describe the work of the coming Messiah¹⁹ as only God can truly redeem humanity from the slavery of sin and exile—just as God, alone, could bring His people out of slavery in Egypt. By contrast, those who do not listen to the Messiah will be judged and rejected by the Messiah.²⁰

While the deliverance from sin is a primary role of the Messiah, the Messiah is also intimately connected to the New Covenant. He will be a messenger of the New Covenant,²¹ He will **BE** the New Covenant,²² and He will establish the New Covenant for the people of God.²³ This latter aspect will be considered more fully below.

The Messiah is also described in the terms of several offices: king,²⁴ prophet,²⁵ priest,²⁶ and judge.²⁷ Interestingly, the prophet Zechariah declares

¹² Cf. Isaiah 53:4, 6, 11, 12.

¹³ Cf. Isaiah 53:5a “But He was pierced because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities...”

¹⁴ Cf. Isaiah 53:11b “...My righteous servant will justify many, and He will carry their iniquities.”

¹⁵ Cf. Isaiah 53:5b “...for our peace was on Him and we are healed by His wounds.”

¹⁶ Cf. Isaiah 59:15-16.

¹⁷ Cf. Isaiah 61:1.

¹⁸ Cf. Ps. 22:22.

¹⁹ Restoration is often used to describe the deliverance of the “remnant” of Israel or of the faithful of Israel. Similarly, “redemption” or the title “Redeemer” often carries the image of one who delivers out of exile or slavery (see Isaiah 59:20 as an example).

²⁰ Cf. Deut. 18:15-19 and Ps. 2:12b.

²¹ Cf. Mal. 3:1c.

²² Cf. Isa. 42:6c.

²³ Cf. Jer. 31:31-34.

²⁴ Cf. Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:14; Ps 2:6. Most notably, the Messiah is connected to the promise of God to David—that God would establish the Kingdom for a descendant of David and that God would “establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:13b). A similar idea is expressed in Isa. 22:22 where God places the “key of the house of David on his shoulder.”

²⁵ Cf. Deut. 18:15-19.

²⁶ Specifically, the Messiah will be a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4) which is important as this priesthood is not limited to Levites!

²⁷ Specifically, the Messiah will be the righteous judge that does not act according to partiality or by simply external presentation but knows the heart (Isa. 11:3). The connection to just treatment of the poor or disenfranchised is connected to this function (see Isa. 11:4; Zech. 9:9). Ultimately, the Messiah will judge all of humanity (Isa. 49:2).

that the Messiah will be both a king sitting upon the throne *and* a priest (6:12-13)! A few other titles or descriptions are used throughout the biblical narrative to illuminate the work of the Messiah: an intercessor on behalf of humanity before God;²⁸ the “wonderful counsellor”;²⁹ the “Prince of peace”;³⁰ a true witness;³¹ the great shepherd;³² the chief cornerstone;³³ the light of the morning;³⁴ the one giving gifts to the people of God.³⁵

One final consideration of the work of the Messiah is the expected scope. The Messiah would impact all of humanity, not Israel alone. This hope is expressed in four parallel ways in the biblical narrative. First, the promised salvation is for all people: “Then everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved...” (Joel 2:32a). Second, the promise of salvation is for all nations.³⁶ This promise is also stated as a promise for all peoples.³⁷ Finally, the promise is explicitly stated for the Gentiles.³⁸ The message is very clear—there is no limitation to the scope of the work of the Messiah. The Messiah will indeed destroy the devil and the works of the devil providing the opportunity for true deliverance of humanity from the bondage of sin—forever!

Promises Made about the Nature of the Messiah

The deliverance that God promises is complete. This radical deliverance raises the question, what type of Messiah could accomplish such a great and complete rescue? Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals that the promised Messiah is not another human king or priest; rather, the Messiah is equated with God! Isaiah refers to the promised Messiah as “the Eternal Father” (9:6e) and declares that “...He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish

²⁸ Cf. Isa. 53:12e; 59:15-16b.

²⁹ Isa. 9:6c.

³⁰ Isa. 9:6f.

³¹ Isa. 55:4.

³² Isa. 40:11.

³³ Zech. 10:4.

³⁴ 2 Sam. 23:2-4b.

³⁵ Psa. 68:18b.

³⁶ Cf. Gen. 8:17-18; 22:18.

³⁷ Cf. Gen. 28:14; 2 Sam. 22:50; Psa. 18:49; Isa. 11:10; 49:1.

³⁸ The Messiah is described as a “light to the Gentiles” in Isa. 9:1-2b; 42:6; 49:6. The Messiah would provide justice for the Gentiles (Isa. 42:1). The Gentiles will trust the Messiah (Isa. 42:4).

and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever” (9:7b).³⁹ Similarly, Micah notes the eternal nature of the promised coming ruler: “...His origin is from antiquity, from eternity” (5:2b). The very nature of the promised Messiah is one who is from eternity and who will rule forever. Further, this Messiah is addressed as LORD by David in Psalm 110:1a (“The LORD declared to my LORD...”); reflects the character of God as one who is holy; and is seen as the agent through whom everything is created. More explicitly, the promised Messiah is described both as the Son of God⁴⁰ and equated with God—called “Immanuel”, God with us (Isa. 7:14c),⁴¹ and “the LORD is Our Righteousness” (Jer. 23: 6b).⁴² The Messiah is expected to have an intimate connection to the Spirit of God as the Spirit will rest upon him.⁴³ Isaiah will further express the fullness of the Spirit upon the Messiah in that he will have “a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isa. 11:2b-d). In other words, the Messiah is known by the manifestation of the Spirit of God in him and through him. This promised one is ultimately able to deliver completely because He is God.

Promises Made about the Incarnate Life of the Messiah

Incredibly, God does not declare in some vague manner that He is coming to rescue humanity through the promised Messiah, he gives specific details about this coming Messiah who is the very incarnation of God. God provides promises concerning the birth of the Messiah, his life and ministry, the nature of his death, and the exaltation of the Messiah.

The Birth of the Messiah

The coming deliverer promised of God is a major motif of the Old Testament. This Messiah is not assumed to appear *ex nihilo* (out of nothing); rather, the

³⁹ This idea is also found in 1 Chron. 7:14 in the context of the covenant with David and the promise of a coming king: “I will appoint him over My house and My kingdom forever, and his throne will be established forever.”

⁴⁰ Cf., Psa. 2:7 (which will be cited in the New Testament book of Hebrews), 12; 89:26; 2 Sam. 7:12-14 (and in the parallel passage in 1 Chron. 17:12-14) in the context of the covenant with David regarding a promised ruler from the lineage of David; Isaiah 9:6b.

⁴¹ Isaiah 40:3 is even more explicit as there is a call to “Prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert.”

⁴² The passage might also suggest that the Messiah will be man and God (a king who rules, but who is the LORD).

⁴³ Cf. Isaiah 11: 2a; 42:1b; 61:1-2a.

Messiah is one who will be born of a woman (as declared by God in Genesis 3). As the narrative unfolds, God begins to narrow the specific lineage of the promised Messiah. Initially, he is promised of the lineage of Abraham,⁴⁴ Isaac,⁴⁵ and Jacob.⁴⁶ From the sons of Jacob/Israel, the promise is narrowed to Judah.⁴⁷ Within the tribe of Judah, the promised redeemer is to be found in the lineage of Boaz and Ruth,⁴⁸ Jesse,⁴⁹ and David.⁵⁰ Haggai 2:23 provides a further narrowing to the line of Zerubbabel.

In addition to the specific human lineage of the promised Rescuer, God also provided details around the birth of the Messiah (although he is called before he was born).⁵¹ Not only was the specific location of his birth declared as the town of Bethlehem,⁵² but the circumstances would be supernatural. He would be born of a virgin.⁵³ Further, his birth would be announced by a star.⁵⁴ The birth will also be marked by sorrow due to the slaughter of children.⁵⁵ The Messiah, however, would be protected by God.⁵⁶ No real details are given regarding the childhood of the Messiah except that he would come up out of Egypt.⁵⁷

The Life of the Messiah

In addition to the supernatural entrance of the Messiah into the world, the life of the Messiah is also anticipated through declarations in the Old Testament.

⁴⁴ Cf. Gen. 12:3; 15:5; 18:17-18; 22:18. Usually, this promise is seen in the connection with the expectation of blessing of all people and nations through the lineage of Abraham. One could suggest that both Seth (Gen. 4:25) and Shem (Gen. 9:26) are also identified as there is a connection between those births and the faithfulness of God; however, it is not an explicit connection or promise.

⁴⁵ See Gen. 17:19; 22:12; 26:4.

⁴⁶ Gen. 28:14

⁴⁷ Gen. 49:10 and 1 Chr. 5:2

⁴⁸ Ruth 4:12-17

⁴⁹ Isa. 11:1, 10.

⁵⁰ Initially declared in connection to the covenant with God in 2 Sam. 7:13-14 (and the parallel in 1 Chronicles), it is re-iterated a number of times across the Old Testament. Cf. Psa. 89:3-4, 29, 35-36; 132:11, 17; Isa. 7:13-14; 9:7; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-15; Eze. 17:22-24; 34:23-24

⁵¹ Isa. 49:1.

⁵² Cf. Mic. 5:2.

⁵³ Cf. Isa. 7:14.

⁵⁴ Cf. Num. 24:17.

⁵⁵ Cf. Jer. 31:15.

⁵⁶ The image of being hid in the “shadow of His hand” is used to reflect the protective care of God over His servant in Isaiah 49:2.

⁵⁷ Hosea 11:1. Some have suggested that the use of the image in Isaiah 11:1 and 53:2 of a “young shoot” or a “small shoot” to be a reference to growing up in a poor family or a family with little influence, but that is not a dominant interpretation.

Before the Messiah would appear, there was a promise of a forerunner who would “clear the way” (Mal 3:1a) for the Messiah. This forerunner would live in the wilderness apart from the people yet prepare the people to hear the message of the Messiah.⁵⁸ This forerunner would come in the spirit of Elijah and turn many toward righteousness!⁵⁹ The Messiah, himself, would be of ordinary appearance⁶⁰ and one that demonstrates humility.⁶¹

The nature of his ministry is also anticipated with several areas of engagement described. First, the Messiah is one who will teach as a prophet with authority from God.⁶² His words would be as a sharp sword⁶³ yet words of grace⁶⁴ as the Messiah will also be a messenger of the covenant.⁶⁵ Further, God declares that the manner of teaching for the Messiah will be in ways that, on the one hand, are difficult for some to understand such as parables,⁶⁶ but on the other hand, is the proclamation of good news and filled with the hope of rescue and promise of jubilee.⁶⁷ In addition to his role as a teacher, the Messiah is described as one who brings healing to the people,⁶⁸ most notably to the lame, deaf, mute, and blind.⁶⁹ Most importantly, the Messiah is understood to be the servant of God⁷⁰ who is sent by God,⁷¹ pleases God,⁷² and brings glory to

⁵⁸ Isa. 40:3

⁵⁹ Mal. 4:5-6.

⁶⁰ Isa. 53:2b

⁶¹ Zech. 9:9e.

⁶² Deut. 18:15-19.

⁶³ Isa. 49:2. The image of a sword for words often conveys the idea of being able to bring true judgement and discernment: to speak in such a manner as to ‘cut to the heart’ of a matter; to be able to separate truth from lie; to bring conviction of sin and declaration of righteousness.

⁶⁴ Psa. 45:2. This psalm is technically a royal psalm and may be seen as speaking of the King of Israel; however, the royal psalms see their fulfillment ultimately in the true king sent of God—the promised Messiah who would be the final descendant of David and eternal ruler.

⁶⁵ Mal. 3:1.

⁶⁶ See Psa. 78:2 and Isa. 6:9-10. The OT passages do not mention the word “parables”, instead using the terms “mysteries” or describe the teaching as confounding to the understanding of the people.

⁶⁷ Isa. 61:1-2.

⁶⁸ Isa. 53:4 and Mal. 4:2.

⁶⁹ Isaiah 35:5-6: “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy...” See also, Isa. 42:7.

⁷⁰ See Isa. 42:1; 49:3, 5, 6; 52:13; 53:11; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 3:8.

⁷¹ Isa. 48:16b.

⁷² Isa. 42:1.

God⁷³ as he accomplishes God's will⁷⁴ being steadfast in his mission.⁷⁵ Interestingly, the location of the ministry of Messiah is highlighted as both in Galilee⁷⁶ and in connection to Jerusalem. Regarding the latter, the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey,⁷⁷ and would receive praises in Jerusalem.⁷⁸ Further, the Messiah is connected to the location of the Temple in several passages: the Messiah will visit the Temple,⁷⁹ teach at the Temple, and be angered by the disrespect of people toward the Temple.⁸⁰

The Death of the Messiah

While the birth, life, and ministry of the Messiah are of great significance, the anticipated death of the Messiah is granted particular focus in the prophetic declarations about the coming Messiah. As mentioned above, the gift of salvation is connected to the substitutionary death of the Messiah who bears the sin of humanity; therefore, one should not be surprised at the depth and breadth of the descriptions provided around his death. The statements fall into several categories: the betrayal and abandonment of the Messiah by his close associates; the suffering and humiliation of the Messiah; the manner of his death; the final exaltation of the Messiah.

The expectation that the Messiah will be abandoned by his friends is declared both in the Psalms and the prophets.⁸¹ Further, one of these friends would not only abandon the Messiah, but would be the agent of betrayal: "Even my friend in whom I trusted, one who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psa. 41:9).⁸² Even more specific, God reveals in the Old Testament that the price of betrayal will be thirty pieces of silver which will be thrown into the house of the LORD afterwards.⁸³

⁷³ Isa. 49:3b.

⁷⁴ Psa. 40:7-8.

⁷⁵ Isa. 50:7.

⁷⁶ Isaiah 9:1:b: "...But in the future, He will bring honour to the Way of the Sea, to the land east of the Jordan, and to Galilee of the nations."

⁷⁷ Zech. 9:9f.

⁷⁸ Zech. 9:9a.

⁷⁹ See Hag. 2:6-9; Mal. 3:1.

⁸⁰ Psa. 69:9.

⁸¹ Psa. 22:11; 69:20; Zech. 13:7.

⁸² Psa. 55:12-14; Zech. 13:6.

⁸³ Zech. 11:12-13.

The Messiah would suffer injury and humiliation prior to his death. Many would despise him without cause⁸⁴ so that political and religious authorities would conspire against him⁸⁵ even bringing false witnesses to testify against him, speaking lies.⁸⁶ The Messiah who is innocent of any wrongdoing⁸⁷ would not offer any defence—even remaining silent in the face of false accusations,⁸⁸ and would be judged.⁸⁹ The result of this mockery of a trial is the rejection of the Messiah.⁹⁰ As further insult, the Messiah would be mocked,⁹¹ spit upon,⁹² beaten,⁹³ his beard plucked out,⁹⁴ and his back whipped.⁹⁵ Ultimately, the Messiah would be sentenced to death.

The description of the death of the Messiah within the Old Testament writings is quite remarkable as one finds a number of very specific details spread across several passages: the Messiah would die among criminals;⁹⁶ people would cast lots for his clothes;⁹⁷ none of his bones would be broken;⁹⁸ his hands and feet would be pierced;⁹⁹ he would grow thirsty and receive gall and vinegar;¹⁰⁰ and his side will be pierced¹⁰¹ and his heart broken.¹⁰² In addition to the description of his tortuous death, creation bears witness as darkness will

⁸⁴ Psa. 35:11; 69:4; Isa. 53:3; Zech. 11:8.

⁸⁵ Psalm 2:2: “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers conspire together against the LORD and His Anointed One.”

⁸⁶ Cf. Psa. 35:11; 109:2.

⁸⁷ Cf. Isa. 53:9.

⁸⁸ Cf. Isa. 53:7.

⁸⁹ Cf. Isa. 53:8.

⁹⁰ Psa. 69:8; Isa. 49:4; 53:3; Zech. 11:12-13; 12:10. This rejection would not only be by the Jews, but also the nations/Gentiles (Psa. 2:1). The rejection is spoken of poetically as the “stone” rejected by the builders (Psa. 118:22) or as a “hardening of the heart” of Israel (Isa. 6:9-10). Another way of stating this dynamic is of the Messiah being a “stumbling stone” to the belief of Israel (Isa. 8:14).

⁹¹ Isa. 50:6; Psa. 22:8.

⁹² Isa. 50:6.

⁹³ Psa. 22:12.

⁹⁴ Isa. 50:6.

⁹⁵ Isa. 50:6; 53:5.

⁹⁶ Isa. 53:12.

⁹⁷ Psa. 22:18.

⁹⁸ Psa. 22:14, 17 ;34:20.

⁹⁹ Psa. 22:16.

¹⁰⁰ Psa. 69:21.

¹⁰¹ Zech. 12:10.

¹⁰² Psa. 22:14: The description is of his heart melting as wax.

cover the land.¹⁰³ Finally, the Messiah would be buried in a borrowed rich man's tomb.¹⁰⁴ Throughout all of this suffering, the Messiah would pray for his persecutors,¹⁰⁵ commend himself into the hands of God,¹⁰⁶ and voluntarily¹⁰⁷ endure the suffering and death, vicariously, for the salvation of humanity!¹⁰⁸

While the death of the Messiah is a clear focus of the prophetic voices across the Old Testament, the death is not the final expectation. The promise of resurrection is hinted: "For You will not abandon me to Sheol; You will not allow Your Faithful One to see the Pit" (Psalm 16:10).¹⁰⁹ The possible expectation of ascension or exaltation with an eternal place of power can also be noted in several passages.¹¹⁰

The promise of a coming seed of woman first given in the aftermath of the Fall is defined and developed over the course of the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. The birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of the Messiah are glimpsed across the law, prophets, and writings. Further, the divine nature of the Messiah and the incredible work of salvation are clearly proclaimed. In light of such a well-defined expectation, "...we see Jesus..." (Hebrews 2:9).

Promises Fulfilled in Jesus

The New Testament declares with certainty that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, in complete fulfillment of all three areas of these promises: the expected life of the Messiah, the divine nature of the Messiah, and the accomplished work of the Messiah. All three of these aspects will be examined. First, however, consider Morgan's concise summation of the revelation of the promised Messiah in Jesus:¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Amos 8:9.

¹⁰⁴ Isa. 53:9.

¹⁰⁵ Psa. 109:4.

¹⁰⁶ Psa. 31:5.

¹⁰⁷ Psa. 40:6-8.

¹⁰⁸ Isa. 53:4-6, 12; Dan. 9:26.

¹⁰⁹ Similar expectation is voiced in Psalm 30:3 ("LORD, You brought me up from Sheol; You spared me from among those going down to the Pit"). Cf. Psa. 41:10; 118:17; Hos. 6:2.

¹¹⁰ Psa. 2:6-8; 8:6-8; 16:11; 110:1-3; Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:14. The Daniel 7 description of the "Son of Man" has also been taken as a reference to the Second Advent of the Messiah expressing the final consummation of the work of the Messiah.

¹¹¹ Morgan, p. 14.

After four hundred years God sends his Son as the promised Messiah, Suffering Servant, King of Israel, and Saviour of the world. The Son of God is conceived of a virgin and becomes fully human while remaining fully divine. In time, Jesus is baptized, successfully defeats Satan's temptation in the wilderness, and is declared to be the Messiah. Jesus chooses and invests in twelve disciples as new leaders of his messianic community. He teaches about the kingdom of God, that God's rule has come in Jesus the Messiah. Jesus displays this by casting out demons, performing miracles, and preaching the good news to the poor. Jesus completely follows the will and plan of God, remaining without sin. He is loved by many but is opposed by Jewish religious and political leaders. Not only does he not fit their conception of a messiah, he also undercuts their pride, beliefs, and traditions. The opposition increases as the Jewish Sanhedrin condemns Jesus in an illegal trial. Since the nation is occupied by the Roman Empire, the leaders must send Jesus to their staunch enemy, Pontius Pilate, who finds Jesus innocent. Under pressure from the Jewish leaders and crowds, however, Pilate crucifies Jesus anyway. Jesus the innocent One, the righteous One, dies on a cross. From a human vantage point, Jesus dies as a victim in this despicably evil act. Yet the biblical story highlights that this death is part of God's eternal plan to save sinners. Jesus's mission is to seek and save the lost, and he does not fail to do so. Jesus saves sinners as their substitute, victor, sacrifice, new Adam, Redeemer, and peacemaker.

Incredibly, Jesus not only bears the sin of the world on the cross but also is raised from the dead three days later. In a variety of places, situations, and group settings, more than 500 people witness the resurrected Jesus. Through his resurrection he confirms his identity, defeats sin and death, gives new life to his people, and provides a foretaste of his people's future resurrection.

Keeping this concise summary as a backdrop, one needs to unpack the life, nature, and work of Jesus more fully as found in the New Testament documents. The three elements will be considered in the reverse order of the Old Testament survey beginning with the prophetic fulfillment in the incarnate life of Jesus, consideration of the divine nature of Jesus both from Jesus' own

words as well as the declarations of various New Testament authors, and finally an exploration of the significance of the saving work of Jesus.

The Incarnate Life of Jesus

For one familiar with the four gospels that open the New Testament, many of the details of Jesus' life may have come to mind while reading the survey of Old Testament prophecies above. Nevertheless, one should move through the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus specifically noting the connection to the promises made.

The Birth of Jesus

The Holy Spirit led Matthew to begin the gospel narrative with the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17). This genealogy serves as the key thematic foundation for the Gospel of Matthew. The opening verse highlights that both Abraham and David are ancestors of Jesus, the Messiah. These two are of particular importance given that God established covenants with both declaring promises regarding their promised lineage: from Abraham's lineage, all people will be blessed; from David's lineage, the ultimate king and ruler will be born. If the significance is lost on the reader, the Holy Spirit through Matthew provides an important summation in verse 17: "All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah." In addition to highlighting Abraham and David again, the number fourteen is seen as the organizing structure of the genealogy with a three-fold grouping. What is the significance and meaning of "fourteen?" Fourteen is understood as the numerical representation of the name "David" in the Hebrew language as Hebrew numbers correspond to letters in the alphabet. In Hebrew, David is written as three letters: DVD (daleth, vav, daleth) which numerically is 4+6+4, 14. Why mention the number of generations in Jesus' genealogy perfectly reflects a three-fold "David"? Because Jesus is seen as the ultimate David.¹¹² He is the promised son of David, the promised Messianic King. As the Gospel of Matthew unfolds, there is a great emphasis on both the kingly nature of Jesus (i.e., his birth is "announced" in the heavens by the appearance of a star, he is worshipped by

¹¹² In Hebrew, as in Greek, to repeat something a third time is to note it's superlative. Thus, when the angels proclaim "Holy, Holy, Holy" they are declaring God to be the "Holiest". Similarly, Jesus is the "David-est" ever to be.

leaders from the East, he is ultimately sentenced to death as the ‘King of the Jews’) and the nature of the kingdom of God.¹¹³

The Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke both include the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus. Each Gospel writer under the guidance of the Holy Spirit focused on the birth narrative from different perspectives. Matthew focused upon the revelation given Joseph—via a dream¹¹⁴—that he would know the child, Jesus, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and should wed Mary. Luke focused upon the revelation given Mary—via the declaration of the angel, Gabriel—that she would bear a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. Little is provided about the childhood of Jesus, except for the stories of the necessity of the family to flee to Egypt to avoid Herod’s wrath (Matt. 2:13-18), the presentation of Jesus in the temple by his parents for the rite of circumcision and the prophetic declarations of Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:21-40), and the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus speaking with the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:41-51).

The Life and Ministry of Jesus

As promised, the Messiah is announced by a forerunner. All four gospels introduce John the Baptist as the promised one called to prepare the way of the Messiah.¹¹⁵ While the genealogy of Jesus is the foundational passage in Matthew’s Gospel, for the Gospel of Luke, the foundational passage is Jesus’ initial teaching in Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30) in which Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah the proclamation of the expected work of the Messiah, “The Spirit of the LORD is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour” (4:18-19) and declares that “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled” (vs. 21b). The promise found in Isaiah provides a highlight of the ministry of Jesus that unfolds in the Gospel of Luke. The connection of Jesus’ ministry to the promised “year of Jubilee”—a time of the LORD’s favour is of particular importance. Jesus is going to bring complete restoration of God’s favour for those who will hear and respond. In the gospels, miraculous healing

¹¹³ Matthew includes more “kingdom” parables and teaching of Jesus than any other gospel.

¹¹⁴ Joseph is seen in parallel to the Old Testament Joseph, son of Israel, in the gift of divine dreams. Not only does Joseph receive a dream from God about the birth of Jesus, in 2:13 he will receive a warning to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus to avoid the decree of Herod to kill children of Bethlehem.

¹¹⁵ See Matt. 3:1-17; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 3:2-22; John 1:15-34. Luke also tells of the miraculous circumstances around the birth of John in Luke 1:5-25, 57-80.

and deliverance is witnessed by many—as anticipated in the Old Testament promises of Messiah. In addition to the miraculous, Jesus’ ministry is marked by teaching “as one who has authority” often in parables as shown in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). The promised scope of the ministry of the Messiah is also seen in Jesus’ life and ministry. While Jesus does have an initial focus to Israel, he proclaims good news and hope, both to those on the fringes of Israel’s community such as the leprous, the sick, or the shunned, and to those outside of Israel whether a demon-possessed man from the region of the Decapolis,¹¹⁶ a leper from Samaria,¹¹⁷ a woman from Syria-Phoenicia,¹¹⁸ or a myriad of others. Jesus’ ministry is fully in step with the promises given throughout the Old Testament.

In the Gospel of John, one encounters another dimension to the life and ministry of Jesus, namely that of revelation: “No one has ever seen God. The One and Only Son—the One who is at the Father’s side—he has revealed Him” (1:18). Throughout the gospel, Jesus not only is involved in ministry and teaching, but is understood to be revealing God. The seven miracles found in the Gospel of John are not called “miracles” but “signs” as they point to some truth about Jesus as he reveals God. This reality will be considered more fully below in the discussion of the work of Jesus.

The Passion of Jesus

The narratives of the suffering of Jesus through the arrest, trial, and crucifixion bring clarity and fulfillment to the multiple promises given and mentioned above. From Judas’ betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver to Jesus’ arrest and trial in which Jesus offers no defence in the face of his accusers to the public beatings, mocking, and ultimately crucifixion, the prophetic declarations of the Old Testament are unfurled in the passion narrative.

Of particular interest is Jesus’ quoting of Psalm 22 while on the cross. The meaning of the declaration, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” is more than a statement of Jesus’ immediate situation. Rather, in citing the opening verse of the Psalm, Jesus is calling the entire psalm to mind as is common among Hebrew Rabbis. The examination of the psalm yields incredible insight. The psalm mirrors Jesus’ experience on the cross, even though it was written

¹¹⁶ Mark 5:1-20.

¹¹⁷ Luke 17:11-19.

¹¹⁸ Mark 7:24-29.

before crucifixion was used as a means of execution. Consider the movement of the entire psalm. The opening verses mark various circumstances which seek to define God falsely. In verses 1-5 of Psalm 22, the psalmist expresses a feeling of forsakenness yet reminds himself of the testimony of others that declare the faithfulness of God so that he might take heart. In Psalm 22:6-11, the psalmist experiences the mocking of others—even from those who should have given support—and calls to mind God’s faithfulness in his own life in years past (vv. 9-11). In verses 12-21, the psalmist describes the reality of terror and fear in the face of suffering; however, the psalmist then remembers that God creates hope (vv. 19-21). Having examined the circumstances that can cause one to become disheartened, the remaining verses declare a radical hope in two movements. First, our hope is never in our circumstance; rather, in the character of God (vv. 22-24) and second, one can trust the promise and power of God (vv. 25-28). The psalmist then ends with two incredible declarations which are anticipated by Jesus. First, future generations will hear about the wonders of the LORD in the deliverance he brings (v. 30). Second, those not yet born will hear about the righteous acts that are being accomplished by God (vs. 31). Jesus, then, in citing Psalm 22 is not only drawing attention to his immediate circumstance in the crucifixion and the very specific prophetic statements about the nature of his suffering in this psalm,¹¹⁹ but he is also anticipating the end of the story knowing of the coming resurrection and exaltation. This deliverance will result in the salvation of many both from this generation and others yet to come. The citation of the psalm, then, is not simply about Jesus’ forsakenness, but the expectation of deliverance to come and the message of salvation for generations to come.

The Resurrection and Exaltation of Jesus

The “hint” of exaltation that is found in the Old Testament statements about the Messiah moves to very explicit narrative and declarations. The gospels do not end with the death of Jesus; rather, they end with the truth of the resurrection. Very clearly, the Holy Spirit, through the gospel writers, describes the reality of the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen LORD both to smaller groups of disciples and to larger crowds of disciples gathered. In I Corinthians

¹¹⁹ This psalm includes several specific statements of the suffering Jesus would experience: mocking, shaking of heads (v. 7); surrounded by enemies (v. 12); bones out of joint and heart melting like wax (v. 14); thirst (v.15); hands and feet pierced (v. 16); no broken bones (v. 17); garments divided by the casting of lots (v. 18).

15:3-8, Paul summarizes Jesus' appearances for the members of the Corinthian church to validate the reality of the resurrection:

For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and then He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then He appeared to over 500 brothers at one time, most of whom remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one abnormally born, He also appeared to me.

Beyond the resurrection, the Holy Spirit through Luke relates the narrative of the ascension of Jesus in both the gospel of Luke (Luke 24:50-51) and in the book of Acts (Acts 1:9-11).

The Divine Nature of Jesus

The Old Testament revealed expectations of the very nature of the promised Messiah: an eternal one filled with the Spirit and equated with God. How are these three elements revealed in Jesus? Two aspects of this question need engagement. First, the words of Jesus must be considered as to the claims of Jesus, himself. Second, the testimony of the larger New Testament should be examined from the gospel writers to the epistles and the apocalypse.

Jesus' words fall into direct and indirect statements of his nature and claims of authority or actions that reveal his self-understanding. Jesus' use of the term "Son of Man" throughout the gospels as a self-designation is a direct reference to the promised Messiah in Daniel 7:13-14. He explicitly claimed to be the Messiah during his exchange with the Samaritan woman in John 4:25-26. The understanding of Messiah carried with it the sum of all the Old Testament promises. While there are multiple times when Jesus chooses to use the phrase "I am" in connection to his identity, calling to mind God's self-revelation of His name to Moses in Exodus 3:14, the most engaging and explicit usage is in the context of a dialogue about Abraham with the Jews in John 8:48-59. During the discussion, Jesus tells the gathered crowd, "Your father Abraham was overjoyed that he would see my day; he saw it and rejoiced." When the crowd doubts Jesus' statement because he was too young to have encountered Abraham, Jesus concludes, "I assure you: before Abraham was, I am." In this sentence, Jesus claims both

an eternal nature and the identity of God, the I AM. The reaction of the crowd was immediate in their desire to stone him for the perceived blasphemy. The gospel writers often included the reaction and commentary of the crowd to ensure that the reader would understand the impact and meaning of Jesus' words. A similar occurrence is found in John 5:16-18. After responding to the complaints of Jesus' healing on the Sabbath, Jesus concluded that he did such work because "My Father is still working, and I am working also." John explains that this declaration was a cause for the Jews seeking to kill Jesus because "...not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." Further, Jesus will claim, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). In this instance, Jesus is even referencing the declaration in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One." Once again, Jesus' statement of identity results in the attempt to stone him. When he asks for which of his good works they are seeking to stone him, they reply they are stoning him not for any good work, but "for blasphemy, because You—being a man—make Yourself God" (John 10:36) In multiple instances, then, Jesus' direct words were understood by those gathered to be claims of divinity, and in none of the instances does Jesus try to dissuade them from their conclusion; rather, he accepts their understanding—the claims of divinity—as correct. In Jesus' appearance to the apostle John on Patmos, Jesus declares, "I am the Alpha and the Omega", says the LORD God, 'the one who is, who was, and who is coming, the Almighty'" (Revelation 1:8) while in Revelation 21:5-7 this exact self-reference of Alpha and Omega is made by the One seated on the throne.

In several occurrences, Jesus expresses quality, authority, or actions that reflect his understanding of his deity. In the prayer of John 17:5, Jesus expressly asks, "...Now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world existed." Not only is Jesus once again stating his eternal nature but is asking for God's glory. In Isaiah 42:8, God expressly states, "I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another..." Jesus is claiming something only God can claim—divine glory. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic man in chapter 2. When the gathered scribes complain among themselves because only God alone can forgive sins (2:7), Jesus heals the man as evidence of his authority to forgive sins. Elsewhere, Jesus demonstrates authority over creation in the calming of storms, multiplying of food, and casting out of demons. More pointedly, Jesus, during his temptation by Satan, declares that one must worship God, alone (see Matthew 4:10 and Luke 4:8), yet Jesus accepts the worship of others without any rebuke, correc-

tion, or rejection! Sometimes, the worship occurs in crowds such as Matthew 28:17 or Luke 24:52, but at other times it is more personal with an individual expressing worship to Jesus directly. Two such examples are found in the gospel of John: the man born blind declares his belief in Jesus and “worshipped him” (9:38); Thomas upon seeing the risen LORD declares “My LORD and my God!” (20:28).

The New Testament writers include numerous declarations about the divine nature of Jesus. All four gospels include evidence of Jesus’ nature such as the virgin birth, the declaration by God that Jesus is his beloved Son both at the baptism and at the transfiguration,¹²⁰ the evidence of miracles, the sign of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus. The gospel of John begins with an emphatic statement on the eternal nature of Jesus (described as the Word) and his divine state: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). The narrative continues to note that Jesus was the agent of creation and the source of life (1:3-4). A turning point for the disciples of Jesus in each of the synoptic gospels is Peter’s public confession of Jesus: “You are the Christ, the son of the living God!”¹²¹ Outside of the gospels, the nature of Jesus is described in several epistles, but one of the strongest statements about the divinity of Christ is found in Hebrews 1:3 where the Holy Spirit declares: “He [Jesus] is the radiance of His [God’s] glory, the exact expression of His nature.” The first half of the statement echoes Jesus’ statements from John 17 mentioned above, yet moves further as “Jesus alone is the true radiance of God’s glory.”¹²² “The follow up statement to Jesus’ reflection of God’s glory is simply the explanation of why that is so—He is God.”¹²³ The phrase used conveys the idea of the truest essence of something.¹²⁴ As Davis notes, “Here the

¹²⁰ The baptism declaration is found in Matt. 3:17, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22. The similar declaration by God at the transfiguration with the added command “Listen to Him!” is found in Matt. 17:5, Mark 9:7, and Luke 9:35.

¹²¹ See Matt. 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-29, and Luke 9:18-20.

¹²² Ronnie Davis, “Emphasize the Christ of Scripture,” in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Editors: P Barnes, et.al. AB316 Publishing, 2021, p. 185.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ The translation of this phrase varies greatly among translations. ESV: “...exact imprint of his nature...”; NIV: “...exact representation of his being...”; NLT: “...expresses the very character of God...” The combination of the two Greek words is an emphatic expression of exactness. The word, *charaktēr* is a word for engraving or imprinting noting an exact representation. The word, *hupostasis*, is a word describing the “essence” or true nature of something and conveys the idea of the truest form of something.

Holy Spirit through the author is declaring that if one desires to know the truest form or most exact being of God, look to Jesus.”¹²⁵

The Work of Jesus

Jesus identifies himself as the incarnate God who is the true Messiah; further, Jesus is very clear about his intention to be about the work of his Father. He is focused on this work. What, exactly, does Jesus accomplish as the true and only Messiah? To answer this critical question, one needs, first, to hear the words of Jesus about his work, and then, consider the teaching of the larger New Testament.

Jesus framed his work in reference to the testimony of Scripture. In other words, Jesus was fully aware of the Old Testament promises about the work of the Messiah and expressed them as his own. As mentioned above, in the gospel of Luke, Jesus expresses his purpose in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah, “The Spirit of the LORD is on Me because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour” (Luke 4:18-19). Immediately after reading this passage, Jesus returns the scroll to the attendant, and sat down. Noting his sitting was an indication that he was going to provide some instruction on the scripture;¹²⁶ thus, “...the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him” (vs. 20). Jesus’ point for those gathered was, “Today as you listen this Scripture has been fulfilled” (vs. 21). Elsewhere, Jesus will also explain his relationship to the Scripture. In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus declares that he has come to fulfil the law. After the resurrection, Jesus teaches the disciples on the road to Emmaus “...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). Jesus’ choice of the self-designation “Son of Man” was an intentional reflection of the Messianic expectation surrounding the prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14:

...and I saw One like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before Him. He was given authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should

¹²⁵ Davis, p. 186.

¹²⁶ The position of sitting or standing was significant as sitting was the posture of teaching and explanation. Standing would convey the idea of reflection, but not always teaching or instruction.

serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

Jesus will describe his work in several ways, but two key ideas surface: revelation and salvation. Jesus notes his unity with God is such that Jesus reveals God. This revelation is seen in the actions of Jesus as directly reflecting the actions of God as in the discourse in John 5:19-23. More explicitly, Jesus declares “The one who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:6) and “...no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him” (Matt 11:27). All of the activity of Jesus, then, reveals the character, purpose, and desires of God. Most often, as Jesus speaks of his work, he speaks about salvation. The most translated verse in the Bible, John 3:16, is part of the climax of a discourse around salvation:

For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.¹²⁷

In this passage, Jesus not only identifies his purpose of salvation, but also acknowledges the condemnation that already exists for those who do not believe on him. Salvation is an active pursuit of God in the face of the consequences of sin for humanity. Just as was declared in the Old Testament narratives, God is understood as the one who rescues—more importantly, the *only* one who can rescue. Jesus highlights this intentional activity of salvation during his encounter with Zacchaeus declaring, “Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 9:9-10). The understanding of Jesus actively seeking out the lost is conveyed throughout the gospel narratives such as Jesus’ teaching of the parable of the lost sheep in which a shepherd leaves ninety-nine safe sheep to go and find the one sheep that was lost (Luke 15:3-7). Jesus’ expectation of his death is clearly

¹²⁷ John 3:16-18

stated by Jesus in each gospel—usually to the disciples who did not comprehend. This dynamic is particularly evident in the gospel of Mark where immediately after Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus “began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Even though Jesus “spoke plainly” about his coming death, Peter “took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him” (vs. 32). Jesus will attempt to explain the certainty of his death to the disciples two more times (9:12-13 and 10:32-34). Jesus also clearly stated the connection of salvation to his own death: “...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Jesus states that the salvation offered produces life— “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10)—and light “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness” (John 12:46). Jesus also spoke of the exclusivity of the salvation he offered: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). The scope of this salvation is extended to the “everyone who believes” of John 3:16. In summary, Jesus clearly expresses that his focal work is salvation as he has come to ransom himself as a penal substitution—anticipated by Isaiah 53 mentioned above—for everyone who believes. The completion of this work is highlighted by the two-fold occurrence of “finished” in John 19:28-30. First, the Holy Spirit reveals that Jesus recognizes that “...everything was now accomplished...”¹²⁸ (vs. 28) and, consequently, Jesus’ definitive declaration on the cross, “It is finished!” (vs. 30). The use of the perfect tense points to both the reality of the absolutely completed action and to the certain reality of consequences or results of the completed action. Jesus’ work is complete and that reality changes everything! Reminiscent of Genesis 2:1-3 where God finished His work and rested, so here Christ finishes His work, and we have the promise of rest! Tchividjian summarizes the good news of the gospel well: “The gospel is the good news that in His life and by His death and resurrection, Jesus secures for sinners all the approval, all the justification, all the affection, all the freedom, all the meaning, all the righteousness, all the rescue, all the purpose, all the protection we long for.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ The verb translated “accomplished” is the same word translated “finished” in verse 30 (*tetelestai*).

¹²⁹ Tullian Tchividjian, *Unfashionable: Making a Difference in the World by Being Different* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2009), p. 54 as cited in *The Story*, p.90.

The Holy Spirit will lead *every* New Testament writer to provide some further comment, insight, or teaching on the saving work of Jesus. Due to space, only two passages which highlight different elements of Jesus' work will be examined. Afterwards, an examination of an important metaphor used to describe the saving work of Jesus will be provided.¹³⁰

After the discussion of the universality of sin and the reality of the need of salvation for all of humanity in Romans 1-3, the Holy Spirit through Paul provides a concise summary of the gospel message in 3:21-31. Moving through this passage, several critical truths are proclaimed. In verses 21-22, the reality that righteousness is gained only “through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” without distinction of background or ethnicity and “apart from the law” even though it has been “attested by the Law and the Prophets.” In other words, the work of Christ results in the impartation of righteousness to every believer through faith! As the passage continues, two key terms are used by the Holy Spirit to express the work of Jesus further. In verse 24, the declaration that those believing are “justified freely by His grace through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus.” The word redemption was most often connected to the concept of the purchase of freedom for those in slavery. The word conveys the ideas of ransom, purchase, and deliverance. The term was widely understood in the Greek and Roman communities as redeeming someone out of slavery was a well-established legal process.¹³¹ While the purchasing of freedom of a slave was well-known, the slave most often had to provide the funds and the “freedom” often carried conditions or restrictions.¹³² By contrast, this passage in Romans declares that not only was humanity unable to purchase their freedom, but are justified freely—they bring no wages to the table—by grace in the redemptive work of Jesus. Jesus, alone, pays the price of the purchase of free-

¹³⁰ For a more complete survey of the theme of Rescue in every book of the Bible, see Appendix One.

¹³¹ See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 56-68, for a concise summary about slavery in the Hellenistic Roman world.

¹³² *Ibid.* Ferguson describes the most common forms of the manumission (purchasing of freedom) of slaves: slaves could technically purchase their own freedom as they were to be granted a special form of a “wage” (*peculium*) that was recorded and could be saved toward their freedom. This “expectation of manumission was an effective incentive for good service” (p. 57). In reality, slaves rarely earned their freedom until after their usefulness was past. A form of “sacral manumission” existed in which “the slave’s freedom was purchased in a pagan temple in the name of the deity and with funds furnished to the deity by the slave” (p. 58). More often, a slave was granted freedom at the death of the master or in the will of the master, but such arrangements usually included some condition of continued service to the family as a freedman (p. 58).

dom of a humanity bound in the bondage of slavery to sin. Immediately after this incredible declaration, the Holy Spirit declares that “God presented Him as a *propitiation* through faith in His blood...” This second term is more connected to the Jewish backgrounds of sacrifice and worship. It is often translated as “atonement” and conveys the idea of completely covering over so as to remove something—in this case, the sin of humanity. Understand the significance of the placement of these two terms in relationship. Not only is the one believing purchased out of the bondage of sin that has held one in slavery, but the very sin that caused the bondage is engaged and completely removed! The taint of sin is completely blotted out by the blood of Christ so that no penalty of sin remains, and the believer is, thus, declared righteous! As the term is intimately connected to the historic worship of Israel—most notably around Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the Holy Spirit continues with an explanation of the relationship of the atoning work of Jesus and the historic plea for atonement in Israel. God exercised “restraint” and “passed over sins previous committed” (vs. 25). In other words, while the blood of bulls did not achieve true atonement (see also Hebrews 10:4), God accepted the sacrifice of the faithful in anticipation of the true atonement achieved by Christ Jesus. Thus, there was no other means of righteousness in the OT apart from righteousness through faith—achieved by the grace of God in the work of Jesus.

A second passage to consider here is found in 1 Peter 1:3-5 where the Holy Spirit declares three realities which are consequences of the work of Christ. The work of Jesus is a result of the “great mercy” of God and is expressed as a “new birth” (vs 3). The word is quite literally a compound term meaning to be born again. This single compound word obviously echoes Jesus’ phrase to Nicodemus in John 3:7 that one “must be born again.” Jesus’ statement concerning what is necessary becomes a declaration of what is experienced by the follower of Jesus. Those who have been “reborn” experience three realities explained in these verses in 1 Peter: a living hope, a reserved inheritance, and a secured salvation.¹³³ All three expressions were connected to the reality of suffering and persecution being experienced by the church. In response, the follower of Jesus is reminded that because of their rebirth by the grace of God through the work of Jesus, one has a hope that moves beyond death itself. Everlasting life is here declared a direct consequence of Jesus’ resurrection (vs. 3). Further, the true inheritance for the believer is established not in the here

¹³³ James Shields, “The Realities of a Reborn Life” a sermon preached in chapel at Howard Payne University, 1984.

and now of earth, but in the eternal reality of God's heavenly kingdom (vs. 4). Finally, and more importantly, the Christian's salvation is secured not by one's own ability or righteousness but is "protected by God's power" (vs. 5). The salvation of the one who has been reborn by the mercy of God is complete with lasting consequences!

In addition to the terms of redemption, atonement, covenant, justified, declared righteous, and rebirth, the Holy Spirit uses another key metaphor to describe the work of Jesus: the powerful image of adoption.¹³⁴ Not only is the Christian redeemed from slavery but is also adopted as a child of God! The image was particularly striking in the original context as the Roman understanding of adoption was a very important cultural practice:

The person adopted (at any age) was taken out of his previous condition, all old debts were cancelled, and he started a new life in relation of sonship to the new *paterfamilias* [father's family], whose family name he took and to whose inheritance he was entitled. The new father now owned the adoptee's property, controlled his personal relationships, and had the right of discipline, while assuming responsibility for his support and liability for his actions—all just as with natural children born into the home.¹³⁵

The image of adoption is expressed most bluntly by the Holy Spirit in 1 John 3:1: "Look at how great a love the Father has given us, that we should be called God's children. And we are!" The emphasis is completed in the understanding that one is an "heir": "So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal. 4:7).¹³⁶ Interestingly, the understanding of heir (and "co-heir" with Christ) is connected to the reality of suffering in Romans 8:16-17 which will be considered further below. Morgan aptly summarizes the New Testament teaching on salvation:

Apostles such as Paul and Peter also teach about salvation. God the Father plans salvation; the Son accomplishes it; and the Spirit applies it to all who believe in Christ. God chooses, calls, and gives

¹³⁴ See Rom. 8:15: "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father!'" See also, Rom 9:26; Gal 3:25-26.

¹³⁵ Ferguson, pp. 62-63.

¹³⁶ See also Gal 3:29, 4:7; Eph. 3:6; Tit. 3:7; 1 Pet. 3:7.

new life in Christ to believers. God forgives, declares righteous, and adopts into his family all who have faith in Christ. God is making his people holy in Christ and will finally glorify all who know him. God saves out of his generous love and for his glory.¹³⁷

Rescue and Spiritual Beings

All of creation is impacted by the redemptive work of Jesus, the spiritual realm included. The resurrection of Jesus highlights the complete and total defeat of the demonic in the face of the plans of God. In truth, while conflict may exist from the demonic toward God—and by extension the people of God, the battle is unquestionably one sided. As MacDonald notes, “The defeat of the demonic is a theme that saturates the biblical narrative. At nearly every turn, they encounter defeat and failure, which serve as repeated reminders of their approaching doom.”¹³⁸ In other words, while the demonic are still present in the current world, they operate from a position of defeat and are inevitably moving toward their judgment and destruction.

The gospel narratives highlight Jesus’ authority over the demonic repeatedly. From resisting the temptations of the devil to casting out demons, Jesus’ is greater than any opposition. MacDonald asks the question, “How did Jesus defeat Satan so completely?” and looks to Jesus’ declaration in John 12:31-32: “Now is the judgement of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. As for Me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to Myself.”¹³⁹ Beasley-Murray rightly unpacks the power of this statement: “The utterance of Jesus employs a well understood picture to show the change of situation for the world when Jesus was ‘lifted up’ to heaven via the cross: Satan was *dethroned* and the Son of Man *enthroned* over the world for which he died.”¹⁴⁰ Plainly stated, the death of Jesus completely defeated Satan.¹⁴¹ MacDonald concludes:

The cross shatters Satan’s tyranny over this world filled with fear, sin, and death. The death of Christ won freedom from the devil’s

¹³⁷ Morgan, p. 15.

¹³⁸ Scott D. MacDonald, *Demonology for the Global Church: A Biblical Approach in a Multi-cultural Age*, Langham Global Library, 2021, E-format, location 1383.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, location 1411.

¹⁴⁰ As cited in MacDonald, location 1411-1419.

¹⁴¹ See Heb. 2:14-15.

purposes for sin, guilt, condemnation, and death. Christ's victory broke the power of Satan, along with his demonic viceroys, and the nations began to receive the gospel of freedom from death and its master.¹⁴²

While the total destruction of Satan is yet to pass (as will be discussed in the next chapter), he presently moves as one defeated by the work of Jesus Christ our LORD.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESCUE FOR THE FOLLOWER OF JESUS

Throughout the New Testament, the focus on Jesus as the true climax of the biblical narrative—and all of history—is maintained and developed. Jesus is the true Messiah, divine in nature, and through whom God is truly revealed and salvation for humanity is finally achieved. The impact for the Christian is truly amazing and deserves some consideration here. Specifically, one can survey the implications of the work of Jesus on the Christian individually, corporately, and missionally.

Personal Implications for the Follower of Jesus

As one begins to reflect upon the implications of amazing truth of God's rescue of humanity for the individual disciple of Christ, the reality of God's great mercy is incredible. The wondrous saving work of Jesus has lasting impact on the disciple. In truth, Jesus changes everything for the disciple, but a few points of impact for the individual believer should be noted briefly: salvation, identity, and suffering.

Salvation

One cannot over emphasize the amazing grace expressed by the truth, "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us?" (Rom. 5:8). The declaration of awe and wonder is a reminder that humanity brought nothing to credit salvation; rather, salvation is the work of God. Nevertheless, two aspects of salvation and the individual disciple are of interest: the initiation of salvation and the scope of salvation.

¹⁴² MacDonald, location 1424-1427.

While salvation is clearly understood as the work of God, the engagement of individuals in the call of Christ is not absent. Some actions can be consistently identified in response to the question of salvation. For example, at the completion of Peter's sermon at Pentecost, when he was asked by those gathered "what must we do?" he responded with a command "Repent... and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). One should note, however, that later in the same book, baptism is only expressed after belief (8:36ff) and the presence of the Holy Spirit (10:44-48). Passages such as these provide a clear understanding that baptism is a response to the experience of salvation and not a required work for salvation. Is there a consistent required element that can be identified? In Acts 16, the jailer pointedly asks Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Their reply is short: "Believe on the LORD Jesus, and you will be saved..." (16:31). The narrative continues with Paul and Silas speaking the message of the LORD to everyone in his house, resulting in responses of faith. The critical "action" then seems to be faith or belief. This truth is reflected elsewhere such as John 1:12, "But to all who did receive Him [Jesus], He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name..." and Romans 10:8b-9, "This is the message of faith that we proclaim: if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is LORD,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Elsewhere, the Holy Spirit declares the connection of righteousness to faith (Rom. 1:17), that to the one who "...believes on Him who declares righteous the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). Jesus also expresses the importance of faith to Nicodemus in John 3:36: "The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him." Note that Jesus also identifies the "default" position of humanity as one of wrath. The importance of faith is further noted in that we have peace with God through faith (Rom. 5:1); we experience unspeakable joy through faith (1 Peter 1:8); faith leads to victory over the world (1 John 5:4); the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:2) and the indwelling of Christ in our heart (Eph. 3:17) are by faith. One begins to grasp why the Holy Spirit, reflecting upon the actions of the Christian, concludes "...everything that is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23) or, after speaking about Enoch, concludes: "Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

Less one feel that “faith” should be seen as a work applied toward salvation, the Holy Spirit reminds us that even the “measure of faith” is apportioned by God (Rom. 12:3). So, one has no reason to boast; rather, the Holy Spirit declares “For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift...” (Eph. 2:8). Two aspects of this saving faith should be noted. First, faith is placed in Jesus—both the realization of his divine person who is our LORD and the response to his saving work as our Saviour which results in our justification! Second, faith is not a simple agreement with facts as the Holy Spirit warns through James, “You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe—and they shudder” (James 2:19). As one commentator noted, “Faith is the step between promise and assurance.”¹⁴³ Faith is not a groundless belief; rather, “faith is not believing in something you can’t prove as so many people define it. It is, biblically speaking, *reliance*. A rock solid, truth-grounded, promise-founded trust in the risen Jesus to save you from sin.”¹⁴⁴ Faith, then, is expressed as such reliance on God alone that it manifests in action moving beyond being only hearers of the word (James 1:22ff).

A second aspect of the salvation of the disciple of Jesus that should be considered is the scope of salvation. The completeness of salvation is assured not based upon our ability to be obedient to the commands of God, but upon the totality of the work of Jesus. There is no lack in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The Holy Spirit through Paul will connect the work of the Holy Spirit in the reason for our confidence: “In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—in Him when you believed—were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:13-14).¹⁴⁵ The believer is not only quickened to life by the Spirit but sealed and guarantees the full scope of salvation. The truth of one’s justification through Christ can be expressed as salvation from the *penalty* of sin. While the Christian experiences salvation, is justified before God, and is indwelt by the Spirit of God, the struggle with sin continues as discussed in Romans 7:13-25. For this reason, the believer is commanded to pursue sanctification as seen in God’s command to “Be holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16). There is an expectation that

¹⁴³ “1 Kgs. 17:13-16” in *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012), p. 715.

¹⁴⁴ Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), p.42 as cited in *The Story: Guide, Leaders Edition* (Bloomington, IL: SpreadTruth Publishing, 2011), p.89.

¹⁴⁵ See also, 2 Cor. 1:22 and 5:5 where the Holy Spirit is also called a down payment.

regardless of the struggle with sin, the disciple can experience salvation from the *power* of sin in one's daily life. Indeed, the Holy Spirit declares bluntly: "... this is God's will, your sanctification..." (1 The. 4:3) and begins to list a number of actions that need to be avoided and some practices that must be pursued. Lest one conclude that sanctification is solely the work of the Christian, the Holy Spirit reminds "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to will and to act for His good purpose" (Phil. 2:12b-13). Note the dynamic of cooperative work with God in one's life that is only enabled because of God! One is called to surrender to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the instruction of God's word. God provides the means, and the believer is called to submit and obey. One illustration is a comparison between a sailboat and a motorboat. While a motorboat can move under its own power, the sailboat is dependent upon the moving of the wind. In the same manner, the Christian is dependent on the working of God through His Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. At the same time, sailing a boat is not a passive exercise; rather, the sailor must position the sails to best catch the wind. So, too, the Christian is called to position their life according to Scriptural instruction and the moving of the Spirit of God. Such positioning involves meditation on the Scriptures of God as the only lasting true revelation of God to humanity, spending time in prayer, and actively obeying the commands of Christ. One final aspect of the scope of the work of salvation for the Christian is seen in the ultimate hope that after death or when Christ returns, the disciple of Jesus will be raised to life in the New Heaven and New Earth. As a result of this glorification, the Christian will be removed from the very *presence* of all sin. This reality will be considered more fully in the next chapter.

New Identity

One of the great promises expressed in Scripture is "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). In truth, one is a new creation through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit quickens to life the spiritually dead so that one is "raised to new life." Similarly, the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to joyfully declare "...I have been crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:19b-20). One should not mistakenly believe that such new life means that one is free to do whatever one desires or that one is now the master of their own life. Rather, the

identity of the Christian is bound to Jesus as their LORD. Consequently, Jesus defines the manner of life for his followers—one’s freedom is found in the freedom to obey Christ and follow him fully; the freedom to avoid sin which entangles and to run the race which God lays out for us!¹⁴⁶ There is movement from slavery to sin to being “enslaved” to God: “But now, since you have been liberated from sin and become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the end is eternal life!” (Rom. 6:22). In other words, a Christian’s entire identity is to be understood in connection to God. Because of the saving work of Christ, the disciple is free to avoid sin and follow God boldly! Such images of “child of God” and “servant of God” help to express this new identity of dependence and obedience. One’s identity, then, is won by Christ and expressed through faithful, obedient living with a desire to see God glorified in our life and work. A further element of this new identity is the corporate reality as one of the “people of God” which will be discussed below.

Suffering and the Christian

One of the false understandings of the work of Jesus in the life of the Christian is that the true follower of Jesus will not experience any suffering or hardship. Such false teaching will suggest that the exertion of faith which yields the name of Jesus should be able to cast aside any illness, hardship, or persecution. The truth, however, is that suffering is an expectation for the follower of Jesus: “In fact, all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). Jesus, himself, tells his followers to expect hardship, persecution, and suffering—for his name’s sake! In other words, the Christian can expect to experience suffering or persecution if they are faithfully following Jesus! As Jesus warns his disciples, if the world hated him, it will hate his disciples. The Holy Spirit declares, “Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13), although the Greek grammar employed in the statement can be more accurately translated, “Stop being surprised, brothers, since the world hates you!”¹⁴⁷ Since many rabbis taught that one only suffered due to sin or disobedience, as expressed by the friends of Job who were convinced Job’s suffering had to be the result of sin, the early church struggled with the reality of suffering as

¹⁴⁶ See Heb. 12:1-3 which is the climactic transition toward the application of the faith discussed in Heb. 11.

¹⁴⁷ Grammatically, the present imperative with the negative indicates a command to stop doing something that one is currently doing. Alternately, the aorist subjunctive with a negative would be a call to not even begin to do something. Further, the use of a first-class conditional sentence (noted in the use of the indicative verb form) indicates a situation in which the condition is already met “since” not “if”.

a consequence of being faithful and obedient to God! Furthermore, the New Testament also expresses the normality of suffering for the Christian—to suffer is not unusual; rather, it is normal!

The certainty of suffering, however, does not remove the anxiety, fear, or doubt that could arise. The question of how to respond to persecution and suffering that occurred due to faithful obedience of the disciple became a critical issue addressed in many of the later New Testament writings such as the prison letters of Paul, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation. These letters and books all engage the issue of suffering to some degree and provide some understanding as to how the Christian should view this expected suffering. Three primary responses are found consistently. First, the call for a greater perspective. The Holy Spirit declares through Peter that current sufferings and trials should be seen as “a little while” in comparison to the hope of eternity (see 1 Peter 1:6ff). The certainty of life beyond the here and now was established in the resurrection of Jesus and provided an unshakeable hope for the Christian. The Holy Spirit will inspire Paul to declare the implications of resurrection and our hope in 1 Corinthians 15, calling the Christian to serve God boldly without fear. A second response is the revelation that suffering has value for the Christian. The Christian is told that suffering results in such traits as a refined faith (1 Peter 1:6-8) or endurance that produces maturity (James 1:2-4). The Holy Spirit will lead the writer of Hebrews to shift the very word for suffering from words for pain (such as *lupē*) to that of discipline (*paideia*)—a suffering which is comparable to an athlete who suffers the hardship of difficult training with the goal of competing well. Similarly, the Holy Spirit calls for the Christian to understand trials as this type of discipline and training from the LORD:

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, so that you won't grow weary and lose heart...Endure it as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there whom a father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had natural fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but He does it for our benefit, so that we can share His holiness. No discipline seems enjoyable

at the time, put painful. Later on, however, it yields the fruit of peace and righteousness to those who have been trained by it.¹⁴⁸

As mentioned above, the Holy Spirit through Paul also connects the certainty of suffering with the disciple's position as adopted heir: "The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—*seeing that we suffer with Him* so that we may also be glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:16-17, emphasis added). This statement connects three realities which have been discussed so far: the normalcy of suffering for the believer due to the relationship with Jesus, the reality of a purpose—in this case our complete association with Jesus as experienced in the promised glorification, and the understanding of perspective as such a purpose will only be experienced beyond the here and now of this life and world. One is also encouraged to view the pastoral dimension of enduring suffering as The Holy Spirit will inspire Paul to declare in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 that the sufferings he endured enabled him to comfort others who suffered. In addition to perspective and purpose found within the normalcy of suffering, a final explanation for trials is connected to the plan of God. In Revelation 5, the vision granted John shows God in possession of a scroll filled completely with writing on both sides (5:1)—indicating the completed history of humanity in God's hands. As Jesus opens the seals of this scroll in the ensuing chapters, great suffering falls upon the earth—including the people of God. One realizes that this suffering is connected to the plans of God. Sometimes, then, suffering and hardship are connected to God's activity for God's greater purpose. For the Christian who encounters suffering, hardship, or persecution, the promises of the presence of God and the eternal security of God enable the disciple to echo the words of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:28, 37-39:

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose...No, in all these things we are more than victorious through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death or life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our LORD!

¹⁴⁸ Heb. 12:3, 7-11.

Implications of Community for the Follower of Jesus

The results of the work of Jesus are not only experienced on the personal level for the Christian; rather, an entirely new corporate identity is created. The Christian is drawn into the people of God, the Church. The Church is established as the visible people of God across ethnic, geographic, and social lines. Every believer is brought into the “body of Christ” as a member. Every person is gifted within the church for the mission of the church to the glory and purpose of God. As Morgan aptly summarizes:

The early church “devote[d] [itself] to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). The early church is involved in evangelism (vv. 38-41), sharing the gospel with those who do not know Christ as the means of salvation. The church is committed to discipleship, instructing believers in how to follow Jesus as a way of life. The church is devoted to fellowship (vv. 42-47), sharing life together, knowing one another, loving one another. The church is also involved in ministry (vv. 42-46), praying for one another, giving to one another, meeting each other’s needs. The church is active in worship (v. 46), praising God, publicly meeting together, and privately teaching, praying, giving, and partaking of food together. The church grows and faces persecution, but the gospel keeps spreading. Some Jews and many Gentiles trust Christ, churches are planted, and the cycle continues. Along the way, the churches teach sound doctrine, correct error, and call believers to live in love, unity, holiness, and truth.¹⁴⁹

This radical new association becomes a new identity for every believer. A great number of descriptions can be found to describe this new community: body of Christ,¹⁵⁰ household of God,¹⁵¹ a spiritual house,¹⁵² bride of Christ,¹⁵³ and many others. The Christian, then, has not only a radical intimacy with the Holy Spirit,

¹⁴⁹ Morgan, p. 15.

¹⁵⁰ See 1 Cor. 12:27ff; Eph. 4:4, 15-16; Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 1:18.

¹⁵¹ See Eph. 2:19; 2 Tim. 3:15. Similarly, the “family of God” is present in 2 Cor. 6:18.

¹⁵² See 1 Pet. 2:5 where the Christian is called “spiritual blocks” which are being built into this spiritual house to offer spiritual sacrifices. The idea is also present in Eph. 2:19-22.

¹⁵³ See Eph. 5:25-27.

but a new familial community in which to worship God, grow into a mature disciple, fellowship with other believers, and through which to serve God, go out to those who do not know God, and proclaim this good news of Jesus to the nations.

Missional Implications for the Follower of Jesus

As one whose identity is determined by God, the disciple of Jesus also has one's purpose and mission determined by God. These directions are provided by understanding both the desire of God and the command of Christ. God expresses his desire in a couple of complementary statements. First, God intentionally moves and acts for His glory. Throughout the biblical narrative, God declares that His actions reflect His glory, reveal His glory, and display His glory.¹⁵⁴ It is understandable, then, that the follower of Jesus should seek to do "...everything for God's glory" (1 Cor. 10:31b). God's desire for His glory to be seen in all the earth should call the Christian to live and serve in such a way that God's glory is seen. One way to live out this motivation to see God's glory fill the earth is for the disciple of Jesus to be driven by God's desire for humanity. The Father's heart must shape the disciple's heart! The Holy Spirit calls us to heed what pleases "God our Saviour, who wants [desires] everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, a man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:3b-5). God's desire for all to be saved must provide the missional direction for the disciple's actions and focus.

Additionally, the follower of Jesus ought to be directed by the commands of Jesus. In terms of mission and direction, Jesus' final commission of his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 provides clear purpose:

Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe

¹⁵⁴ God states that His glory is the end purpose of many actions including creating humanity (Isa. 43:6-7), choosing Israel (Jer. 13:11), rescuing Israel from Egypt (Psa. 106:7-8), and calling His people (Eph. 1:4-6). Similarly, Jesus describes many actions to the glory of God: the rationale for good deeds (Mat. 5:16), enduring suffering of the cross (John 12:27-28), and welcoming Christians into His fellowship (Rom. 15:7). The work of the Holy Spirit is characterized as bringing glory to Jesus (John 16:14).

everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Several key elements should be noted. First, the reason this task is the primary mission of the disciple is because “all authority” belongs to Jesus—and He commanded this task of His followers! C. Welton Gaddy in his sermon on the “Why” of the Great Commission declared that the authority of Jesus establishes the priority of the disciple, provides the ability of the disciple, and shapes the identity of the disciple.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, the follower of Jesus has no position to decline the command of the LORD! Second, the fulfillment of the commission requires the disciple to “go out.” The grammar indicates that wherever one should go, this task is to be engaged! Thirdly, the specific call is to “make disciples” which involves both the evangelizing and leading them to faith as seen in the call to baptize them, and the equipping and training as seen in the command to teach them to obey. Finally, this task is to continue as a primary focus for the disciple until the end of the age. Morgan summarizes the mission of the Christian:

Jesus directs his disciples to take the gospel to all nations to fulfill God’s promise to Abraham to bless all peoples through him. His disciples are to make disciples of others, who will then make disciples of still others. On the day of Pentecost, Jesus sends his Spirit, who forms the church as the New Testament people of God. The Spirit empowers the church to bear witness to Christ among the nations.¹⁵⁶

One final critical observation is that the Holy Spirit endows the Christian with spiritual gifts;¹⁵⁷ thus, empowering the believer to be able to accomplish the mission of God. The follower of Jesus, then, is given a new purpose which is to make disciples, thus glorifying God through the proclamation of His work of salvation!

THE IMPACT OF RESCUE ON OTHER BIBLICAL THEMES

The life and work of Jesus as the promised Messiah and the Saviour of the world provides the true climax of the unfolding plotline of the biblical metanar-

¹⁵⁵ C. Welton Gaddy in *The Minister’s Manual, 1994 Edition*, Ed James W. Cox (San Francisco: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1993).

¹⁵⁶ Morgan, p. 15.

¹⁵⁷ See 1 Cor. 12: 4-11 and Eph. 4:11-13 for a list of gifts and explanation of purpose.

rative—after the devastation of the fall, only the saving work of God could rescue.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, the work achieved through Christ Jesus our LORD provides climactic understanding for the themes which have been unfolding in the biblical narrative. As with the previous chapters, the biblical themes of Temple/Tabernacle and the presence of God, Image of God in humanity, Kingdom of God, and Covenant will be re-examined in light of the redemptive work of Jesus in the Rescue.

Impact of Rescue on the Role of Temple and the Presence of God

In the Gospels, Jesus provides clear understanding that the relationship with the Temple was changing as he completed his work. In the Gospel of Mark, the Temple is compared to a fig tree that did not bear fruit—and was subsequently cursed by Jesus, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” (Mark 11:14). The Temple is understood to be like a barren fig tree without fruit from which “no one will ever eat again.”¹⁵⁹ In the Gospel of John, Jesus describes himself as one who will replace the Temple in answer to the Jews asking for some indication of his authority to drive the money changers out of the Temple:

So the Jews replied to Him, “What sign of authority will You show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered, “Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days.” ...But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that he had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made” (John 2:18-19, 21-22).

While this promised reality of the physical destruction of the Temple is explicitly declared by Jesus to his disciples on Mt Olivet,¹⁶⁰ Jesus had also related

¹⁵⁸ Such a statement does not ignore the reality that more of the narrative is yet to come; however, the consummation better reflects the results and lasting impact of the Rescue rather than the climax. Jesus’ victory is the climactic action and the consummation to come is part of the resolution of what was accomplished.

¹⁵⁹ The association of the fig tree and the Temple is accomplished through the use of a loose chiasm (ABA) with the cursing of the fig tree (vv. 12-14), the cleansing of the Temple (vv. 15-19), and the evidence of the withered fig tree (vv. 20-26). The thematic “sandwich” intimately connects the centre teaching with the *inclusio* formed by the repeated topic of the fig tree.

¹⁶⁰ See Matt. 24:2ff and Mark 13:2ff.

the passing of the role of the Temple as a place of worship to the Samaritan woman in John 4. When she asked if people must travel to Jerusalem to worship God, Jesus replied, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (4:21). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all specifically relate that “the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom” (Matt 27:51) at the exact moment of Jesus death. The curtain was “so the veil will make a separation for you between the holy place and the most holy place” (Exo. 26: 33b). Lanier draws the connection between this event and the statement in Hebrews 9:23, “For the Messiah did not enter a sanctuary made with the hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, that He might now appear in the presence of God for us.”¹⁶¹ The realization that the earthly temple was but a representation of the true temple in heaven is significant for Jesus as the true high priest offers himself as the true sacrifice in the presence of God in the true temple. Lanier concludes that this rending of the veil, then, accomplished three realities: judgement on the Temple system; new access to the Father in Christ; and Christ’s entrance into the Heavenly (noted above).¹⁶² The perceived barrier between the presence of the holy God and his people was removed. This reality, however, is not the only new understanding of Temple found in the New Testament.

The appearance of the Holy Spirit in Acts completely changed the understanding of the presence of God for the Christian. While the Old Testament narrative of the dedication of the Temple by Solomon relates how the presence of God filled the sanctuary so that none could enter as “the glory of the LORD filled the temple” (1 Kings 8:11), the very Spirit of God now indwells the Christian! The follower of Jesus is never removed from the presence of God as a result of the complete effective atoning work of Jesus! As a result, the Christian is now effectively seen as the Temple: “Don’t you know that you are God’s sanctuary [temple] and that the Spirit of God lives in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16) and “Do you not know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The reality of the presence of the Spirit of God indwelling the believer has repercussions for how one is to live. Because the Spirit, himself, indwells the Christian, the opportuni-

¹⁶¹ Greg Lanier, “Curtain Torn in Two: What Did the Tearing of the Veil Accomplish?” *The Gospel Coalition Website*, 2 April 2021. Accessed at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/veil-torn-jesus-cross/> 29 October 2021.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

ty to bring glory to God in one's life has now reached new potential. This reality does not only impact the individual believer, but also the corporate identity is framed in terms of the wondrous new temple: "you, yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

The Kingdom of God

The connection between the kingdom of God and the work of Jesus is unmistakable as Jesus brings the topic of the kingdom of God or kingdom of Heaven into the centre of discussion throughout his ministry. The synoptic gospels have 76 different kingdom sayings!¹⁶³ The first recorded summary of Jesus' preaching highlights this reality: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Some of the other conditions or demands of the kingdom include:¹⁶⁴ childlike faith,¹⁶⁵ possible sacrifice of possessions,¹⁶⁶ and entrance by the narrow gate.¹⁶⁷ The Gospel of Matthew has more focus on the kingdom providing the most nuanced picture of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom.¹⁶⁸ Matthew relates that both John the Baptist and Jesus calls for people to repent in the face of the coming kingdom of heaven (3:2; 4:17). The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) has as a central command "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" and describes the nature of being a citizen of the kingdom of God.¹⁶⁹ The nature of this kingdom is described in over a dozen parables by Jesus in which the

¹⁶³ C.C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God/Heaven" *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* J.B. Green, S. McKnight, I.H. Marshall (eds) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 417-430, p.425. Includes references to kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven, and kingdom. If one includes all the parallel passages, the number increases to 103: Matthew (50); Mark (14); Luke (39) (Ibid. pp. 425-426).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 424, for a fuller discussion on the conditions and demands of the kingdom.

¹⁶⁵ Matt, 18:3; Mark 10:14.

¹⁶⁶ Mark 10:21-27.

¹⁶⁷ Matt. 7:13-14.

¹⁶⁸ Caragounis, p. 427-428. Caragounis suggests Matthew is both richer and more nuanced than Mark; Luke is considered somewhere between as being richer than Mark but less nuanced than Matthew. He further notes that Matthew has 32 unique kingdom sayings.

¹⁶⁹ Dockery and Garland structure their commentary on the Sermon on the Mount around the call to be citizens of the kingdom of God: The Character and Influence of Kingdom Citizens (5:3-16); The Righteousness of Kingdom Citizens (5:17-48); The Genuineness of Kingdom Citizens (6:1-18); The Security of Kingdom Citizens (6:19-34); The Relationships of Kingdom Citizens (7:1-12); and The Commitment of Kingdom Citizens (7:13-27). David S. Dockery & David E. Garland, *Seeking the Kingdom: The Sermon on the Mount Made Practical for Today* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1992).

kingdom is closely connected to the preaching of the gospel:¹⁷⁰ the most highly valued thing one could encounter,¹⁷¹ has dynamic to impact the world around it,¹⁷² and grows as a result of the work of the Spirit.¹⁷³

The kingdom has both present and future as the “already” and “not yet” tension is expressed. While much of the language reflects the impact of the church here and now under the LORDship of Jesus, the connection of the Son of Man with the coming kingdom¹⁷⁴ seems to carry a future expectation of the kingdom’s expanse to “every people, nation, and language” of the prophecy given to Daniel (Dan. 7:14). Jesus, then, has inaugurated the kingdom of God in the completion of his work. As a result, a new kingdom not bound by people, geography, or politics is established by God. Every believer as a child of God is incorporated into this people of God which comprise the kingdom of God. This truth reflects the “already” of the kingdom—the kingdom of God is currently moving under the LORDship of Christ Jesus to accomplish the mission of God for the glory of God. The consummation of the kingdom is yet to come and will be considered more fully in the next chapter.

The Image of God

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Fall did not “un-create” humanity in the image of God; rather, the image of God was marred due to the impact of sin. Rescue, then, restores to humanity the role of image bearer. The regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in restoring life to the spiritually dead, also restores the true potential and nature of being created in the image of God. This reality enables the believer to put aside one’s old life as the Holy Spirit reminded the Colossians through Paul, “Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with his practices and have put on the new man who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator” (Col. 3:9-10). While this verse makes a reference to the image of God, most of the declarations about

¹⁷⁰ See the parable of the sower and the soils (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23).

¹⁷¹ See the parables of the pearl of great price and the hidden treasure (Matthew 13: 44-46).

¹⁷² See the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (Matthew 13:31-33).

¹⁷³ See the parable of the growing seed (Mark 4:26-29).

¹⁷⁴ Matthew 16:28, “...There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” can be argued as a reference to a time contemporary for the disciples who see the resurrected Jesus and the inauguration of the kingdom. But the requests of the mother of James and John to have special recognition in the kingdom and Jesus’ response does have a more eschatological feel (see Matt. 20:20-28).

our renewed image centre on Jesus. One is given both a present expectation of being “conformed to the image” of Jesus in Romans 8:29 as well as a future expectation that the Christian “will also bear the image of the heavenly man” (1 Cor. 15:49). In other words, “The image of God is not just being restored in us, but we are also being made into *the image of Jesus*. We are being ‘conformed’ to Jesus’ image, ‘transformed . . . from one degree of glory to another.’ And this is the work of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).”¹⁷⁵ The dynamic of the “already” completed and the “not yet” completed is evident as the process of being conformed to the image of Christ continues. Yet, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciple provides assurance of the progress. Consequently, one can echo the same hope expressed in 1 John 3:2: “Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, *we will be like Him*, because we will see Him as He is.”¹⁷⁶ While the struggle with sin may be real, the hope of our victory is even greater!

New Covenant

One of the great promises of God is found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 where God declares that he will create a new covenant. The rationale given is not that God’s previous covenants were faulty; rather, the problem was clearly with the inability of humanity to remain in covenant with God—even the first generation out of the Exodus was guilty of breaking God’s covenant (vs. 32). The covenant promised is radically different in that it will be internalized and be written “on their hearts” (vs. 33) so that no longer will one need to be told to ‘know God’ and experience forgiveness (vs. 34). Jesus will highlight the establishment of the new covenant as his work. Jesus specifically connects his blood with the establishment of the new covenant during the last supper with his disciples: “Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks, He gave it to them and said, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood that establishes the covenant; it is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Mat. 26: 27-28). The Holy Spirit through the writer of Hebrews identifies the establishment of the New Covenant as a key focus of the priestly work of Jesus, the perfect High Priest, in Hebrews 8-10. The New Covenant established through the blood of Christ is, thus, understood

¹⁷⁵ Zachary Garris, “The Image of God—Fallen and Restored” on Knowing Scripture Website, 5 April 2017. Accessed at: <https://knowingscripture.com/articles/the-image-of-god-fallen-and-restored> on 30 Oct 2021.

¹⁷⁶ Emphasis added.

to be complete and permanent, again, in contrast to the imperfect nature of the blood of bulls or goats (10:4). The New Covenant not only establishes the forgiveness of sins (10:17-18), but also intimacy with God which calls us to live in godliness (10:19ff). In other words, the work of Jesus results in a renewed covenantal relationship with God that supersedes all previous relationships!

Covenant of Marriage Restored

Two aspects of marriage need to be considered due to the radical Rescue of humanity by God. Both aspects are found in Ephesians 5:22-33. The first—and critical—aspect occurs near the end of the passage when the image of marriage as applied to the relationship of Christ and the church. In repeating the initial declaration regarding marriage from Genesis 2 (vs. 31), the Holy Spirit declares, “This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church” (vs. 32). In other words, the marriage covenant is uniquely qualified to serve as an image of the desired relationship between God and the corporate body of Christians. This type of imagery is not unknown in the biblical narrative as the nation of Israel was often compared to the bride of God—usually described as adulterous due to Israel’s worship of other gods.¹⁷⁷ By contrast, the “adulterous wife” of Israel is replaced with the “pure bride” of the Church. John the Baptist will use the image of Jesus as the groom while he (John the Baptist) is only the friend of the groom (John 3:28-30). Jesus will use the metaphor of a wedding procession¹⁷⁸ and wedding feast¹⁷⁹ to describe his second coming. The ultimate presentation of the church as the spotless bride is a moment of celebration! Marriage, then, is seen as a clear picture of the intimacy between Jesus and the church. The metaphor is also extended to the new Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2) where the source of joy is that God will be dwelling with His people!

This imagery provides the foundation for the statements regarding the restoration of marriage in Ephesians 5. The second critical aspect is that Christ and the church becomes the model for the relationship of husband to wife. The passage begins with an admonition for the wife to submit to her husband which would have been considered a normal expression, culturally. The rationale

¹⁷⁷ The Book of Hosea is built around this image as God uses Hosea’s relationship with his adulterous wife, Gomer, as an example of how Israel has treated the covenant with God. The metaphor is found in other OT passages as well: Jer. 3:1, 6, 20; 16:32; Eze. 16:2ff.

¹⁷⁸ Matt. 25:1-13

¹⁷⁹ Matt. 22:1-14.

is given in terms of service to God, “as unto the LORD,” which provides a new lens through which one is to see the marriage relationship. The wife’s relationship to her husband becomes an opportunity of worship. The relationship of Christ to the church is seen as the paradigm for the woman to her husband in the covenant of marriage. The shocking revelation for the Ephesians is found in verse 25 and following when the husband is also given expectations toward his wife! Within the Greco-Roman culture, the husband was to “rule” their household as “order in the household would produce order in society.”¹⁸⁰ While most Greeks and Romans would argue that “wives should subject themselves to their husbands and husbands should tenderly rule their wives the way the soul rules the body,”¹⁸¹ the Holy Spirit declares a more stringent obligation for the husband: “Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ loved the church...*” (vs 25, emphasis added). As with the wife, the husband’s behaviour toward his wife is to be an act of worship. By fulfilling the role, one honours God. In case one did not know the depths of Christ’s love for the church, the passage continues noting that Jesus gave his life for the church with the purpose of making her holy “and cleansing her in the washing of water by the word” (vs. 26). The result is that the church is presented as a bride without blemish. With Christ as the model, the husband is commanded to love to the degree he loves his own body. This discussion is completed with the repetition of God’s description of the covenantal relationship of marriage as first expressed in Genesis 2:24 and repeated by Jesus in Matthew 19:5: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” The three-fold repetition of God’s ideal of marriage across the biblical metanarrative is significant. God is reinforcing this distinct relationship. Further, the understanding of the marriage relationship as intimately reflective of the divine relationship with the church moves the marriage covenant more clearly into a covenantal relationship before God. The fulfillment of the marriage covenant now becomes expressly connected to the worship of God.

¹⁸⁰ C.S. Keener, “Marriage” *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds* C.A. Evans & S.E. Porter (eds.) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 680-693, p. 687. Keener also notes that “Aristotle had established household codes to advise aristocratic men how to rule their wives, children, and slaves” (Ibid). Paul adapts the content of the codes but retains their structure “possibly to help Christians witness within their culture” (Ibid).

¹⁸¹ Ibid. The reference is originally found in Plutarch’s *Bride* 33, *Mor.* 142E and cited by Keener.

RESCUE AND OTHER WORLDVIEWS

African Traditional Religions (ATRs)

The gospel arrived in Sub-Saharan Africa more than three centuries ago. One would expect that Christianity would have been firmly established without major distortions. The presence of African Traditional Religion, however, has proved to be a potent challenge to biblical Christianity. Adamo correctly observes that “Even today, many who claimed conversion to Christianity still patronises priests of ATR.”¹⁸² Our immediate interest in this space is to highlight the idea of salvation in ATR and demonstrate a way of reaching members of this worldview with the gospel. Therefore, to articulate the sufficiency of the biblical teaching of rescue, one will first need to grasp the concept of Salvation in African Traditional Religion. Thus, the crucial questions which must be answered are: “What are adherents of ATR seeking to be saved from?” and “How is salvation achieved?” To best understand the dynamics of these questions, one must first have a good knowledge of the principal themes of their worldview, including a grasp of their problems, needs and aspirations.¹⁸³ This knowledge begins with an understanding of the cosmological hierarchy that is an essential characteristic of ATRs.¹⁸⁴

The Hierarchy of the Spiritual Realms

When speaking of salvation with adherents of African Traditional Religions, some critical foundational beliefs must be understood for genuine communication to occur. One of the most critical elements is the understanding of the spirit world and its impact on this world. More specifically, an understanding of a definite hierarchy.

The essential belief of the highest power as the Supreme Being who is the head of all things—the creator and the controller, the everlasting, the omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and ever-acting God—is not questioned in ATRs.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the notion of the creation of human beings with the

¹⁸² Adamo, D.T., 2011. ‘Christianity and the African Traditional Religion(s): The postcolonial round of engagement’, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32(1), Art. #285, p. 10.

¹⁸³ Nyamiti, C., 1984, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*. Mambo Press, Gweru, Harare. p. 68.

¹⁸⁴ Some of these elements have been noted in earlier chapters but are brought together here to provide a foundation for the understanding of goals of “salvation” in most ATR expressions.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter 1 above for further explanation.

potential to relate to this God is foundational in ATR—even though the precise way of that creation varies from place to place.¹⁸⁶ Adamo points out the perceived importance of this relationship:

To be a human being is to share a sense of a community. What makes a human being is incorporated in the ‘complex unity of the tribe, outside of which all others are strangers and inferiors, if not enemies.’... This relationship can be extended to the invisible world, the spirit world in all the hierarchical order, namely God, Deity and Ancestors... When there is estrangement between God and the spirit beings, there is a need to pacify and recapture the lost relationship between God and humankind by sacrifice, performing rituals and medicine.¹⁸⁷

In ATR next in rank to the Supreme Being, God, are the divinities. These divinities were brought to life by the Supreme Being. All the divinities are subordinates and work as mediators between the Supreme Being and the rest of the universe, including human beings. They have no power of their own except what the Supreme Being allows them to perform.

The third tier of existence in ATR is the spirit world into which every person aspires to reach, namely the spirit realm of one’s ancestors. If one can reach this realm, one will be venerated by one’s descendants as an ancestor. “Therefore, ancestors are people who have made it to the spirit land and are venerated by their descendants. They are regarded as part of the elders of the families with enhanced powers to bless, protect or punish the families” explains Oborji.¹⁸⁸ Thus in ATR ancestral veneration, ancestors function as mediators between God and the members of their families.

Spirits are fourth in the chain of command in the ATR hierarchy. Spirits, according to ATR belief are ghostly entities, which belong to different groups of beings than the divinities. Spirits are anthropomorphically understood as if they are abstract beings. It is believed that they can become anything, such as objects or human beings and can also evaporate into vapour at any moment

¹⁸⁶ G.H. Muzorewa, G.H., 1985. *The Origin and Development of African Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

¹⁸⁷ D.T. Adamo, p. 10 pages.

¹⁸⁸ E.A. Oborji, “In Dialogue with African Traditional Religion: New Horizon,” *Mission Studies* 19(1), 2002, p. 37.

in time.¹⁸⁹ In ATR, it is generally thought that everything has spirits and that these spirits also have classifications such as ghost-spirits, born-to-die spirits, spirits of witches, the guardian spirits, and diviner spirits. Belief in these spirits pervades the life of Africans and should not be easily dismissed as sheer superstition.¹⁹⁰

Salvation in African Indigenous Religion

As mentioned above, two important questions must be answered regarding the notion of salvation among ATRs: “From what is one trying to be saved?” and “How is this salvation achieved?” To these questions, a third can be raised: “Is there an ultimate goal of salvation?”

Saved from What?

The main goal in ATR worldview is the quest for life and its security. Life in ATR is understood as “continuum, with a dynamism of rhythm and circles that follows the process of birth, death and rebirth.”¹⁹¹ Salvation as expressed in most ATRs cannot be understood without a grasp on the nature of evil. Evil in ATR consists of both physical and moral evil. Simply stated, their god is the one who brings into the world what is good on one hand, but human being causes evil to themselves and others on the other hand. In ATR, evil constitutes *any misfortune* which happens to a person or community or “any voluntary anti-social behaviour or any infringement of the decrees of God, the deity or the ancestors.”¹⁹² In ATR, therefore, evil is broadly understood as the doing of “evil spirits, witches, sorcerers or evil eye, broken taboos, oaths or even the deity or ancestors.”¹⁹³ Interestingly, though, ATR adherents hold that when their god or divinities or ancestors permit evil, it is often punitive, disciplinary or corrective.

Salvation in ATR consists in freedom from evil powers that hindered human beings from achieving well-being.¹⁹⁴ The ATR holistic worldview focusses on how the spirit world invades the visible world to hamper or promote human prospering. Evil spirits are meant to harm people and, consequently, ATR ad-

¹⁸⁹ D.T. Adamo, “The Church in Africa and African Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices, Rel. D. dissertation, Indiana Christian University, 1983.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Marius Nel, “The African background of Pentecostal Theology: A critical Perspective,” *In die Skriflig* 53(4), 2019, p. 6.

herents are constantly seeking ways of defending themselves from these dangers.¹⁹⁵ For example, the Aushi of Zambia say that “God is the one who saved them from disasters, especially wars, in the course of their history.”¹⁹⁶ The concept of salvation in ATR is about being rescued from all calamitous circumstances and all forms of evil and suffering in human life.

How to Be Saved?

ATR followers are not only concerned about the origins of evil, but also must deal with it. One must first understand the cause of any experienced suffering. Such investigation usually involves advice from ancestors or a spirit power person. It is at this juncture that propitiatory sacrifices become a major means to rescue themselves from repercussions of evil. These sacrifices may involve offering blood, whether of human beings, animals or birds or giving other gifts like food, oil, water, milk, money, etc. Often blood becomes involved in the sacrificial system of ATR when there is a calamitous incidence of evil, such as multiple misfortunes or deaths in a personal, familial, or community life. Hence, sacrifices also become the way of restoring communion with the Supreme Being, deities, ancestors, and the environment. Much of religious life among adherents of ATRs is trying to discern the reason for hardship and suffering and making restitution so one can be “saved” out of any immediate calamity. On the other side, one may try to avoid calamity by seeking advice from ancestors or a spirit power person before acting on business ventures, marriage, life decisions.

The Ultimate Goals of Salvation in ATRs

One would be short-sighted if left with the belief that the understanding of salvation within ATRs had no focus beyond the here and now. One critical idea is the desire to have a proper role in the spirit realm after death. Oborji attempts to describe the concept salvation in ATR terms:

The final end and the aspiration of all, every person, is to reach the spirit-land of one’s ancestor, to be venerated by one’s descendants as an ancestor, and eventually (at least in some traditions) to be reincarnated. Ancestors, therefore, are people who have made

¹⁹⁵ Y. Turaki, *Christianity and African Gods*, (Potchesfroom: PU for CHE, 1999) p 183.

¹⁹⁶ J.S. Mbiti, *The Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK: London, 1970) p 244.

it to the spirit land and are being venerated by their descendants. The ancestors are not worshipped by the Africans; rather they are regarded as the elder members of the family. As spirits, they have enhanced powers which they are believed to use mainly to protect the interests of their families, or clan. In the hierarchy of beings, after the Supreme Being and the deities, come the ancestors.¹⁹⁷

This means that in ATR one's own death is not the only prerequisite to accomplishing salvation or realizing the status of ancestors, but issues such as old age, a life lived well in conformity to the accepted values of the of the people group, and fitting funeral rituals are other critical necessities for salvation.¹⁹⁸ Basically, in ATR, the ultimate hope of a person at death is ancestral fellowship, life in the spirit-world of ancestors. This aspect will be considered more fully in the next chapter.

Bridges to the Gospel

The first bridge to reaching adherents of ATR is their pervasive belief in one Supreme Being (God) as the Creator of the universe, human beings, and every form of life. ATR adherents have no place for atheism! Further, the persistent belief that this Supreme Being provided opportunity for relationship can provide an opening for a Gospel presentation.

Closely related to the first bridge is the understanding of a need for some mediators between God and humanity. This bridge can also be a barrier (as noted below), as the most common concept of mediator is the ancestor or spirits. Kalilombe highlights the potential bridge noting that it "will be correct to say that African religious systems of ancestors were not merely tolerated by God; they were the results of efforts of African cultures wherein the Spirit of God was an active agent."¹⁹⁹ Kalilombe implies that ATR has been a method, by which God has been communicating with the traditional Africans until the arrival of Christianity.²⁰⁰ It would be an overstatement to suggest this pre-knowledge is sufficient to understand the true mediator; rather, it may supply a bridge to communicate the gospel message.

¹⁹⁷ As cited in Adamo, dissertation, p. 5.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ P.A. Kalilombe, "The Salvific Value of African Religions," in G. H. Anderson & T.F. Stransky (eds.), *Mission Trends* No 5. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1981) p 67.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p 65.

Another bridge is the idea of a propitiatory sacrificial system in ATR. Although the concept in ATR is also directed toward divinities or ancestral spirits (who are not the true God and for superstitious reasons), the practice is built in the desire to placate the offended Supreme Being or ancestors. This concept can help the understanding of the work of Christ in His substitutionary death of the Cross²⁰¹ when explaining the merit of salvation in Christ alone.

A final potential bridge is the concept of covenant in ATR. God has made covenants with humans on several occasions. As explained in the foregoing chapters on the Creation and the Fall, the breaking of those covenants is what has caused Creator God to be separated from humankind. These parallels can serve as “redemptive analogies”²⁰² in providing a basis for gospel conversations.

Barriers to the Gospel

The first barrier to the gospel in ATR is that there is ignorance of the exact nature of ATR. The common attitude among evangelical Christians is that ATR is a primitive religion and therefore it is not worth studying; however, Peter Nyende pithily points out that:

...there seems to be a revival, relatively speaking, of the traditional African worldview, contrary to the expectations that economic and social modernization following on the worldview of the European Enlightenment would eliminate it. This African worldview, in which we have a constant interaction of the physical and spiritual worlds, with the latter perceived to be heavily influencing the former, is a crucial part of the context of Christianity in Africa.²⁰³

Therefore, understanding ATR cosmology will be helpful toward detecting syncretistic beliefs and provide authentic critical contextualisation. On the one hand ignorance of nature and beliefs of ATR can lead to syncretism, on the other hand it may also engender the fear of ATR to shun evangelism of their adherents.

The second barrier to ATR is the issue of ancestral mediation. ATR adherents communicate with the Supreme Being through ancestors, animal sacrifices,

²⁰¹ Rom. 3:23-26; 1 Cor 15:3-5; 2 Cor 5:21.

²⁰² Don Richardson. *Redemptive Analogy*. Accessed from: <https://www.gatewaycwm.org/sites/gatewaycwm.org/files/Team%20training%204.2%20Redemptive%20Analogy.pdf>, 06 Dec 2021.

²⁰³ Peter Nyende, “An Aspect of the Character of Christianity in Africa,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 132 (November 2008), p 43.

and libations (pouring water or any other drink to the ground). An imperative for the Christian is to highlight the sufficiency of Jesus as the true mediator. Similarly, the sufficiency of Jesus as the true sacrifice is critical in engaging adherents of ATRs in their daily living.

Neo-Pentecostalism/Prosperity Gospel

Marius Nel, a leading scholar in Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostalism at the North-West University in South Africa, in his insightful paper entitled *The African Background of Pentecostal Theology: A critical perspective* locates the moorings of the theology and praxis of African Pentecostalism (and Neo-Pentecostalism by implication) in African Traditional Religion. Nel writes:

Pentecostalism is effectively changing the face of African Christianity, and it has been argued that one of the important reasons for its success in reaching Africans is its pneumatic spirituality that relates to the primal African spirituality and worldview. It operates with the assumption of the existence of unseen authorities, evil cosmic powers and benevolent spiritual forces. Its prophets replace the divinatory services of ATR, providing believers with the needed information about the source of their misfortunes and solutions to appease malevolent spirits. By staying within the orbits of an African worldview, it succeeds in traditionalising Christianity within African culture. As in the African worldview, it accepts a sense of cosmic oneness, where fundamentally all things share the same nature and the same interaction one upon another. It is a hierarchy of power but not of being, for all are one, all are here, and all are now. No clear distinction is made between sacred and secular, natural and supernatural, for nature, human beings and the unseen are inseparably involved in one another in a total community of communality. Within the African worldview, African ideas of the Holy Spirit and the world are not far removed from the biblical revelation, The challenges of daily life have their provenance in the spirit world and evil spirits intending to do people harm, require that Pentecostal believers look for ways to protect themselves from these threats. They fight against the evil forces by living a good Christian life, effective prayer that engages

God's power against the evil forces that threaten believers' well-being, faithfully attending church services and group Bible studies, and giving generously to the church. It has been argued that African Pentecostalism does not necessarily represent a syncretistic utilisation of aspects of African primal spirituality although the possibility exists that it might and did happen, requiring the ability to discern spirits (1 Cor. 12:10) and to critically evaluate its theology and praxis.²⁰⁴

Nel thus asserts that African Neo-Pentecostalism (and its precursor African Pentecostalism) has not critically contextualized the Gospel but has merely 'sanitized' the traditional African worldview and merged it with Scriptural warrants (mostly proof-texts) for their teachings and practices. As Rodgers rightly notes, "African culture tends to connect more readily with Neo-Pentecostal doctrine and expression.... they value the text, but interpret the meaning of the text based on culture, experience, and worldview."²⁰⁵ Reflecting on the observations of Nel and Rodgers, it is not surprising to find that the understanding of the nature of salvation among adherents to the prosperity gospel has much in common with salvation as expressed in ATRs (see discussion above).

"Salvation" in Neo-Pentecostalism/Prosperity Gospel

The Lausanne Theology Working Group succinctly defines the Prosperity Gospel as "The teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds' through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings."²⁰⁶ Therefore, proponents of the Prosperity Gospel in Africa believe that God and the atoning death of Jesus Christ guarantee a state of well-being, victory over social stagnation, abundance of money and material things to meet the needs of Christians. As a result, in their view, Christians can live a good life of spiritual and material abundance this side heaven *as a chief end* of their converting from ATR to Christianity. If this state of wellbeing does not happen in one's life, then they do not have enough faith for breakthroughs or they need

²⁰⁴ Nel, pp. 6-7.

²⁰⁵ Kevin Rodgers, "Critical Contextualization and the Abandoned Gospel" in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Phil Barnes, et al, eds (Nairobi: AB316, 2021) p. 160.

²⁰⁶ Lausanne Movement, *A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel*. Theology Working Group, 2010. Available at: <https://lausanne.org/content/a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel>.

deliverance from the hindering elements connected with either familial spirits or curses. Andreas Heuser notes well the connection of prosperity teaching to various African folk-religion:

...Prosperity Gospel is a resourceful ‘theological locus with porous boundaries’ into non-Christian terrains Recent observations indicate such trans-religious osmosis of Prosperity Gospel rhetoric, metaphors, and practices into African folk-Islam as well as into some layers of traditional African religion.²⁰⁷

At this stage it seems that the main theological inadequacy of Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa is its undue emphasis on deliverance from pain and suffering instead of dealing with the core matter of salvation from sin through the grace of our LORD Jesus Christ. In other words, Neo-Pentecostalism offers an adulterated gospel called the Prosperity Gospel instead of the biblical account of God’s intervention in human history as discussed earlier in this chapter. In the words of Matthew A. Ojo:

... Prosperity Gospel is a re-reading and interpretation of certain verses in the Bible in which God and the atoning death of Jesus Christ were understood to have promised a state of well-being, of abundance, of victory over social stagnation, abundance of money and materials to meet the needs of Christians so that they can live a life of spiritual and material abundance in the world.²⁰⁸

Therefore, inadequacy of the Prosperity Gospel in a sentence is in asserting that salvation means rescue (or deliverance) from bad circumstances such as poor physical health and poverty in order to live a happy life as a Christ-follower this side of heaven.

Bridges to the Gospel

Although Neo-Pentecostals claim “new revelation” from the Holy Spirit to support their teachings and practices, they still have a high view of the Bible. This

²⁰⁷ Andreas Heuser, “Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies”, *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(1), 2016. Accessed at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3823>.

²⁰⁸ Matthews A. Ojo, *The Prosperity Gospel Among Neo-Pentecostals in Africa*. 2008. Accessed at: <https://ab316.org/the-prosperity-gospel-among-neo-pentecostals-in-africa/>, on 08 Dec 2021.

perspective is perhaps the most important bridge one may encounter in engaging adherents of Neo-Pentecostalism/ Prosperity Gospel with the true Gospel message. One can say, however, that it is one thing to claim belief in the priority of the Bible as God's word and quite another to read and interpret it accurately and faithfully. Matthews A. Ojo rightly points out that "Lacking any exegetical or contextual interpretation, and using proof text reading of the Scriptures as a method, Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals have taken certain passages as supportive of the doctrinal emphasis on prosperity."²⁰⁹ Hence, this bridge is available for one to introduce solid, contextual interpretation of Scripture. It is critical to place the "proof texts" used in errant interpretation within their biblical contexts and help provide a better lens for interpretation.

A second potential bridge to Neo-Pentecostals is their zeal for making known their beliefs, practices, and reaching out to others in their respective spheres of influence upon their conversion or breakthrough in a matter—such as, a monumental financial breakthrough, or healing 'miracle', etc. In a sense, Neo-Pentecostals are not ashamed of their gospel.²¹⁰ This zeal in Neo-Pentecostals is not wrong of itself. It may become useful in the context of biblical Christianity. One needs to help magnify the wonder of salvation as the miraculous work of God. Indeed, the raising to life one who was spiritually dead is the greatest miracle one can experience. If one can help those seeking "signs and miracles" to grasp this truth, their zeal to see God move might be re-directed toward the gospel.

Barriers to the Gospel

While the common touchpoints with biblical Christianity provide bridges to gospel conversations, real hindrances exist as well. The first barrier to the Gospel in Neo-Pentecostalism/Prosperity Gospel is its syncretism of Christianity with folk religion. J. Lee Grady poignantly writes:

Before Christianity came to Nigeria, people visited witch doctors and sacrificed goats or cows to get prosperity. They poured libations on the ground so the gods would hear their prayers. Today similar practices continue, only the *juju* priest has been replaced by

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ In fact, a significant feature of their worship services is occupied by testimony sharing time regarding a dramatic healing experience or a financial breakthrough or getting a better job often after giving a large offering or tithe or a conception of a child in cases of infertility, etc., as a way of 'growing the faith' of those in attendance in need of a miracle.

a pastor who drives a Mercedes-Benz. I am aware of a pastor who buried a live animal under the floor of his church to win God's favor. Another pastor asked his congregants to bring bottles of sand to church so he could anoint them; he then told the people to sprinkle the sand in their houses to bring blessings. The people who follow these charlatans are reminded that their promised windfall won't materialize unless they give large donations.²¹¹

The practice of some African Christians visiting "witchdoctors" and at the same time seeking pastoral care from the church (and vice versa) is still occurring not only in Nigeria, but in most of Sub-Saharan Africa.²¹² This confusion in Neo-Pentecostal theology and praxis in Sub-Saharan Africa is anchored in ATR worldview (see discussion above).

A second barrier to the Gospel in Neo-Pentecostalism is that it works against the formation of Christian character.²¹³ The prosperity message is a poor substitute for the true Gospel and leaves no room for brokenness, suffering, humility, or delay. Prosperity preachers promise immediate results and a sudden success story. If one does not get an immediate breakthrough, then it is because either one did not give enough money in the offering or has little faith.

Consequently, there is "a leadership crisis in the African church because many pastors are so set on getting rich, they can't go through the process of discipleship that requires self-denial."²¹⁴

A third barrier to the Gospel in Neo-Pentecostalism may be in their view that the Abrahamic Covenant is a means to material prosperity. This belief is deeply entrenched among both leaders and followers of the Prosperity Gospel

²¹¹ J. Lee Grady, "5 Ways the Prosperity Gospel Is Hurting Africa," *Charisma Magazine*, 2008. Accessed from: <https://www.charismamag.com/blogs/fire-in-my-bones/19113-5-ways-the-%20prosperity-gospel-is-hurting-africa> on 07 Dec 2021.

²¹² For example, among the Bemba speaking people of Zambia, there's an adage which says "*ukwimba kati kusansha na Lesa*" (transliterated as: 'To find a cure from an illness, one must mix it with god). The meaning is one must not only go the hospital or the pastor for prayer but must go to witchdoctor for a cure to occur in hard times. Of course, the second tier of meaning in this Bemba adage may be that if one is seeking employment (for example), they must be willing write a resume (CV) and make known their need for employment by going to employment. In this tier of meaning, it's like the English adage: 'God helps those who help themselves'. Another application is that in a married couple with infertility. They may seek help from a fertility clinic, and just in case the medical route does not resolve the infertility they must seek out traditional African interventions by consulting a witchdoctor.

²¹³ Grady.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

to the extent that they are so inclined to dub anyone who dare challenge this pervasive tenet a heretic. David W. Jones opines well:

The Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22) is one of the theological bases of the prosperity gospel. It is good that prosperity theologians recognize that much of Scripture is the record of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, but it is bad that they do not maintain an orthodox view of this covenant. They hold an incorrect view of the inception of the covenant; more significantly, they hold an erroneous view concerning the application of the covenant.²¹⁵

A fourth barrier to the Gospel is Neo-Pentecostalism's inadequate view of the atonement. David W. Jones writes that "the prosperity gospel claims that both physical healing and financial prosperity have been provided for in the Atonement."²¹⁶ Sadly, prosperity preachers find themselves deemphasizing the Fall and God's provision of Rescue from sin in the death of the LORD Jesus Christ, God's Son. The closest Neo-Pentecostalism gets to mentioning humankind's need for repentance from sin is when they meet a person in ill health and lack of material wealth and blame it on weak faith or a generational (ancestral) curse to be broken by special deliverance prayers at a price—a colossal amount of money paid to the servant of God. By so doing, prosperity preachers replace the call to repentance and faith with a call to give money. This scenario entails their failure to preach the whole Gospel message of sin, repentance, faith, and eternal life in Christ. In short, one may safely deduce that prosperity preachers, inadvertently or not, substitute biblical evangelism with fund raising appeals.

For gospel conversations to occur, these hindrances to the true gospel message will need to be engaged by the Christian. Arnett, reflecting on examples of healthy engagement with adherents of the Prosperity Gospel, argues that "the goal is to replace the deviations [from biblical doctrine] with biblical sound faith and practice."²¹⁷ Arnett provides several points of emphasis to aid in gospel conversations and healthy church formation among Neo-Pentecostals:²¹⁸ estab-

²¹⁵ David W. Jones, "5 Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 9Marks Journal, 2014. Accessed from: <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalerrors-prosperity-gospel/>, on 08 Dec 2021.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Randy Arnett, *Pentecostalization: The Evolution of Baptists in Africa* (Eldon, MO: Randy R. Arnett, 2017), p. 165 (Kindle version, location 3556).

²¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 166-170 (Kindle version, location 3581-3696).

lish Scripture as the final authority; insist on a viable hermeneutic; emphasize the Christ of Scripture; focus on the sin nature; present salvation as reconciliation; instil the victory of the cross.²¹⁹

Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Africa

While the Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination worldwide, much of the language around salvation creates a great potential for misunderstanding that leads to a false sense of security. While the role of faith is prominent in the discussion of salvation in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC),²²⁰ the popular understanding of many of the teachings around the nature of salvation have resulted in much syncretism of Catholicism and ATRs in Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, one needs to consider the RCC doctrines of the role of the sacraments and faith, and the role of mediators and saints in approaching God.

Role of Sacraments in the RCC

The RCC highlights the function and role of the seven sacraments in the salvation of a follower of Jesus. The seven sacraments are placed in three categories by the RCC: the Sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist); the Sacraments of Healing (Penance and Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick); and the Sacraments at the Service of Communion (Holy Orders, and Matrimony).²²¹ The sacraments are understood to parallel human life

²¹⁹ For an excellent examination of these principles, see *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Philip W. Barnes, et al, eds (Nairobi: AB316, 2021). Each of these suggestions is the focus of a separate chapter by various authors: “Establish Scripture as the Final Authority,” pp. 163-170 (Patrick Dube); “Insist on a Viable Hermeneutic,” pp. 171-180 (Nicholas A. Moore); “Emphasize the Christ of Scripture,” pp. 181-192 (Ronnie Davis); “Emphasize the Sin Nature,” pp. 193-200 (Jack Rantho); “Present Salvation as Reconciliation,” pp. 201-210 (Moses Audi); “Instil the Victory of the Cross,” pp. 211-220 (Reuben Ishaya Chuba).

²²⁰ See sections 144-149 “Obedience of Faith”; 153-156 “Characteristics of Faith”; 1987-1995 “Justification” in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1992 edition, E-book format downloaded at <https://www.turnbacktogo.com/catechism-of-the-catholic-church-pdf/> on 6 Nov 2021.

²²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) online. Accessed from the Vatican archives online at: Catechism of the Catholic Church (vatican.va) (https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM) on 10 Nov 2021. The Sacraments are discussed over the whole of Part Two of the CCC (sections 1066-1690) entitled “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery”. The discussion includes both the understanding of the “Sacramental Economy” (Part Two, Section One: sections 1076-1209)) in which the relationship of faith, sacraments, and the Church is highlighted as well as a discussion of each of the “Seven Sacraments” as well as Sacramental celebrations such as last LORD’s Supper (Part Two, Section Two: sections 1210-1690).

and development with a spiritual life and development; nevertheless, “In this organic whole, the Eucharist occupies a unique place as the ‘Sacrament of sacraments’: all the other sacraments are ordered to it as to their end.”²²² The centrality of the LORD’s Supper is critical, then, as it is not only the most visible and regularly practiced sacrament, it is understood as the goal and design of every sacrament—the communion with Christ. Further, RCC views the Church, itself, as sacramental in nature! The sacraments, then, can only be administered truly by the RCC for she is “the sacrament of Christ’s action at work in her through the mission of the Holy Spirit”²²³ and the sacraments are particular commands for the Church in the sense that “ ‘the sacraments make the Church,’ since they manifest and communicate to men, above all in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the God who is love, One in three persons.”²²⁴

The sacraments are critical to the salvation of the individual according to the RCC: “The sacraments of the Church prolong in time the works of Christ during his earthly life. In them is actualized the healing power that emanates from the body of Christ, which is the Church, to heal from the wound of sin and to give new life in Christ.”²²⁵ According to *Vatican II*: “The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally to give worship to God... *They do indeed impart grace...*”²²⁶ For the Catholic church, while Christ is understood as the source of salvation, the Church is understood as “the depository and dispenser of Christ’s salvation.”²²⁷ Quite bluntly, the *Catechism* (CCC) declares that “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us.”²²⁸ This ongoing engagement with the sacraments is critical in the understanding of the RCC of the cultivation of faith in the life of the Christian since

²²² Ibid, section 1211.

²²³ Ibid, section 1118.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ “The Reciprocity between Faith and Sacraments in the Sacramental Economy” by International Theological Commission of the RCC accessed at the Vatican website: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20200303_reciprocita-fede-sacramenti_en.html on 6 Nov 2021, section 1..

²²⁶ From *Vatican II* as cited in “Reciprocity,” section 57, emphasis added. *Vatican II* refers to the collection of documents that came out of the study of faith and practice of the Roman Catholic Church conducted from the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican in multiple sessions from 1962-1965.

²²⁷ “The Reciprocity between Faith and Sacraments in the Sacramental Economy,” section 16.

²²⁸ CCC, section 1131. Similarly, “Sacramental symbols and symbolic actions, performed through water, oil, bread, wine, and other visible and external factors, invite each believer to open the ‘inner eye of faith’ and see the saving effects of each sacrament,” “Reciprocity,” section 70.

“Faith is not guaranteed forever at the time of conversion.”²²⁹ The RCC, then, places itself as the guardian of salvation through these specific sacramental acts. Further, the “ordained minister is the sacramental bond that ties the liturgical action to what the apostles said and did and, through them, to the words and actions of Christ, the source and foundation of the sacraments.”²³⁰ It is not surprising, then, that the exactness of the rituals of the sacraments are also understood as critical by the RCC: “For this reason no sacramental rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of the minister or the community.”²³¹ It should be noted that the RCC acknowledges the tension between its doctrinal stance on the relationship between faith and the sacraments and what is experienced broadly: “confession of faith precedes sacramental celebration, while sacramental celebration secures, seals, strengthens and enriches faith. *Yet today, in pastoral practice, this interaction is often blurred or even ignored.*”²³²

In concluding the thought of sacraments in RCC practice, two truths need to be highlighted. First, the addition of any means of dispensing grace other than the explicit work of Jesus runs contrary to the truth proclaimed in Scripture. As the RCC quite bluntly states: “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation,”²³³ this position stands in contradiction to the understanding that salvation is found in Christ alone. Further, the evidence of salvation of believers in the New Testament by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit occurs without any sacraments dispensed. Second, the idea that salvation is impacted by a set of rituals that cannot be modified enacted by a spirit person uniquely set apart readily connects to the religious expressions across Sub-Saharan Africa in so many ATRs! The fact that the rituals are placed in the language of Christianity allows for an unbalanced merging of worship practices to emerge with ritual tasks replaced by sacraments and the spirit power person replaced by the priest.

²²⁹ “Reciprocity,” section 58. Although according to the CCC, section 1121, “The three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders confer, in addition to grace, a sacramental character or ‘seal’ by which the Christian shares in Christ’s priesthood and is made a member of the Church according to different states and functions. This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible... these sacraments can never be repeated.”

²³⁰ CCC, section 1120.

²³¹ *Ibid*, section 1125. The paragraph continues: “Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy.”

²³² “Reciprocity,” section 2. Emphasis added.

²³³ CCC, section 1129.

Role of Mediators in Prayer in the RCC

A second practice of the RCC creates a further opportunity for an unhealthy syncretism of folk religion and Christianity: the role of mediators and saints in prayer. The RCC takes the “cloud of witnesses” mentioned in Hebrews 12:1 as a foundation for the understanding of mediating saints in the life of the Christian:

The witnesses who have preceded us into the kingdom, especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today. They contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. When they entered into the joy of their Master, they were "put in charge of many things." Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.²³⁴

For the RCC, then, there is an ongoing relationship with those faithful believers who have died and the living follower of Jesus. As the current Pope Francis—seeking to clarify the relationship and role of the Christian to the saint—notes, “Saints are still here, not far away from us... They are witnesses that we do not adore... but whom we venerate and who, in thousands of different ways, bring us to Jesus Christ... A saint makes you remember Jesus Christ... Saints remind us that holiness can blossom even in our lives...”²³⁵ Interestingly, the RCC affirms the declaration of 1 Timothy 2:5 that there is one mediator, Jesus Christ; nevertheless, the RCC encourages the Christian to engage saints. The RCC seeks to avoid the term mediation for the work of the saints; rather, they prefer to call the work of the saints intercession. In urging the Christian to seek for these saints to intercede for them, Pope Francis explained “There is a mysterious solidarity in Christ between those who have already passed to the other life and we pilgrims in this one: our deceased loved ones continue to take care of us from Heaven. They pray for us, and we pray for them, and we pray with them.”²³⁶ Finally, he declared that these saints, “...give us a hand to obtain the

²³⁴ CCC, section 2683.

²³⁵ Pope Francis, “Mediators or Intermediaries,” Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, 9 December 2016. Accessed at Vatican website.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

grace we need from God. If the trials in our life have not reached breaking point, if we are still capable of persevering, if despite everything we proceed trustingly, perhaps, more than to our own merits, we owe all this to the intercession of many saints...”²³⁷

The basic understanding of the efficacy of the saints is in connection to their holiness in life. These saints are seen as such great servants of God that they have a surplus of grace, and they can help the believer still struggling in life. Further, the idea of approaching God with everyday struggles is viewed as less attractive since one may not be worthy to encounter God; therefore, seek out someone lesser. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is viewed as a particularly potent person to seek out for intercession. As Pope Francis tweeted: “Mary is not only the bridge joining us to God; she is more. She is the road that God travelled to reach us, and the road that we must travel in order to reach him.”²³⁸ This practice of praying “with” these saints or seeking help from them is appealing to those practitioners of ATRs who often understood the need to seek out the spirits of ancestors who had died. As a result, the RCC doctrines of praying with saints is a door for further syncretism in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Bridges to the Gospel

The familiarity with the biblical narrative proves to be both a bridge as well as a barrier when engaging Roman Catholics with the gospel message. A welcome bridge is the acceptance of Scripture as authoritative. This position allows for one to move from creation to fall to rescue smoothly. Of critical importance is Jesus. Using the bridge of the biblical narrative, one must be able to emphasize both the divine nature of Jesus and the complete efficacy of the work of Jesus. Only as one emphasizes the Christ of Scripture fully, can one engage with the ritualistic and work-based practice of Catholicism.

Barriers to the Gospel

Oddly, the same point of contact—the Word of God—can become a barrier as the RCC will often use Scripture as a foundation for their practices. Sometimes, they may draw from the deuterocanonical books of the Apocrypha; for example, the appeal to Maccabees to affirm the practice of praying for the dead.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ @pontifex Tweet, “#AnnuciationOfTheLORD” Tweeted on 25 March 2021 as posted on Facebook by “Be Not Deceived” on 26 March 2021.

Other times, faulty or haphazard exegesis is used such as Christ's affirmation to Peter in Matthew 16:18 to justify—incorrectly—institution of the papacy. Further, the close affinity to practices of the RCC with many ATRs (the use of strict rituals, the role of the spirit person of power, the role of ancestors) provide a greater challenge as one must take care to lay a solid foundation in the biblical truth so as to root out areas of syncretism.

Islam

While Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are often “connected” as three ‘Abrahamic religions,’ it is important then to recognize that they differ greatly in teaching. Nowhere is this difference more evident than around the issue of salvation. To grasp the significant difference between the biblical understanding of God’s Rescue of humanity and the Islamic understanding of salvation, one must consider what Islam teaches concerning Allah’s nature and salvation, what forgiveness is, and ultimately the means of salvation.

The “Mercy” of Allah

One of the most fundamental statements regarding the nature of Allah in the Qur’an is, “Allah is merciful.” This belief is declared in the introduction to 114 Surahs (every Surah except Surah 9): “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.” This statement in Islam means that human beings may always hope for Allah’s mercy in this life or in last judgement. Islam teaches that if a human being sins, repents and turns from their transgression, Allah will forgive the iniquity, large or small, as divine mercy “encompasses all things” (Surah 7:156). Furthermore, Surah 3:135-136 promises all Muslims forgiveness and entrance into Paradise if they ask Allah for forgiveness.²³⁹

The Qur’an explains that humans sin by turning away from Allah and yielding to Satan’s influence, and, thus, require forgiveness. Forgiveness is understood as a response to genuine repentance. The word used in the Qur’an for ‘repen-

²³⁹ Christine Schirrmacher 2008. *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings: The Role of Jesus Christ, Sin and Forgiveness*. World Evangelical Alliance: British Columbia. p, 47. Schirrmacher highlights Surah 3:135-136: “And those who when they commit an indecency or do injustice to their souls remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their faults—and who forgives the faults but Allah, and (who) do not knowingly persist in what they have done. (As for) these—their reward is forgiveness from their LORD, and gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them and excellent as the reward of the laborers.

tance' or 'penance' (Arabic: *tauba*) means 'to turn about face.'²⁴⁰ Repentance, therefore, is not only a formal rejection of sin but includes the plea to Allah for pardon and the renunciation of the transgression. Consequently, Allah turns back to the sinner graciously and leads them in the right way.²⁴¹ It is at this point of the mercy of Allah, that one encounters some of the uncertainty for the Muslim concerning the certainty of forgiveness. Consider Surah 57:28-29 which begins with a statement of hope, "O you who believe! Be mindful of your duty to Allah and believe in His Apostle: He will give you two portions of His mercy, and will appoint for you a light with which you will walk and forgive you." This declaration of mercy, however, is immediately followed by a statement of uncertainty in which Allah's very mercy demonstrates that Allah, alone, dispenses grace and it is according to Allah's own pleasure: "Allah is forgiving, Merciful: So that the people of the Scripture may know that they control naught of the grace of Allah, and *that grace is in Allah's hand to give to whom He pleases*. And Allah is the LORD of mighty grace" (emphasis added). On the one hand, Allah is merciful; on the other hand, one cannot control the mercy or grace of Allah who will dispense it at his pleasure.

The Omnipotence of Allah and the Uncertainty of Salvation

The assurance of salvation, then, is not an absolute in Islam as one cannot control the will of Allah. The Qur'an constantly warns humans to turn to Allah's mercy before it is too late, and Allah abruptly and without warning subjects them to the punishment of the last judgement in which unbelievers have no hope for divine mercy. Surah 4:17-18 further cautions against premeditated sin which continues without contrition before death.²⁴² The definition of true repentance becomes critical for the Muslim. Islamic theologians have developed three requirements for divine forgiveness:

1. The sinner must repent because they regret their sin, not because they reckon with forgiveness or fear Allah and his judgement.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² "Repentance with Allah is only for those who do evil in ignorance, then turn (to Allah) soon, so these it is to whom Allah turns (mercifully), and Allah is ever Knowing, wise. And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds until when death comes to one of them, he says: Surely now I repent; nor (for) those who die while they are unbelievers. These are they for whom we prepared a painful chastisement."

2. The sinner must resolve never to commit the same sin again. Muslims hold that asking for forgiveness while at the same time being determined to commit the same sin again is unexpected of a true believer.
3. The sinner must in future avoid all circumstances which may lead them to repeat this sin.²⁴³

A curious difference between the Bible and the Qur'an rests on the reason for God's forgiveness. In the Bible, God forgives out of his character and an expression of love for humanity.²⁴⁴ Love moved God to send His Son Jesus Christ into the world to die for man's sin so that we could receive forgiveness. In the Qur'an, however, Allah's forgiveness does not come from love, but arises from his omnipotence. Allah forgives whom he will, but not as a proof of his love. The Qur'an refers to Allah's goodness and his mercy towards human beings, "but the root of his being is his power and his eminence."²⁴⁵ Allah is so powerful that no relationship can exist between him and humanity, his creation. Because one may not comprehend Allah in any way that would limit his divine might, humans can neither foresee Allah's behaviour nor predict his movement. Thus, a believing Muslim cannot even be "absolutely sure of his salvation at the Last Judgement, even though he hopes for it, for an absolute security would mean that man can control God's treatment of his creations."²⁴⁶

While the Muslim cannot be certain, it is believed that the Muslim can better his chances of gaining Allah's favour through submission and obedience. Most specifically, adhering to the "5 Pillars" of Islam: *Shahadah* which is sincerely reciting the Muslim profession of faith; *Salat* which is the proper recitation of ritual prayers five times daily; *Zakat* which is the giving of alms to benefit the poor or needy; *Sawm* which is fasting during the month of Ramadan; *Hajj* which is the pilgrimage to Mecca. In popular Islam, therefore, the concept of restitution for sin has led to the concept that some good deeds (like additional fasting or giving large alms) can be deemed as potent penance.²⁴⁷ The pilgrimage to Mecca is the most effective means of having one's major sins cancelled and making this pilgrimage pleases Allah the most. Whereas the prayers presented at

²⁴³ Schirrmacher, p. 47ff.

²⁴⁴ John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10; etc.

²⁴⁵ Schirrmacher, p 50.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ According to this view, dying in battle as a martyr for Islam pays for all one's sins. The martyr enters Paradise immediately, without needing to go through the last judgement, as required of other Muslims.

the Ka'ba—the largest Islamic Shrine, situated in the major mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia—are understood to be more powerful than those offered anywhere else. In summary, the Muslim expresses “hope” in Allah, but remains in a state of uncertainty that leads to the completion of tasks and rituals in the hope of gaining notice so that one can experience ultimate grace.

Bridges to the Gospel

In spite of the serious differences around the hope of salvation between Christians and Muslims, some points of contact exist that may be used as a bridge to a gospel conversation. A basic point of conversation is the acknowledgement of the providential care of God who shows his goodness and grace to mankind by providing the things man needs for life and, therefore, provides instructions for salvation.²⁴⁸

A second bridge is found in the fact that Muslims believe the *Injil* (The four Gospels of the NT) is a book that Allah sent down to Jesus. Engaging them may be assisted by offering a copy of the New Testament to Muslims to read about the life and works of Jesus Christ on their own.²⁴⁹ Tal Davis, of the North American Mission Board, thus rightly advises missionaries to Muslims to “focus on Jesus Christ and who He is according to the New Testament. Give them a New Testament (the *Injil*) in their language. Ask him to read the Gospels and ask his opinion of what it says about Jesus.”²⁵⁰ A third bridge is found in the Muslim’s belief (like Christians) that “Petitions should be made directly to God, without requests to dead prophets, apostles, or saints for their intercession.”²⁵¹ A final bridge that can be effective is an exploration of sacrifice. Using the substitution of a lamb for the sacrifice of the son by Abraham, one can move through the role of sacrifice in the biblical narrative so that the foundation is laid to move to the need for a sacrifice for our sins and the revelation of Jesus as the substitutionary atonement for us.

Barriers to the Gospel

While some points of contact around the understanding of salvation exist, a number of significant barriers also exist. A major barrier is the Christian under-

²⁴⁸ Rick Brown 2006. Muslim worldview and the Bible: Bridges and Barriers-Part II Jesus, The Holy Spirit and the Age to come. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. Volume 23:2 p. 52.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. Of note, some Muslims are taught that the original *Injil* was taken back to heaven with Jesus. Therefore, many Muslims have never read the NT Gospels and depend for their knowledge of Jesus on inaccurate accounts of Jesus’s life and works their teachers give them.

²⁵⁰ Tal Davis. Bridges & Barriers: Spanning the Spiritual Gulfs that separate People from the Good News of Jesus Christ. North American Mission Board.

²⁵¹ Brown, p. 51.

standing of a Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and the Muslim rejection of the divinity of Jesus. Some Islamic apologists have used the argument that Jesus does not declare that He is God. Some of these apologists will go so far as to say that if a Christian will show where Jesus explicitly makes such a claim and that He is to be worshipped, they will convert! The Christian needs to be aware of the explicit statements by Jesus regarding his divinity as well as the implicit statements and actions.²⁵² Due to the Christian rightful assertion of the divinity of Jesus, Muslims accuse Christians of being polytheists and therefore guilty of the dreadful unpardonable sin of *shirk*. In the Muslim mind, Christians do not really worship one god, but three gods. The issue is complicated further as the Qur'an makes statements connecting Allah to Yahweh of the Bible; therefore, Christians will need to maintain a distinction between Allah and Yahweh.²⁵³ Further, the Christian should have a clear understanding of the Trinity as many Muslims will move to this doctrine to attack a Christian position.²⁵⁴ The second barrier is that Muslims believe that salvation is attained by being a faithful Muslim, practicing the "Five Pillars" of the faith, living a morally upright life, and obeying Allah's commands as taught in the Qur'an. The Christian will need to be able to address the nature of grace and inability of works to obtain favour. This task can be bridged with the fact that Islam already acknowledges the futility of works to gain mercy.

CONCLUSION

The Rescue of humanity from the bondage and penalty of sin by the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ our LORD and Saviour, is the true and anticipated climax of the biblical metanarrative. The desperate need of humanity due to wilful sin and disobedience has been met. The wages of sin are paid and the "gift of God" which "is eternal life in Christ Jesus our LORD" (Rom. 6:23b) is now a reality for those who believe in Jesus. *The Story* evangelism training manual expresses the impact of this truth well:

²⁵² See the section, "The Divine Nature of Jesus" above.

²⁵³ Billy C. Sichone July 2020. Islam and the Trinity. *Kerusomen: A Journal of Theology for the African Church*. Volume 6/1 (2020) 104–144. Accessed from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343336481_ISLAM_AND_THE_TRINITY. p.136.

²⁵⁴ See Sichone, 104-144, for an in-depth discussion of engaging Muslims on the doctrine of the Trinity in the context of sub-Saharan Africa.

The **greatest rescue** of all time was the rescue of human souls from the darkness of the enemy's camp. God planned our rescue, made the arrangements, and stopped at nothing to accomplish it. Now that a rescue out of sin and darkness is **possible** through Jesus Christ, God's purpose for man is once again possible too—for by His death on the cross, He offered the ultimate act of worship and obedience to the Father. When we turn to the rescue found in Jesus, we are set free to once again **worship and obey** God, as He originally designed.²⁵⁵

Truly, everything has changed with lasting results that will culminate in the consummation of our faith which will be considered in the next chapter. With great joy, one can proclaim:

For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

²⁵⁵ *The Story*, p. 91 (emphasis in original quote).

CHAPTER 4

CONSUMMATION

“Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: ‘Look! God’s dwelling is with men, and He will live with them...’ Then the One seated on the throne said, ‘Look! I am making everything new.’”¹

What is the end hope of our faith? Is this world all there is? What does the future hold? If Jesus won, why is there still so much suffering? Such questions reflect the uncertainty regarding the future especially in current circumstances. As with other critical world view questions, the Bible provides answers and insight into future expectations.

The anticipated future goal of our faith is expressed in the term “consummation.” Consummation is a term that carries an understanding of the act of the fulfillment of a contract (as its use in terms of marriage) as well as the attainment of the goal or end of something. Other terms can be used to describe this dynamic of completion: restoration; resolution; culmination. Consummation heightens the intentional actions used to bring about completion; thus, the Consummation of the faith of the follower of Jesus is intimately connected to the assurance in God who can bring it to pass!

The very concept of consummation also acknowledges the tension between the certainty of Christ’s victory and the continuing circumstances of this world as expressed in Hebrews 2:8b: “For in subjecting everything to him [Jesus], He left nothing not subject to him. As it is, we do not yet see everything subjected to him.” Similarly, for the follower of Jesus, this tension of the “already” of salvation and the “not yet” of the ultimate results of that salvation is very real. The Holy Spirit through Paul, however, provides reassurance for the disciple of Jesus by describing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as proof or evidence of the certainty of the consummation of our faith: “In Him [Jesus]

¹ Revelation 21:3a and 5a

you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—in Him when you believed—were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He [the Holy Spirit] is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:13-14).² Oscar Cullman, in considering the tension between the celebration of the complete redemptive work of Jesus in the Rescue and the culminative experience of that victory which is yet to come, argues that the passion of Jesus should be seen as the centre of redemptive history, not the end.³ He will go on to use the illustration of a decisive battle that determines the outcome of a war, and the final declaration of victory:

The centre [of redemptive history] has been reached but the end is still to come. I may illustrate this idea by an example: *The decisive battle in a war may already have occurred in a relatively early stage of the war, and yet the war still continues.* Although the decisive effect of that battle is --perhaps not recognized by all, it nevertheless already means victory. But the war must still be carried on for an undefined time, until "Victory Day." Precisely this is the situation of which the New Testament is conscious... the revelation consists precisely in the fact of the proclamation *that that event on the cross, together with the resurrection which followed, was the already concluded decisive battle.*⁴

His choice of illustration calls to mind the relationship of D-Day (6 June 1944) and V-Day (8 May 1945)⁵ in World War II. The landing of the allied forces gaining the beachhead in Normandy (D-Day) is widely considered the point at which the outcome of the war was settled although the fighting did not cease immediately. Similarly, the Christian celebrates “God’s D-Day” of Easter with the full confidence that the enemy is defeated. Nevertheless, one acknowledges that suffering and struggle will continue until “God’s V-Day.” As to the time of such a day of victory, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John provides some insight as to

² See also 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5 for the same imagery.

³ Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, Revised Edition (London: SCM Press LTD, 1962). This concept is the primary focus of his book and is unpacked in several chapters: Part I, chapters 5, 7; Part II as a whole, but especially chapter 1. He particularly contrasts the Jewish view of the Messiah as a future event with the Christian view that it is a passed historical event at the mid-point of redemptive history with a future consummation yet to come.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 86.

⁵ Technically, 8 May is V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day) marking the surrender of Germany to the Allied forces. V-J Day (Victory over Japan) is not formalized until 2 September 1945.

when the Christian can anticipate the consummation of their faith: “Dear Friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He [Jesus] appear, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). The final consummation of our faith, then, is only to be known at the second coming of Jesus. To understand better the nature of the hope of the consummation of faith, the anticipation of the consummation as found in the larger biblical narrative will be initially considered. Further, Revelation 20-22, as the primary passage which describes the scope of our expected hope, must be examined. The implications of both the eschatological hope for the Christian and the reality of judgment for those who reject Jesus will be considered. Afterwards, the four major themes of Temple/Tabernacle, Kingdom of God, Image of God, and Covenant will be examined a final time in connection to the promise of Consummation. Finally, the understanding of future hope or judgement as expressed in the four major worldviews found in Sub-Saharan Africa (African Traditional Religions, Islam, Neo-Pentecostalism/Prosperity Gospel, and Roman Catholicism) will be contrasted to the biblical narrative and examined with a goal of providing bridges and barriers to the gospel message.

ANTICIPATION OF THE CONSUMMATION IN THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

The expectation of a final, culminative activity of God is found in both the Old and New Testament although with some subtle differing points of emphases. While the entire biblical narrative connects God’s act of consummation to be one of final justice, the Old Testament has a greater emphasis upon the judgement of the wicked—most often connected to the coming “Day of the LORD.”⁶ The New Testament, while anticipating judgement, also has a more prominent emphasis on the eschatological hope of rest for the Christian at the return of Jesus and the establishment of the kingdom of God in its fullness.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament does not usually express much of a focus beyond our present life. As examined in the previous chapter, the major “future” event for

⁶ While some element of reward for the righteous can be seen, reward is more closely connected to the “restoration” of David’s throne most often in connection to the kingdom of Israel as a nation. The understanding is the faithful remnant would experience reward if a true king like David reigned over a kingdom established by God. Israel and later Jewish communities tended to interpret such restoration as an earthly kingdom that exceeds the original kingdom under David.

the Jewish people was the coming Messiah who was expected as a part of current history. Nevertheless, one does encounter the anticipation of the climactic kingdom of God. This anticipation is occasionally expressed in terms of an experience of radical peace brought about by the fulness of the knowledge of God although still expected to be manifest in this world. In Isaiah, the prophetic declaration of the coming Messiah in 11:1-5 is followed by the anticipated climax of the Messiah's kingdom:

The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf, the young lion, and the fatling will be together, and a child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze their young ones will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like an ox. An infant will play beside the cobra's pit, and a toddler will put his hand into a snake's den. No one will harm or destroy on My entire holy mountain, for the land will be as full of the knowledge of the LORD as the sea is filled with water (vv. 6-9).

Most of the expressions of the coming, climactic activity of God found in the Old Testament describe a less peaceful event as the focus is just judgment—more often on the punishment of the wicked than the reward of the righteous. Both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 provide the foundation for covenant blessings as well as discipline for covenant breaking.⁷ A critical component of Israel's history is the reality that God would visit the people with both blessing and judgment. The reality of God's expression of righteous wrath against the unrighteous provided a two-fold emphasis. First, the reality of this judgment was an expression of both the holiness and justice of God. Second, the promise of judgment for the wicked was a vindication for the suffering of the righteous—especially at the hands of the unrighteous. The importance of both elements—God's righteousness and the vindication of the righteous—are understood as true reflections of the character of God. For example, Lamentations reflects upon the fall of Jerusalem as a visitation of God's righteous judgment

⁷ Paul R. House, "The Day of the LORD" in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, Eds S.J. Hafemann and P.R. House (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2007), pp. 183-187. House acknowledges that while neither the phrase "Day of the LORD" nor any synonyms occur in the Pentateuch, "later passages certainly build on related concepts found there to formulate Day of the LORD themes" (pp. 183-184). House highlights creation, flood, and Sodom in Genesis (pp. 184-185); the exodus, Red Sea, and golden calf in Exodus (pp. 185-186); and covenant breaking and punishment of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28 (pp. 186-187).

as God had proclaimed.⁸ Further, if God does not spare his own people from judgment, there is certainty that God will judge the sins of other nations.

This expectation of a complete judgment upon all the wicked is most often connected in the Old Testament with the visitation of God described as “The Day of the LORD.” While the foundation of the certainty of God’s actions against the unrighteous is laid in the early books of the law (particularly the promises of blessing and judgment found in such passages as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 mentioned above), the greatest development of the understanding of the Day of the LORD in the Old Testament is found among the prophets.

Isaiah 1-4 provides one of the earlier expressions of a “day belonging to the LORD of Hosts” (2:12) that is coming with both certainty of judgment and hope of restoration.⁹ In these early chapters, the coming day of God’s visitation is an expected present event—the defeat of Israel at the hands of an enemy. God calls the people to repentance to experience mercy in the face of judgment. This initial occurrence establishes a pattern for later discussions of the Day of the LORD which are greater in scope.¹⁰ At times, the certainty of the Day of the LORD was a challenge to the expectations of the unfaithful Israelites. For example, God in the oracle delivered to Amos (5:8-27) challenges any false hope of the northern kingdom of Israel that His appearance would be for their deliverance;¹¹ rather, they would most definitely experience judgement: “Woe to you who long for the Day of the LORD! What will the Day of the LORD be for you? It will be darkness and not light. It will be like a man who flees from a lion only to have a bear confront him. He goes home and rests his hand against the wall only to have

⁸ House has an excellent analysis of Lamentations as a reflection of the promise of judgment found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (pp. 202-204). House notes the descriptions of the harsh reality of the remnant of Jerusalem in the first two poems of Lamentations are direct reflections of Dt 28:52-56 (p. 203) and again in chapters 4 and 5 of Lamentations (p. 204). House argues that since Lamentation reflects the perspective of those living in the aftermath of the wrath of God, “It is nothing less than a report on the Day of the LORD from those who have experienced it in space and time” (p. 203).

⁹ See House, pp. 187-190 or an examination of Isaiah and the Day of the Lord.

¹⁰ House sees “three basic conclusions” that are to be drawn from the Day of the Lord in Isaiah 1-4: (1) these chapters serve as a paradigm for Day of the Lord in the Prophets in that the “nature, purpose, timing, and imagery of the Day of the Lord here reflect concepts found in the Law and offer various images that later Old and New Testament writers utilize” (p. 189); (2) God’s mercy is placed at the forefront of Day of the Lord passages; (3) introduces Isaianic treatment of the Day of the Lord which will be applied in greater scope; i.e., to the nations (chapters 13-23) and the whole earth (chapters 24-27) (pp. 189-190).

¹¹ J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament, Volume 4: A Guide to the Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p.169.

a snake bite him” (vv. 18-19).¹² Further, Amos clearly connects sin to the coming day of judgment. The prophet Obadiah receives an oracle that reflects the more common expectations (vv. 15-21); namely, the Day of the LORD will be one of judgement on the nations who oppressed Judah. The idea of justice is of most importance: “For the Day of the LORD is near, against all the nations. As you have done, so it will be done to you; what you deserve will return on your own head” (v. 15). The prophets Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Joel have more lengthy oracles around the Day of the LORD. In Zephaniah 1:2-2:3, one finds an oracle about the “Great Day of the LORD” which includes the promise of complete destruction of all the enemies of God as well as a restoration of true worship.¹³ Interestingly, God declares that He will “completely sweep away everything from the face of the earth” (vs. 2) which is an important new dynamic as there is now an element of the need to re-create as a part of this day of reckoning. This radical judgment does end with an assurance for the salvation of God’s people in some future time (3:16-20).¹⁴ Zechariah 9-14 moves through several different images of the decisive actions of God including a description of the cataclysmic Day of the LORD in which every enemy will be destroyed, all false worship will be exposed and removed, and the LORD’s anointed king will appear humble riding on a donkey. The final oracle of the Day of the LORD (14:1-21) ends with a restoration of God’s people and a paradise-like expression of a true worship of the LORD by all people at the temple in Jerusalem.¹⁵ The understanding that God’s climactic activity results in a greater faithfulness in worship—found in both Zechariah and Zephaniah—is a critical understanding of the future hope of God’s restoration of Israel in the Old Testament. Judgment, then, is not to overwhelm completely the hope of restoration. In the prophets, restoration and the hope of renewal is found for the faithful remnant as well as “purified group of international people after the full force

¹² One does find in Amos, a short word of hope in 9:11-15 where God provides a word of hope of restoration of the throne of David.

¹³ This Day of the LORD oracle was developed into a popular hymn by the medieval church as the two-fold focus on the wrath of God on the ungodly and the hope of restoration by the faithful was a consistent theme in medieval theology. William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), p.314 (footnote). Thomas of Celano wrote a couple of hymns on this passage (Day of Wrath! O Day of Mourning! and The Day of Wrath) both hymns can be accessed on hymnary.org

¹⁴ As mentioned in footnote 7 above, most of the “future” expectations in the Old Testament were not eschatological, “end of time” expectations; rather, the expectation was of a future experience in this world—an earthly kingdom established by God.

¹⁵ See vv. 16-21 for the images of the true worship as all peoples travel to Jerusalem and participate in the festivals.

of the Day of the LORD has been felt.”¹⁶ Joel received declarations from God that are probably the most famous of the OT “Day of the LORD” proclamations. The phrase “Day of the LORD” occurs five times appearing in each sub-section at least once so that it has been “likened to an engine driving the prophecy” in Joel.¹⁷ In Joel, God’s declarations include both a radical scope of judgment and a deep hope of restoration. Further, there is an immediacy to the coming judgement in the early oracles (1:1-2:17), but clearly a future anticipation in the latter (2:18-4:21). Within the latter oracles, one finds the connection to a radical presence of God’s Spirit as the initial sign (2:28ff). This sign is confirmed by Peter at the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. One critical development is that “Joel indicates that the ultimate result of the Day of the LORD will be the people of God dwelling in Zion with Yahweh and the wicked receiving divine wrath.”¹⁸ The final Old Testament prophet, Malachi, includes a word about the coming Day of the LORD which confirms earlier oracles. The wicked should be moved to fear as they will be consumed like wood in a furnace (4:1) while the righteous will experience joy so that they “will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall” (4:2). A final key idea around the Day of the LORD is found in Daniel 7 and 9 in connection to the coming Son of Man. In these passages, the coming of the Son of Man is connected to the establishment of the Kingdom of God. This idea is reflective of the hope of restoration found in other prophetic oracles. The images in Daniel, however, carry a definite “future” perspective. Collectively, the prophets provide an increasingly clear picture of the coming judgment. On the one hand, a Day of the LORD is experienced in any event connected to the righteous judgment of God against his people; however, on the other hand the Day of the LORD will be universal in scope. The two elements of judgment and restoration are expected consequences of the visitation of the LORD upon the earth.

In summary, anticipation of a climactic visitation of God is found in the Old Testament. This anticipation is most often expressed in terms of three activities of

¹⁶ House, p. 199. House identifies two means of renewal in Zephaniah—people can seek the Lord or experience the Day of the Lord! He concludes that “Zephaniah acts as a summary of how judgement comes to Israel and the nations without that judgment being the final word. Renewal is the final word...” (Ibid.).

¹⁷ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea—Jonah* Word Biblical Commentary, vol 31 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), p. 230. Also cited in McConville, p.158. The phrase occurs in 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4; 4:14—at the beginning of the oracle in 2:1; in the midst of the oracles in 1:15; 2:11; and 4:14; near the end of the oracle in 3:4, leaving Stuart to conclude: “In this way the concept of the Day of Yahweh permeates the book. Leaving the hearer/reader with little doubt as to its significance for Joel’s message” (Ibid., p. 231).

¹⁸ House, p. 194.

God. The first is the certainty of judgment upon the unfaithful—both individuals and peoples. The second is the expectation of the restoration of the faithful into the kingdom of God. This restoration results in true worship. Finally, creation is so impacted by the sins of humanity that there is a need for a new creation.

The New Testament

Among the New Testament writings, several passages address the consummation of our faith. These passages cover three primary topics: the incomplete experience of the Christian currently, the second coming of Jesus, and the promise of resurrection and new creation.

As mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, the tension between the “already” experienced and the “not yet” experienced aspects of salvation for the Christian can result in misunderstanding of the work of Christ. Three areas where this tension is experienced are addressed by the Holy Spirit through Paul in Romans 6-8.¹⁹ The first aspect is regarding sin. On the one hand, the Christian has victory over sin because of the death and resurrection of Jesus: “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him [Jesus] in order that son’s dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin...” (6:6). On the other hand, the Christian is not freed from the struggle with sin completely so that the disciple is admonished to “not let sin reign in your mortal body” (6:12).²⁰ Second, the relationship between the Christian and the Law is highlighted in chapter seven. On the one hand, the Christian is free from the Law because “...you also were put to death in relation to the law through the crucified body of the Messiah...” (v. 4). On the other hand, the Christian still needs the law to provide instruction concerning sin and holiness as Paul notes that he “would not have known sin if it were not for the law” (v. 7). Further, the Christian continues to struggle between the God’s law and the “law” of sin still at work: “For in my inner self I joyfully agree with God’s law. But I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body!” (vv. 22-23). Third, the relationship between death/mortal flesh

¹⁹ F.F. Bruce discusses these chapters under the heading of “The Way of Holiness” and refers to these areas as the three freedoms of the Christian: freedom from sin; freedom from law; freedom from death in *Romans* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol 6 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic,).

²⁰ See Romans 6:12-23. The tension between the temptation to sin and the victory in Christ is noted plainly. The end promise is that as “slaves” to God, the believer is empowered to avoid sin, nevertheless, the reality of the struggle of sin is real. This discussion continues in 7:13-25 in connection to our relationship to the Law.

and the follower of Jesus is highlighted in chapter eight. On the one hand, the Christian experiences victory over death, itself, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus: “For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace” (v. 6). Further, the Christian still lives in a mortal body but has hope beyond this life: “Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lies in you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through His Spirit who lives in you” (vv. 10-11). On the other hand, the reality of death is still present for the follower of Jesus—unless Christ returns; nevertheless, the hope of the fulness of our salvation outweighs the struggle with our mortal flesh: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation of God’s sons to be revealed” (vv. 18-19). The relationship of the tension between the victories already experienced by the Christian and the elements of those victories that are yet to be experienced is also highlighted in the grammar of these chapters through the choice of dominant verb forms.²¹ In each of the “already” sections, the primary verb forms are “indicatives” which are used to narrate reality. In each of the “not yet” sections, the primary verb forms are “imperatives” which are used to give commands—what the disciple needs to do because of our state in Christ. The chart below illustrates this relationship:²²

In-principle statement/ Already/ Indicative		Reality of eschatological tension/Not yet/ Imperative
6:1-11	with reference to sin	6:12-23
7:1-6	with reference to law	7:7-25
8:1-9	with reference to flesh/mortal body	8:10-30

Illustration three: Verb Tenses and the movement between “Already” and “Not Yet” in Romans 6-8

²¹ James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38A (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988) provides an overview of these tensions of the already and not yet found in chapters 6-8 in a section entitled: “The Outworking of the Gospel in Relation to the Individual (Romans 6:1-8:29)”, pp. 301-303.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 303.

The consummation of our faith, then, is expected to relieve these tensions. In the consummation, no longer will sin, law, or death be an obstacle for the believer.

The second area of focus within the New Testament concerning the consummation of our faith is the promised Second Coming of Jesus. Jesus provides the basis for the expectation of a return. Addressing his disciples with the certainty of his departure at the anticipation of his death, resurrection, and exaltation: “Your heart must not be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself so that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-3).²³ The expectation of Christ’s return is stated clearly by the angels at the ascension of Jesus: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven” (Acts 1:11). The Holy Spirit affirms the coming return of Jesus elsewhere: “For the LORD Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air; and so we will always be with the LORD” (1 Thess 4:16-17). Additionally, “so also the Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him” (Heb 9:28), and “Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him including those who pierced Him.... This is certain. Amen” (Rev 1:7). Intimately connected to the coming of Jesus is the establishment of God’s kingdom which will be discussed below.

The third aspect of consummation occurring within the New Testament is the expectation of resurrection and re-creation of heavens and earth. Both resurrection and re-creation can be seen as developments in the declaration of the Day of the LORD in the Old Testament are reinforced in the New Testament writings. Resurrection—while not expressed in the Old Testament—is connected to the just judgment at the return of Jesus—both the punishment for the wicked and reward for the Christian as Jesus declared:

²³ The promise of “I will come again” is made more emphatic in the use of the Present tense rather than the Future. The absoluteness of the return of Jesus is clearly stated as it is almost a “I am already returning” type of emphasis.

And He [God] granted Him [Jesus] the right to pass judgment because He is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:27-29).²⁴

Similarly, in proclaiming the gospel to the philosophers on the Areopagus in Athens, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to conclude, “because He has set a day on which He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). The coming of Jesus will be definitive, visible, and conclusive. Resurrection of the Christian as well as the ungodly are connected intimately to the just actions of judgment by God. The Holy Spirit through Paul declares that the truth of the resurrection of Jesus establishes the certainty of resurrection for the believer: “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor 15:20-22).²⁵ A second element found in the Old Testament anticipation of consummation and reinforced in the New Testament is the reality of the passing of this creation in anticipation of a new creation: “But the Day of the LORD will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed... But based on His promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell” (2 Peter 3:10, 13).

From the New Testament writings, one finds the Holy Spirit’s expressions of the anticipation of the consummation of our faith in several declarations.

²⁴ Jesus made similar statements elsewhere: “For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done” (Matt 16:28).

²⁵ Prior to this statement, Paul will list six negative consequences for us if Christ were not raised: preaching is in vain (vs. 14); our faith is in vain (vs. 14); we are false witnesses about God (vs. 15); we are still in our sins (vs. 17); those who died in Christ have perished (vs. 18); we deserve pity (vs. 19). Interestingly, John Piper in his 1991 Easter sermon entitled “Six Gifts of the Resurrection” restated these negative statements as positive truths since the resurrection of Jesus is a fact: we are forgiven our sins; our faith is well founded; the Apostles preach what is true; we are to be envied; those who are fallen asleep are alive (accessed online at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/six-gifts-of-the-resurrection> on 26 November 2021).

The consummation will coincide with the return of Jesus. A re-creation of the heavens and the earth will follow the return of Jesus. The just judgment of God for the godly and the ungodly will follow the return of Jesus. For the disciple of Jesus, the current struggle with sin, law, and mortal flesh will end. Such a hope brings understanding for the expression of the early church: *Maranatha*—Come, Our LORD!²⁶ Having examined the anticipatory passages, one should consider the primary text for the description of the consummation of our faith.

CONSUMMATION AND REVELATION 20-22

The final chapters of the final book of the Bible provide an incredible picture of the hope of the Christian. In the vision given to John, the picture of the consummation of God's plans encompassing all of creation provides encouragement and wonder for the Christian. In the early verses of chapter 21 of Revelation, God offers words of hope and promise about this new creation. In this declaration, two elements are highlighted: we will be forever with God as God is now "dwelling with humanity" (v. 3) and God is "making everything new" (v. 5). These two elements need to be examined further as a means of unpacking the nature of Consummation.²⁷

Everything New

These final chapters provide an incredible conclusion to the whole of the biblical narrative calling to mind the initial story of creation found in Genesis 1-2. Morgan highlights this relationship:

The classic passage depicting the consummation and these related truths is Revelation 20-22. Just as Genesis 1-2 reveals that the

²⁶ The term found in 1 Cor 16:22 is a transliteration of an Aramaic or Syriac phrase. There is some debate, however, on how the compound word should be divided: *marana tha* (Come, our Lord) or *maran atha* (Our Lord has come). Most understand it to have some element of future fulfillment, the exclamation "...*Maranatha* is a prayer...that may call for the future Parousia of the Lord. The parallel in Revelation 22:20 would support such an interpretation." L.J. Kreitzer "Eschatology" in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, D.G. Reid, editors (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p.260.

²⁷ These two components of "All Things New" and "Forever with God" are highlighted in *The Story* evangelism training in the explanation of Restoration. See *The Story: Guide (Leader Edition)* (Bloomington, IL: SpreadTruth Publishers, 2011), pp. 97-111.

biblical story begins with God's creation of the heavens and the earth, Revelation 20-22 shows that it ends with God's creation of a new heaven and a new earth. The story begins with the goodness of creation and ends with the goodness of the new creation. The story begins with God dwelling with his people in a garden-temple and ends with God dwelling with his covenant people in heaven, a new earth-city-garden-temple.²⁸

When comparing the six days of creative activity in Genesis to the singular day of the new creation in Revelation, the points of contact are remarkable! In considering the first three days of creation in Genesis 1:2-13, the contrast with the new creation is stark. The creation of the forms of "light" and "dark" in the first day are countered with the singular form of "light" in the new creation as there is no darkness at all! The separation of the waters and the formation of the seas of the second day is countered with the lack of seas in the new creation! There will be no physical barrier to separate peoples in the new creation! The formation of dry land and the variety of vegetation to eat on the third day of creation is countered with the focus on a single vegetation—the tree of life! While the first three days are countered with the design of the new creation, the final three days of the Genesis account of creation find their fulfillment and true consummation in the new creation. Whereas the sun, moon, and stars are created to shine upon the earth on the fourth day of creation, none exist as the true light is in the new creation: "The city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, because God's glory illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lamb" (21:23). While the fifth day of creation in Genesis makes the creation of "living creatures" in the waters, in the new creation, there is living water: "Then he showed me the river of living water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the broad street of the city..." (22:1-2a). Finally, the creation of man and woman on the sixth day is overshadowed with the resurrection of all of God's covenant people filling the new city! Unlike the garden of Genesis where God walked with Adam and Eve, God dwells with His people in the new Jerusalem! The initial harmony created on that sixth day of creation is now restored to the full as there exists radical harmony between humanity and God, humanity and creation, and humanity

²⁸ Christopher W Morgan, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), p. 16. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>,

itself! The permanence of this new relationship is emphasized in the presence on both sides of the river of life, "...the tree of life bearing 12 kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, and there will no longer be any curse..." (22:2b-3a). Further, there is no hint of the suffering that resulted from the Fall as God declares "...Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away" (21:4b).

Forever with God

Just as the six days of creation in Genesis ends with a statement of completion and then rest, so the singular day of the new creation ends with the declaration, "It is done!" (21:6a) and the invitation to enter the true rest!²⁹ The seventh day of the creation narrative in Genesis 2:1-3 finds parallel in the new creation as the Christian enjoys the fulness of the presence of God and worships without hindrance. Morgan notes:

Magnificently, the new heavens and new earth arrive and God dwells with his covenant people (Rev 21:3, 7), brings comfort to them (no more pain, death, etc., in v. 4), makes all things new (v. 5), and proclaims, "It is done!" (v. 6). Heaven is then depicted as a perfect temple, glorious, multinational, and holy (vv. 9-27). The people of God rightly bear God's image: serving him, reigning with him, encountering him directly, and worshipping him (22:1-5). God receives the worship he is due, and humans are blessed beyond description, finally living to the fullest the realities of being created in his image.³⁰

The true and great reward for the Christian is not found in the magnificence of the New Jerusalem nor the wonder of a resurrected body; rather, the ultimate reward is to dwell with God in His presence without hindrance forever! As Piper writes: "The tree of faith grows only in the heart that craves the supreme gift that Christ died to give: not health, not wealth, not prestige—but God!"³¹

²⁹ As noted in the chapter 4 above, Jesus' cry upon the cross, "It is finished!" brought about the promised rest.

³⁰ Morgan, pp. 16-17.

³¹ John Piper, *Desiring God*, Third Edition (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003, p. 73 as cited in *The Story*, p. 104.

For the Christian, this truth is ever to be seen as the wonder of our salvation—we are reconciled with God! In the new creation, this reconciliation reaches its climactic consummation. This truth is realized in two declarations: we will be with God forever, and we will see Jesus face to face.³² Both dynamics are crucial to understand. First, dwelling together humanity lives in perfect harmony—not only with one another, but with God. Consequently, the earth will be filled with worshippers!³³ Second, we “will see with our own eyes the One who loved us enough to die for us”³⁴ as our “faith will become sight.” The five climactic declarations of Revelation 22:3-5 about this new creation are captured well in *The Story*:

There will be no more curse, which means we will be able to serve God without hindrance.

He will be in the city, and we will see His face, which means we will enjoy uninterrupted intimacy with God.

His name will be on our foreheads, which means His rightful ownership will cover us.

Darkness will no longer exist, which means we will have nothing left to fear.

We will reign forever, which means God will let us rule His kingdom.³⁵

No hindrance bars the Christian from the presence of God forever and ever! Amen!

The Just Judgment of God

While the promise of consummation for the Christian is one filled with hope, peace, love, and joy, the certainty for those outside the kingdom of God is very different: “their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8b). In other words, the justice that comes with the Day of the LORD is not only one of blessing and reward for the faithful. Morgan writes:

³² *The Story*, pp. 103-104.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Once and for all, God's victory is consummated. God's judgment is final, sin is vanquished, justice prevails, holiness dominates, God's glory is unobstructed, and the kingdom is realized. God's eternal plan of cosmic reconciliation in Christ is actualized, and God is "all in all."

As a part of his victory, God casts the devil and his demons into the lake of fire, where they are not consumed but "tormented day and night forever and ever" (20:10). Satan and the demons are not restored but go to hell to receive their due punishment, and they remain there to suffer forever. Then God judges everyone: those whom the world deems important, those whom the world never notices, and everyone in between. "Anyone whose name [is] not found written in the book of life [is] thrown into the lake of fire" (v. 15). God does not send only the ruthless Roman emperors to hell (which we might expect); he consigns to hell all who are not the people of Jesus (see Dan 12:1; Rev 14:10-11; 21:8, 27).³⁶

Morgan rightly identifies the two groups who will experience this judgment. The first is Satan and all the demonic. The spiritual enemy will be eliminated: "The Devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). The defeat of the fallen spiritual beings is now made complete in the lasting judgment. The second group is everyone not found in the book of life—everyone who died apart from Christ. The final consequence of the rejection of Christ is revealed. Further, the truth of God's statement to Adam and Eve that sin would produce death is now seen in its ultimate consummation—the second death, an eternity of anguish. Revelation 20:11-15 describes the reality that none will escape the final judgment:

Then I [John the Apostle] saw a great with throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. I also saw the dead, the great and the small standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books. Then the

³⁶ Morgan, p. 16.

sea gave up its dead and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

A few points need to be drawn from this promised judgment. First is that it is complete—none are left out! Those who have died, those who were lost at sea, those of every station in life—all stand before the One on the throne. The only hope is to have one's name written in the book of life. Within Revelation, the image of having a name written is used in several passages. In the letter to the churches in Philadelphia (3:7-13), the promise of victory is seen in having the name of God written upon the individual—a sign that one is the possession of God and under God's salvation! The book of life is specifically mentioned in the letter to the church of Sardis (3:1-6). Although the church struggles to follow Christ faithfully, those who do not abandon the faith are promised that Jesus “will never erase [their] name from the book of life” (v. 5). The book of life, then, is seen as a definitive record of those who belong to Christ—the faithful follower. The image of a written record denotes both permanence and completion—everyone deserving is noted, now and forever. In the warning of Revelation 20, each is judged according to their works; however, the only “work” that merits salvation is to be written in the book of life—those who belong to Jesus. The meaning is clear in the passage. One does not accrue works toward salvation; rather, the listing of works leads to judgment. By contrast, those who are the followers of Jesus have their names written in the book of life—those who have been declared righteous by the work of Jesus! Interestingly, the final image in Revelation 20 is one of “Death” and “Hades” also being judged and thrown into judgment. The significance is that for the Christian found in the book of life, neither death nor hell has any hold or impact in eternity.

While uncomfortable, the reality of eternal judgment—Hell—needs to be addressed. The certainty of hell is not only found in Revelation but is anticipated in the larger biblical narrative. As mentioned above, the promise of judgment usually accompanied the Old Testament anticipation of the “Day of the LORD”; however, the images are fairly broad in terms of the nature of judgment. In the New Testament, however, while a lot of details are absent, one is presented with more descriptive passages concerning this final judgment. Jesus will characterize those left outside the kingdom of God as experiencing weep-

ing, darkness, and the “gnashing of teeth.” Such descriptions indicate sorrow and anguish.³⁷ Further, this experience of judgment is described as eternal as in the case of the parable of the sheep and the goats, the unrighteous will “go away into eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46). The terms used in the New Testament for the place of this punishment both convey the idea of judgment. “Hell” or “Hades” is the equivalent of “Tartarus” which was the common Greek understanding of the place of judgment where one received what was deserved. “Gehenna” was a more metaphoric term as it was literally a place where garbage was dumped and burned. As fires were constantly seen in this garbage dump, it became a term to indicate a place of lasting judgment for the unworthy. The biblical picture of judgment found in Revelation 20 is the culmination of the earlier images of an eternal judgment based upon one’s sin filled with anguish and sorrow.

CONSUMMATION AND BIBLICAL THEMES

Over the last three chapters, the four prominent themes of Temple/Tabernacle, Kingdom of God, Image of God, and Covenant have been examined regarding the impact of the different components of the grand narrative of Scripture upon them. Just each of these themes had their beginning in the creation narrative, so these themes reach their final resolution in the consummation narratives.

Temple/Tabernacle

The theme of the temple has developed across the biblical narrative as the place where one encountered the presence of God meaningfully. In creation, the garden was seen as a temple place where Adam and Eve walked with God, worshipped God, and served God. As a result of the Fall, the walking in the garden in the presence of God became replaced by the tabernacle (and later temple) as

³⁷ See Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28 The images are all images of the consequence of judgment. Bollinger notes that the term indicates great anguish and is the image of grinding ones teeth in response to pain or great discomfort. Hope Bollinger, “Why is ‘Gnashing of the Teeth’ in the Bible?” on Crosswalk.com accessed at <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/why-is-gnashing-of-teeth-in-the-bible.html> on 29 Nov 2021. One should also note that the term is found in several Old Testament passages. While the occurrence in Psalm 110:12 carries this same meaning of anguish, the other OT usages (Job 16:9; Psalms 35:16; 37:12; Lamentations 2:16) all carry the idea of persecution as someone is gnashing their teeth at the writer. In the context of judgment, it is more likely the sign of anguish.

a place where one approached God with petition, sacrifice, and thanks offerings. A place marked by separation from the Holy of Holies. The Rescue won by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus ushered an entirely new experience as the Christian became the “temple” of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit regenerates the believer and indwells the Christian sealing them for salvation. This radical presence of God within the believer changed the dynamic of temple. In the Consummation, however, even this presence reaches a greater fulfillment: dwelling in the presence of God! As John relates the vision given him, he relates, “I did not see a sanctuary in it [the new Jerusalem], because the LORD God the Almighty and the Lamb are its sanctuary” (Rev. 21:22). At the dedication of the newly built Temple in Jerusalem at its dedication by Solomon in 1 Kings 8, the glory of God filled the Temple so that “the priests were not able to continue ministering, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple” (v. 11). By contrast, the glory of God is the very illumination of the new earth so that “the nations will walk in its light” (Rev. 21:24a)! The promise of “Immanuel,” God with us, of Isaiah is finally brought to its most complete fulfillment.

Kingdom of God

The sovereignty of God displayed across the universe in creation is once again visibly and undeniably displayed at the Consummation. The reign of God is complete in the climactic establishment of the kingdom. Morgan summarizes this development well:

Jesus will finish what he has started. He will return to reign as King, bringing justice, peace, delight, and victory. The kingdom is God’s reign over his people through King Jesus. The kingdom is both a present reality and a future promise tied to Christ’s second coming. Jesus brings it in phases. It is inaugurated in his public ministry as he teaches, performs miracles, and casts out demons (Matt 12:28; 13:1-50). When Jesus ascends to God’s right hand, the place of greatest power, the kingdom expands (Eph 1:20-21) and thousands enter it through the apostles’ preaching (Acts 2:41, 47). The fullness of the kingdom awaits Christ’s return, when he will sit on his glorious throne (Matt 25:31). Jesus will judge the

world, inviting believers into the final stage of the kingdom while banishing unbelievers to hell (25:34, 41).³⁸

This final stage of the kingdom outlined in the latter chapters of Revelation provides several climactic developments. The throne is occupied by God clearly and dramatically. As a result, there is no confusion as to the ultimate authority. God directs the affairs of the kingdom. In an interesting description of the relationship of the “nations” to the kingdom of God, every king yields their “glory” to the glory of God: “The nations will walk in its light [the glory of God and lamp of the Lamb, v. 23], and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it” (Rev. 21:24). Nevertheless, there is a role for the Christian in serving God and in some forms of administering and ruling in the kingdom under the authority of God (Rev. 22:5).

Consummation and the Image of God in Humanity

The creation narrative in Genesis one establishes the unique role of humanity among all of creation in the declaration of God, “Let Us make man in Our image...” (Gen 1:26a). God’s image set humanity apart from the rest of creation. *The Story* materials does an excellent job of tracing God’s image as a common thread throughout the metanarrative of Scripture.³⁹ The narrative establishes the normative expression of a perfect image of God as intended. Adam and Eve resemble “God in that they could think, love, feel, choose, discern, and create”⁴⁰ setting them apart from the animal kingdom. Further, they “were given a special dignity, purpose, and significance that distinguished them from the rest of creation.”⁴¹ In the Fall, the image of God is “badly broken, tarnished by sin, but it remains.”⁴² Joyfully, the image of God is renewed in humanity by God’s Rescue of humanity from the bondage of sin. For the Christian, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit “begins renewing us to be like [Christ].”⁴³ At the consummation of our faith, then, the image of God is perfected: “In the new Heaven and new Earth, [we] will be restored to a perfect

³⁸ Morgan, pp. 15-16.

³⁹ *The Story*, pp. 124-128.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

state. We will reflect our loving Saviour and King as He intended us to [sic].”⁴⁴ This radical restoration is complete. The promised restoration encompasses the whole life and every aspect of that life: spiritually—forever with God, in a perfect relationship with Him; physically—no longer experiencing sickness, aging, or death; socially—restored to perfect relationship with everyone in the new Heaven and Earth; emotionally—experiencing everlasting joy, peace, and purpose; and morally—all people groups will be joined together and there no longer be expressions of prejudice, elitism, or war.⁴⁵

Covenant Fulfilled

In the redemptive work of Christ, the new covenant is established and effective. The application of the whole of the covenant to the Christian will be experience in its fullest expression at the Consummation of our faith. Consider, again, the initial promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Hafemann provides an understanding of the argument of the text, “with the explicit and implicit logic of its constituent propositions highlighted.”⁴⁶

- v. 31 ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
- v.32a *Specifically*, I will not make it like the covenant which I made with their fathers...
- v. 32b *since* they broke this covenant of mine
- v. 32c *even though* I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD.
- v. 33a ‘*The reason the new covenant will be different in this regard is that this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,*’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put my Law within them, and I will write it on their heart.
- v. 33b *The result of this new covenant will be that* I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
- v. 34a The ultimate consequence of this new covenant relationship in which I am their God and they are my people is that

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 128.

⁴⁵ *The Story*, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Scott J. Hafemann, “The Covenant Relationship,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity and Diversity*. S.J. Hafemann and P.R. House, eds. (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), p.49.

- they shall not teach again each man his neighbour and each man his brother saying, 'Know the LORD,'
- v. 34b *because* they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares the LORD
- v. 34c *'The basis for all of this is that* I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.'

The Holy Spirit through the author of Hebrews will highlight the establishment of this new covenant as the crucial work of Jesus accomplished by his death.⁴⁷ The promises of a radical identity as belonging to God, incredible intimacy with God resulting in being taught by the Spirit of God, and the complete forgiveness of all sin are, indeed, realized in the life of the Christian. The fulness of these promises are only experienced at the promised return of Jesus and establishment of the eternal kingdom completely. Similarly, Hafemann will go on to explore 2 Peter 1:3-11 as a 'covenant' sermon that can be broken down as: The Historical Prologue (vv. 3-4); The Covenant Stipulations (vv. 5-7, 10a); and The Covenant Promises and Curses (vv. 8-9, 10bc-11).⁴⁸ The force of this exhortation in Peter is that based upon the activity of God, one can pursue a changed life with the hope of an eternal consummation of that faith: "For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our LORD and Saviour Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you" (2 Pet 1:11). This hoped eternal kingdom is the final blessing promised in the new covenant and experienced at the coming of Jesus and consummation of the covenantal promise of membership in this eternal kingdom.

The Consummation and Marriage

The topic of marriage and the future kingdom of God is only addressed specifically in the New Testament in one parallel passage in the three synoptic gospels. Jesus is questioned by a group of Sadducees about the implications of marriage after the resurrection. More specifically, they raise a hypothetical situation where a widow marries seven brothers consecutively following the death of the previous husband. They, then, ask of Jesus, "Whose wife will the woman be? For all seven had married her" (Luke 20:33). Jesus replies, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to take

⁴⁷ The establishment of the New Covenant takes a central role in Hebrews 8-10 and is the primary work of Jesus as the true high priest.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-65.

part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Luke 20:34-35). He will provide further explanation that the nature of the resurrected person is different: “For they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are sons of God, since they are sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36).⁴⁹ Jesus’ response provides the foundation for an understanding of the impact of the future consummation of our faith and marriage. The resurrection of humanity results in some significant difference so that marriage is not a part of the human relationships expressed in the coming kingdom.

While human marriage is not expressed, a “marriage” is described. Namely, the marriage of Jesus and his bride, the church. This image, itself, is the climactic picture of a relationship described in the Old Testament as well. God’s relationship with Israel is often described in terms similar to that of a marriage contract as in Deuteronomy 6 where God declares that he is a “jealous God” (v. 15) who will not accept their faithlessness. The image is strong in the parable of the adulterous wife in Ezekiel 16. The parable chronicles God’s care for Israel including a moment of marital pledge and covenant (v. 8): “Then I passed by you and saw you and you were indeed at the age for love. So I spread the edge of My garment over you and covered your nakedness and pledge Myself to you, entered into a covenant with you and you became Mine.”⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the parable takes a turn as this bride—Israel—is adulterous (vv. 15-34). Israel’s idolatry was often compared to adultery.⁵⁰ Just as Israel was not able to keep their covenant with God and stood in need of a new covenant, so there is a new image of God’s faithful bride. This image is found in a few parables taught by Jesus when likening the kingdom of God to a bridegroom coming for his bride.⁵¹ Two passages from the epistle further develop the image. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, the Holy Spirit led Paul to declare to the Corinthian church, “For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, because I have promised you in marriage to one husband—to present a pure virgin to Christ.” In Ephesians 5:22-33, the relationship of Christ and the church is established as the pattern for proper relationship between a husband and

⁴⁹ Matthew and Mark share a slightly different account of Jesus’ response: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven” (Matt 22:30). See also Mark 12:25.

⁵⁰ See book of Hosea for the use of the prophet’s marriage to a prostitute as an illustration of the unfaithfulness of Israel to God—the specific charge of Israel’s adultery against God is made in Hosea 2:2-5; see also Ezek 6:9; Jer 3:1-5; 31:32.

⁵¹ See the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 for one such example.

wife. The climax occurs after the Holy Spirit recalls the declaration of the creation of the marriage covenant in Genesis concludes that this profound mystery applies to Christ and the church! This “marriage” of Christ and his bride finds its consummation after the return of Jesus. In Revelation 19:6-10 relates the celebration over the marriage of the Lamb [Jesus]: “Hallelujah—because our LORD God, the Almighty has begun to reign! Let us be glad, rejoice and give Him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has prepared herself. She was permitted to wear fine linen, bright and pure” (vv. 6b-8a). The marriage is clearly Jesus claiming the “bride” which is the corporate believers dressed in purity which is the righteousness won by Christ for them. Whereas Israel was unable to maintain their relationship, the church as the bride is the true consummation of the relationship for it is founded on the efficacy of the work of Christ—a bride, bright and pure.

BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONSUMMATION AND OTHER WORLDVIEWS

African Traditional Religions (ATRs)

The discussion of Rescue among ATRs in the previous chapter revealed that for ATR adherents, the final hope of a person at death is ancestral fellowship. In other words, ATR doctrine emphasizes that the ultimate destiny of a person is to have life in the spirit-world of ancestors.

As Mayembe helpfully notes, “eschatology is the theological doctrine of the ultimate things, of the last or final days, of the world to come, of life after death”⁵² and one may discuss the notion of consummation in ATR by looking at their teachings about last things. Since we have noted in chapter 4 (Rescue) that the ultimate concept of salvation in ATR is limited to assuming ancestral status, in some cases reincarnation, based on their nobility, influence, and beneficent deeds in the present life, one may surmise that ATR ultimately has no concept (or at the very least minimal concepts) of reconciliation with a god nor dwelling in the presence of a god in Heaven.

⁵² Bienvenu Mayembe, *The Notion of Eschatology in African Ancestral Religions: A Category of Deliverance Promise, Remembrance*. Accessed from: <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bcir:102736/datastream/PDF/view>, 28 Jan 2022

Interpretation of Time in ATR

ATR thought has a timeless conception of time. It sees and feels time as a timeless infinity. In Mbiti's words, "[the] African concept of time is silent and indifferent."⁵³ Meaning that the future is perceived as an empty space (nothing exists there). John Mbiti further comments,

African peoples expect human history to continue forever...They expect the events of the rain season, planting, harvesting, dry season, rain season again, planting again, and so on to continue for ever. Each year comes and goes, adding to the time dimension of the past. Endlessness or 'eternity' for them is something that lies only in the region of the past... (...This means that what is 'eternal' lies beyond the horizon of events making up human experience or history).⁵⁴

The immediate implication of this perception of time on ATR eschatology is that the consummation of the 'here and now' is in the past in the custody of the beneficent ancestors (of which ATR adherents aspire to become upon their death).

Furthermore, Mbiti contends the Christian understanding of a new world in the heavens demands a thorough discontinuity with the ATR worldview, particularly because they (ATR) do not anticipate or contemplate a future world located somewhere in the heavens, and hence have no futuristic eschatology. Thus, Mbiti asserts,

The Most significant factor is that Time is considered as a two-dimensional phenomenon; with a long 'past', and a dynamic 'present'. The 'future' as we know it in linear conception of Time is virtually non-existent in [ATR] thinking.... The future is virtually absent because events which lie in the future have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute Time which otherwise must be experienced. Time as a separate reality does not 'move'; only events come and go, often in rhythmic succession. It is,

⁵³ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, second edition. (Oxford: Heinemann. 1999), p. 21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

therefore, what has taken place or will shortly occur that matters much more than what is yet to be.⁵⁵

Therefore, in ATR worldview, an event acquires its concrete meaning when it is realized via becoming part of history. Interestingly, Bujo, also writes, “in looking toward the ancestors, and hence becoming a partaker in their privilege, such an African becomes in turn a source of life for succeeding generations.”⁵⁶ Essentially, then, the majority of ATRs accept the reality of life after death for their ancestors but are not cognizant of punishments or rewards in the afterlife. They believe in a god who judges and punishes people during their earthly life, but not necessarily after their death. Some exceptions can be found such as the traditional belief among the Bassa people in Cameroon which teaches that “at death evil people were banished to a cold place while good people went to a wonderful place of light.”⁵⁷

The Problem of Final Judgment in ATR

In the preceding discussion, the critical understanding was established that the majority of ATRs look to the past and not to the future for the meaning of time and life. Furthermore, one must realize that ATR adherents perceive people as punished or rewarded primarily in the here and now as opposed to the expectation of a final judgement. As Mbiti points out:

In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving ‘forward’ towards a future climax, or towards an end of the world. Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot expect to usher in a golden age, or a radically different state of affairs from what is in the *Sasa* [Now] and the *Zamani* [past]. The notion of a messianic hope, or a final destruction of the world, has no place in traditional concept of history. So African peoples have no ‘belief in progress’, the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a

⁵⁵ John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A study of the encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 24.

⁵⁶ Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ “After Death” in *Africa Study Bible* (Oasis International Limited, 2016), p.1929.

low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor “build castles in the air.”⁵⁸

Mbiti argues that ATRs have no developed teaching on future things. Now, since eschatology is concerned about the destiny of the created order and themes such as—death, the return of Christ, judgment, rewards, heaven, and hell—ATR adherents are hence fascinated and frustrated to hear of these themes, because they have only a limited imagination of the “other world.”⁵⁹

Mbiti claims that human beings follow a rhythm of existence which knows neither end nor radical change starting with yet-to-be-born, birth, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death and admission into the fellowship of the dead. In this ATR view, then, people who die ‘progress’ to the past where they exist until after five generations. This belief, therefore, impels Africans to pour libations to keep the memory of the departed for a long time. It is here one must appreciate the significance of ‘remembering’ the dead, as central tenet of ATR. By remembering their dead, relatives retain the dead in their present period, in what may be termed ‘*personal immortality*’ since the dead person is remembered by name, and is called upon as such during libations as an act of remembrance, fellowship and rekindling of relationship between the living and the living-dead.⁶⁰ Finally, the whole point of the foregoing discussion is to show that the idea of the end of the world and eschatology as revealed in the New Testament is conspicuously absent in the ATR worldview.

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

The singular bridge to the gospel is the common belief in the inevitability of the death of every human being. ATR is certain of the mortality of every human being in precisely the same way the Bible teaches that “...it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment...” (Heb 9:27, CSB). A clear dis-

⁵⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, p. 23.

⁵⁹ Elias Kifon Bongmba, *Eschatology in Africa: The Imperative of a Transformative Social Praxis*. Accessed from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349776539_Bongmba_Eschatology_in_Africa, 31 January 2022.

⁶⁰ This understanding is the reason why the dead of up to four or five generations are termed as the ‘living-dead’ in ATR cosmology as they are dead in body, but alive in spirit form and in the memories of their surviving relatives. After five generations or so, the living dead are forgotten by name. They now die relative to living human beings, but live in spirit form, in the state of *collective immortality* (where their spirit is one of multitudes of unknown spirits of others who once were human beings and those created by God as species of spirits). See Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, pp 29-30.

tion, however, must be made between ATR belief in the certainty of every human's death and biblical teaching on the matter. ATR correctly asserts the inevitability of human mortality, but does not believe in a futuristic last judgment. The ATR teaching is that judgment occurs in the here and now only, whereas the Bible points to a future hope for those in right standing with God (cf. Heb 9:27-28). As the writer to the Hebrews explains the implication of post death judgment, "... so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb 9:28). Therefore, ATR adherents must be offered salvation, based on their acquiescence of the certainty of death for all human beings, through the accomplished work of rescue of His death on the behalf of repentant human beings (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Regarding barriers to the gospel in ATR, the first is that they (ATR) show little interest in the concept of the last judgment. Van Wyk contends that there is a tendency in ATR to consider the notion of the final judgment as a nonentity in their interpretations of life and the after death.⁶¹ Furthermore, Van Wyk notes that "African churches show little interest in the notion of the final judgment"⁶² because they have carried over an ATR idea into 'their' Christianity.⁶³ Van Wyk insists that although the "theologoumenon 'last judgment' become a museum piece", the remedy to this absence lies in teaching about the it in churches.

Neo-Pentecostalism/Prosperity Gospel

While most adherents of prosperity theology accept the biblical teaching on the consummation, there is a subtle difference in the way of both interpretation of

⁶¹ Ignatius WC van Wyk, "The Final Judgment in African Perspectives", *HTS Theological Studies* 62(2) 2006, p 703. Accessed from: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v62i2.358>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Van Wyk quotes Steve Biko, whom he describes as an African Christian traditionalist, to support this observation:

We believed – and this was consistent with our views of life – that all people who died had a special place next to God. We felt that a communication with God could only be through these people. We never knew anything about hell – we do not believe that God can create people only to punish them eternally after a short period on earth ... It was the missionaries who confused our people with their religion. They ... preach a theology of the existence of hell, scaring our fathers and mothers with stories about burning in eternal flames and gnashing of teeth and grinding of bone. This cold cruel religion was strange to us but our fore-fathers [sic] were sufficiently scared of the unknown impending anger to believe that it was worth a try. Down went our cultural values!

the biblical texts and application to contemporary Christian life. The prosperity gospel often misinterprets the Bible regarding the consummation in two crucial ways. First, it attempts to turn the “redemptive-historical clock backwards”⁶⁴ by placing Christians back under the Mosaic Covenant. Prosperity theology claims that God’s promises of obedience to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 are applicable to Christians in the here and now without considering the historical context in which they were written. Prosperity preachers basically equate the nation of Israel in the Old Testament to the New Testament Church.⁶⁵

Furthermore, prosperity theology also teaches that the promises of material prosperity and protection in the Psalms are literally applicable to present day Christians. Drummond writes:

Prosperity “gospel” preachers often appeal to Old Testament texts which promise physical blessings to Israel and apply them in a 1:1 fashion to the church. They like to do this particularly with the Psalms because the Psalms often promise physical protection and prosperity for God’s people (e.g., Psalm 35:27, 37:25). Other wisdom literature does so as well – Proverbs especially. Yet the hermeneutical problem comes when they apply them in a 1:1 fashion to the church because the church is not the same as Israel in some very important respects.⁶⁶

This manner of applying Old Testament texts to present day Christianity is a problematic hermeneutical principle which has misled prosperity gospel adherents in Africa and elsewhere.

The second aspect of error in the prosperity gospel is the problem of an excessively-realized eschatology where they force “the redemptive-historical

⁶⁴ Taylor Drummond, ‘Two Hermeneutical Errors of the Prosperity Gospel,’ *Patheos* November 29, 2017. accessed from: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/chorusinthechaos/hermeneutical-errors-prosperity-gospel/> 06 Feb 2022.

⁶⁵ Prosperity theology blatantly ignores the fact that the Mosaic Covenant was established as a temporary covenant which has been ended by the coming of Christ. The writer to Hebrews explains, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13, ESV). Also, Paul’s entire argument in Galatians is that the Mosaic Covenant has ended and therefore its obligations, particularly circumcision, no longer remain in force for the Christians. In other words, it is contrary to the gospel to demand Christians to come under the Mosaic Law (cf. Galatians 5:1).

⁶⁶ Drummond.

clock forward by claiming all the eschatological blessings of the New Heavens/ New Earth and applying them in the here and now.⁶⁷ This means that the prosperity theology takes blessings promised to Christians in the consummation⁶⁸ and applies them to Christians in the here and now. Thus, prosperity theology characteristically places emphasis on verses such as 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come,” and forcefully overrules the rest of the New Testament’s teaching on the already/not yet nature of the church’s existence. More specifically, the radical promises of the eschatological kingdom—no death or sorrow—are often claimed as a present reality for the true follower of Jesus. True salvation is understood in terms of complete comfort now. An over-realized eschatology can cause lead to unrealistic expectations both from oneself and from others – usually manifesting as a form of perfectionism.

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

What then are the bridges to gospel for reaching prosperity gospel adherent? First, despite the misinterpretation and misapplication of certain biblical texts, the prosperity gospel has a high regard for the Bible. This area of commonality with biblical Christianity lends itself as an area of much hope for their returning to biblical Christianity. One, therefore, can say that with the continued proclamation and teaching of biblical truth, they may come closer to correctly handling Scripture and embrace it.

Secondly, prosperity theology accepts the biblical teaching of the depravity of human beings and its consequences in both humans and the natural world. Although they misinterpret, and thus misapply some texts, they have a vision for a restored humanity and the entire cosmos (cf. Rom 8:22). This entails that a viable corrective to the errors of the prosperity gospel “would be modeling what it is to rightly handle the Scriptures.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ George Eldon Ladd, in *A Theology of the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1975), describes the consummation as “The goal of God’s redemptive purpose is the restoration of order to a universe that has been disturbed by evil and sin. This includes the realm of human experience, and the spiritual world (Eph. 1:10), and ... even nature itself. God will reconcile all things through Christ (Col 1:20),” p. 567.

⁶⁹ See Elliot Clark, ‘Don’t Oversimplify the (Prosperity) Gospel,’ *Training Leaders International*. Accessed from: <https://trainingleadersinternational.org/articles/849/dont-oversimplify-the-prosperity-gospel> 06 Feb 2022.

The first significant barrier to the gospel in prosperity theology is (ironically) its elevation of the “the-LORD-spoke-to-me phenomenon” among them. Prosperity gospel preachers tend to draw authority from this extra-biblical source even without sound biblical warrant for the content/import of their utterances. Some of their followers have no reason of behaving in a particular questionable manner other than that the man or woman of God gave them such a word from the LORD. Consequently, the centrality of the Bible is indirectly compromised in interpretation and application/practice. Furthermore, prosperity gospel adherents present their experiences as if they share the same status with those of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostle.

A second barrier to the gospel is that the prosperity gospel is mixed with occultism.⁷⁰ For example, Grady writes that “Before Christianity came to Nigeria, people visited witch doctors and sacrificed goats or cows to get prosperity. They poured libations on the ground so the gods would hear their prayers. Today similar practices continue, only the juju priest has been replaced by a pastor who drives a Mercedes-Benz.”⁷¹ The promise of a heavenly experience in the here and now is often the promise dangled before the congregation.

Roman Catholic Church (RCC)

As with many of the elements of the grand narrative of Scripture, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) seems to be in step with biblical picture of the consummation of our faith. The understanding of the church as the bride of Christ is a strong image within RCC teaching. Similarly, the expectations of a new heaven and new earth and the culminative reign of Christ in the new kingdom are found in RCC doctrinal statements. Not every doctrine of the future hope of the believer as taught by the RCC is based upon God’s revelation in Scripture. A common teaching that deviates sharply from the testimony of Scripture is the understanding of *purgatory*.

Purgatory

The term “purgatory” is often used to refer to the understanding of an intermediate place between death and heaven for the Christian. In truth, however,

⁷⁰ J. Lee Grady, ‘5 Ways the Prosperity Gospel Is Hurting Africa’, *Charisma Magazine*, Accessed from: <https://www.charismamag.com/blogs/fire-in-my-bones/19113-5-ways-the-prosperity-gospel-is-hurting-africa> 07 Feb 2022.

⁷¹ Ibid.

the term purgatory is derived from the Latin, *purgare*, which means “to purify” or “to purge.”⁷² The doctrine of purgatory, then, is more correctly understood as an expression of sanctification: “The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.”⁷³ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) explains: “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.”⁷⁴ This understanding of sanctification is based upon very particular readings of Scripture. Two important understandings of the Catholic idea of sin needs to be highlighted: there is a degree of severity among sin; and some sin can be forgiven after death.⁷⁵ Both of these ideas are grounded in a very particular reading of Jesus’ declaration of the “unforgiveable sin” of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: “He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, since Jesus declares that the “pure in heart” will see God (Matt 5:8), purification needs to take place:

In order to see God face to face in heaven (the beatific vision), our hearts need to be totally purified. This purification can begin on earth, but, if we die without this purification being complete, this will occur in purgatory, a condition of existence in which every trace of attachment to evil is eliminated and every imperfection of the soul corrected.⁷⁷

In other words, “Sanctification involves suffering (Rom. 5:3–5), and purgatory is the final stage of sanctification that some of us need to undergo before we enter heaven. Purgatory is the final phase of Christ’s applying to us the puri-

⁷² “The Doctrine of Purgatory” on *Today’s Catholic* website. Accessed at <https://todayscatholic.org/the-doctrine-of-purgatory/> on 3 December 2021.

⁷³ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 1031. Accessed online at https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P2N.HTM on 3 December 2021.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, section 1030.

⁷⁵ See the discussion on the impact of the Fall and RCC worldview in chapter three above.

⁷⁶ CCC, section 1031.

⁷⁷ “The Doctrine of Purgatory.”

fiyng redemption that he accomplished for us by his death on the cross.”⁷⁸ The experience of purgatory, then, is understood as one of anguish as “the tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire.”⁷⁹ The need for the doctrine of purgatory, then, is intimately connected to a misunderstanding of the efficacy of the work of Jesus as well as a misunderstanding of the dispensation of grace through the sacraments. If one holds that grace is dispensed truly through the sacraments⁸⁰ yet there are those who have partaken of the sacraments without exhibiting the fullness of grace, then one needs to have some mechanism for the completion of the sanctifying process. For the RCC, that process is purgatory. As it is an experience of anguish, one should strive to avoid it; nevertheless, one has the assurance that if you completed your sacramental activities then your salvation is secured. Hence, purgatory is different from the punishment of the damned.

This false understanding of the work of sanctification has led to the efforts of Catholics to strive to find ways to lessen the experience of purgatory for their family that have died with unforgiven sins: “From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.”⁸¹ A couple of the more common practices should be considered. First, is through prayers for the dead. This practice finds its basis in a passage from the Apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees 12:46: “Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.” The CCC provides further support through an erroneous application of Job: “If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died

⁷⁸ “What Does the Catholic Church Teach about Purgatory?” on *Catholic Answers* website. Accessed at: <https://www.catholic.com/tract/purgatory> on 22 November 2021.

⁷⁹ CCC, section 1031. Specifically, 1 Cor 3:15 (“If anyone’s work is burned up it will be lost, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire.”) and 1 Peter 1:6-7 (“...so that the genuineness of your faith—more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”) are given as prooftexts. Earlier in the section, one finds the understanding stated again, “As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire.”

⁸⁰ See the discussion of the role of the sacraments in the RCC worldview in chapter four above

⁸¹ CCC, section 1032.

and to offer our prayers for them.”⁸² This practice is often connected with the lighting of candles in the church for someone. Such a practice is seen as a greater expression of faith and diligence than simply praying at home. Often, an offering is given in connection to the lighting of the candle. Second, the practice of indulgences. Contrary to popular misunderstanding, an indulgence is not buying someone out of purgatory.⁸³ Rather, an indulgence is connected to the relief of the temporal punishment or consequences of sin which has already been forgiven.⁸⁴ In terms of purgatory, then, indulgence is usually stems from the RCC understanding of the consequences of good deeds. “Each good action of the just man possesses a double value: that of merit and that of satisfaction, or expiation. Merit is personal, and therefore it cannot be transferred; but satisfaction can be applied to others.”⁸⁵ This understanding of the application of satisfaction of a good deed carries the idea that one can perform good deeds which will help the process of the sanctification of those who have died. Such plenary indulgences are a crucial part of the life of Catholic members and often a focus of the first eight days of November in honour of “All Saints Day.” The disruption of COVID in 2020 led the Pope to modify how these plenary indulgences were granted so that they could still be gained.⁸⁶

Bridges and Barriers to Gospel

The general understanding of the second coming of Jesus and the reality of heaven and hell provide notable bridges to have meaningful conversations with

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ “Indulgences” in *Catholic Dictionary* online at New Advent website. Accessed at: <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07783a.htm#:~:text=Basis%20of%20the%20doctrine%20An%20essential%20element%20in,Treasury%20of%20the%20Church.%20The%20communion%20of%20saints> on 3 Dec 2021.

⁸⁴ Ibid. A more formal definition: “An indulgence is the extra-sacramental remission of the temporal punishment due, in God's justice, to sin that has been forgiven, which remission is granted by the Church in the exercise of the power of the keys, through the application of the superabundant merits of Christ and of the saints, and for some just and reasonable motive” (Ibid.).

⁸⁵ Ibid. The latter idea stems from a misunderstanding of Paul: “...as St. Paul writes to the Colossians (1:24) of his own works: ‘Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body, which is the Church.’” (Ibid.)

⁸⁶ “Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on Plenary Indulgences for the deceased faithful in the current pandemic” 22 October 2021 on the Vatican website. Accessed at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/tribunals/apost_penit/documents/rc_trib_appen_pro_20201022_decreto-indulgenze_en.html on 23 November 2021. Some of the more notable modifications included the allowance for “mental” cemetery visitation and the allowance for prayers and recitations to be conducted on any day of November and not just the first 8 days.

members of the RCC. The understanding of purgatory; however, creates a significant hindrance for several reasons. First, while not the intention of the formal church teaching, it provides the illusion that one gets a “second chance” to get it right. Notably, one is expected to have been a member in good standing, but with “unconfessed sin” or in need or greater righteousness. In practice, this doctrine encourages the idea that the ritual of sacraments will ensure that one receives the option of purgatory over damnation. Further, the idea that one may help those who have died to gain access to God by performing prayers and good deeds falls in line with many ATR practices around the veneration of ancestors; thus, the pathway to greater syncretisation of Christianity and ATRs is granted.

In Gospel conversations, then, the absolute efficacy of the work of Christ must be clearly explained. The inability of works to provide salvation for either the individual believer or through that believer for another is clear in the biblical narrative. The biblical narrative around death, resurrection, and judgment is the final voice on the experience after death. It is critical to remove the idea that one can have “another chance” after death.

Islam

“What is the chief end of Islamic faith?” Or “What is the assurance of salvation in Islam?” These are big questions in Islam even though Muslims rarely discuss the assurance of the believer’s salvation. What is certain is that neither Islamic theological literature nor Qur’anic commentaries offer thorough explanations of the consummation of the Islamic faith. The reason for this silence may be attributed to the fact that neither Qur’an nor Islamic tradition teach that any human being can be certain of their eternal salvation. Doesn’t the Qur’an promise Paradise to Muslims? Don’t martyrs enter Paradise (*Jannah* in Arabic)⁸⁷ immediately upon their death when they have given up their lives because of Islam? On the one hand, the Qur’an appears to promise Paradise to those who believe in Allah, the Creator and Judge, and on Muhammad, Allah’s messenger and prophet, and all those who obey Allah’s commandments as several texts in the Qur’an show that all who “believe and do right” (2:25), the “Allah-fearing” (or “the righteous” 57:17) will enter the “Gardens of Delight [Paradise]”

⁸⁷ BBC Bitesize 2021. *GCSE Muslim Beliefs*. Accessed from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z43pfcw/revision/5>, 6th December 2021. Muslims believe in the concept of Paradise (*Jannah*), which is where people go if they have lived a good life.

(56:26). It is hence undeniable that Muslims *hope* to enter Paradise. As one reads through the Qur'an, however, the realization of that hope is not as certain. Several aspects of the future hope in Islam needs to be considered.

Heaven and Hell in the Qur'an

Heaven is described in the Qur'an as a beautiful garden [Jannah (Paradise) where those who have been good go]. The Qur'an also describes paradise as "gardens of pleasure" (Qur'an 31:8). This pleasure encompasses a variety of food,⁸⁸ wealth and clothing,⁸⁹ and "great-eyed Houris" as wives (44:54; 56:22). Beyond the material, this garden is the "abode of peace" (6:127).⁹⁰ The residents of Paradise (believers) praise Allah (10:10) forever (44:56) and ridicule the unbelievers (damned) in hell (*Jahannam* in Arabic),⁹¹ who despised them (believers) on earth (83:29-35; 37:50-61). Finally, the bliss of Paradise in Islam also includes the presence and the "pleasure of Allah," which the Qur'an values more than all material pleasures (3:15; 9:72). Muslim theologians, however, are divided in their interpretation of Surah 75:22 whether believers perhaps even see Allah himself in Paradise.⁹²

It is important to note, however, that Muslims believe there are seven levels of Heaven (although "seven" is interpreted by some Muslims as simply "many"). Each Heaven is made of a different material, and a different prophet lives in each there. The first Heaven is made of silver and is where Adam and Eve reside. Abraham lives in the seventh Heaven in a place made of divine light. Hell is described as a place of fire and torment (a place of scorching fire pits and boiling water, a place of physical and spiritual suffering).

⁸⁸ 55:68 specifically mentions the enjoyment of fruit (55:68) and meat, springs, milk and honey

⁸⁹ Golden jewelry and garments of brocade and silk (35:33; 18:31).

⁹⁰ The garden will be freed from empty words, lies, and sin (78:35). They will forever hear only of peace and well-being (19:62). No human being in Paradise is ever sad (35:34), there is no hardship or weariness (35:35).

⁹¹ BBC Bitesize. Muslims also believe in Hell (Jahannam), which is where people go if they have lived a bad life or have committed *shirk*.

⁹² Christine Schirrmacher 2008. The Islamic View of Major Christian Teaching: The Role of Jesus Christ, Sin and Forgiveness. World Evangelical Alliance: Bonn. pp 101-102.

*Akhirah*⁹³ and The Day of Judgment

In Islam, life after death is called *Akhirah*. Muslims believe that no soul may die except with Allah's permission and at a preordained time (Qur'an 3:145). Muslims also believe that before Islamic believers go to *Jannah* (Paradise) or *Jahannam* (hell), they will enter *Barzakh*⁹⁴ (a state of waiting until the Day of Judgment). General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE) *Muslim Beliefs* summarizes the initial three-step expectation upon death:

1. When a person dies, their soul is taken by *Azra'il*, the Angel of Death.
2. He sends two angels to question the waiting soul. They ask: "Who is your LORD?" "What was your life like?" "Who is your prophet?"

⁹³ *Akhirah* is an Islamic term referring to the afterlife or the final destination of a soul. It is a key belief in Islam that life on earth is but a test and that every soul will be returning to Allah where Allah will decide our eternal home *Jannah* (paradise) or *Jahannam* (hellfire). This will be decided on a day known as *Yamm ad-Din* (day of judgement). There are various levels of *Jannah* and *Jahannam*, and placement will be determined on the extent of the person's deeds (see MyIslam 2021. *Akhirah Meaning and How to Pronounce*. Accessed from: <https://myislam.org/akhirah-meaning-and-pronunciation/>, 18 Dec. 21).

⁹⁴ *Ibid*. In Islam theology this is a place where souls wait before the Day of Judgment. It is also a place that divides the living from the dead. This is a purgatory equivalent as in Roman Catholicism. The Jannah An-Nur Foundation, in its book *The Life After Death (Barzakh) In Islam Based from The Holy Qur'an Bilingual Edition Ultimate Version (Hardcover)*, accessed from <https://www.roomofonesown.com/book/9781714961184>, 18 Dec. 21 explains:

Barzakh is an Arabic word meaning "obstacle", "hindrance", "separation", or "barrier" designates a place separating the living from the hereafter; a veil between the dead and their return to world of the living, but also to a phase happening between death and resurrection. *Barzakh* may, according to Ghazali, also be the place for those, who go neither to hell or to heaven. According to Ibn Hazm, *Barzakh* is also the place for the unborn souls, existing in the lowest heaven, where an angel blows the soul into wombs. Mentioned only three times in The Holy Qur'an, and just once specifically as the barrier between the corporeal and ethereal, *Barzakh* is portrayed as a place in which, after death, the spirit is separated from the body - freed to contemplate the wrongdoing of its former life. Despite the gain of recognizance, it cannot utilize action. The other two occurrences refer to *Barzakh* as an impenetrable barrier between fresh and salt water. While fresh and salt water may intermingle, an ocean remains distinct from a river. In *hadith*, Ibn al-Qayyim cites that, albeit not mentioned in the Qur'an, souls in *Al-Barzakh* would be grouped with others matching in purity or impurity. In Islam, the soul and the body are independent of each other. This is significant in *Barzakh*, because only a person's soul goes to *Barzakh* and not their physical body. Since one's soul is divorced from their body in *Barzakh*, the belief is that no progress or improvements to one's past life can be made. If a person experienced a life of sin and worldly pleasures, one cannot try to perform good deeds in order to reach *Jannah* Paradise. In Sufism the *Barzakh* or *Alam-e-Araf* is not only where the human soul resides after death but it is also a place that the soul can visit during sleep and meditation.

3. Muslims believe the answers to these questions determine how the soul experiences *Barzakh*.⁹⁵

Consider the illustration below:⁹⁶

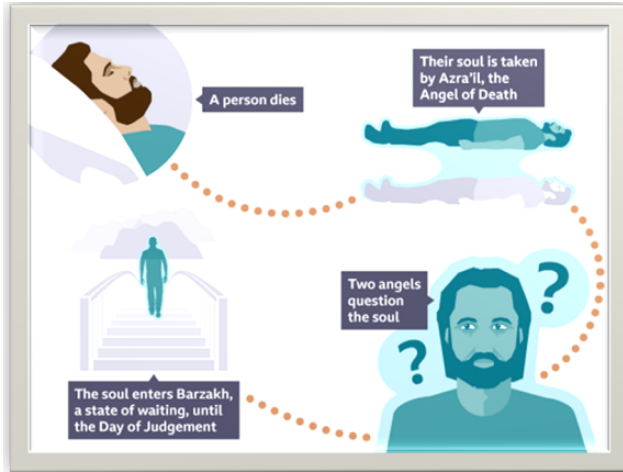


Illustration four: Islam—Life after Death

According to Islam, once the soul has passed this stage, it goes on to the Day of Judgement, where it is judged by Allah. When judged, Muslims must accept the consequences of how they behaved in their life on earth. The Day of Judgement in Islam is when no soul shall have power [to do] *anything* [i.e., anything] for another (82:19).⁹⁷ It will be each one for themselves and thus from the Day of Judgement, Muslims must enter either Paradise (Jannah) or Hell (Jahannam). In short, Muslims believe that every person who neither follow the teachings of the Qur'an nor take responsibility for their deeds will be sent to Hell. Either of these omission or commission would mean 'they had failed Allah's test' in their life on earth.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., GSCE *Islam—Life after Death* accessed from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zdxqhv/revision/5> 19 Dec. 21.

⁹⁷ GSCE Muslim Beliefs, Ibid.

⁹⁸ Some Muslims believe that even the souls in Hell can eventually be sent to Paradise. These beliefs give Muslims the motivation to follow the teachings in the Qur'an. They also give hope to those who suffer that there is something better to come (See BBC Bitesize, *ibid*, *Hell*).

Allah's 'Limitless' Omnipotence

A second vital aspect of Islamic theology has to do with Allah's omnipotence and his limitless authority of decision. According to Islam, Allah's limitlessness of power makes it *impossible* for human beings to predict his final decision in the Last Judgment. This tenet assumes that since Allah is omnipotent and no human being has ever understood his nature, no human being can be certain if Allah's mercy, goodness, and grace will apply to a person or if Allah will still be angry at the end of time. Therefore, *only after death* will a person truly know their fate, not before, as Allah's behaviour is perpetually unpredictable. Otherwise, Allah would fall to a human rank and fit within human notions. Furthermore, the Qur'an depicts Allah as a trickster and conniver who devises the best intrigues: "Allah is full of guile" (13:13), and "The unbelievers may 'hatch plot' but Allah also hatches plots. And Allah is the best of plotters" (8:30). Allah's behaviour is beyond human understanding and no human has ever comprehended the essential nature of his devious divinity. As the Qur'an puts it: "Oh you [humans]! It is you who are poor and dependent on Allah, but Allah depends on no one and is worthy of praise" (35:15).

The Return of Jesus in Islam

Muslims believe that Jesus (*Isa* in Arabic) will return to Earth before the Day of Judgment to restore justice and defeat *al-Masih ad-Dajjal* (Arabic for "the false messiah")—the Antichrist⁹⁹ They also believe that the return of Jesus will be preceded by signs, again similar in general description, but subtly different in detail.¹⁰⁰ Islam, like biblical eschatology, teaches that preceding Jesus' second Coming, epochal events (signs of the end-times) will occur in frequent succession.¹⁰¹ Although Islamic eschatology also believes that Jesus will return to earth, they nonetheless believe that Jesus will come to restore people to Islam and then die again. Therefore, the cardinal point of Islam's teaching about Jesus' second coming is to demonstrate that Allah, not Jesus, will be the judge on the

⁹⁹ Jennifer Williams 2019. 'Muslims love Jesus, too: 6 things you didn't know about Jesus in Islam.' *Vox*. Accessed from: <https://www.vox.com/2017/12/18/10660648/jesus-in-islam-muslims-believe-christmas-Qur'an> 20 Dec. 21.

¹⁰⁰ Jeremy Boutler 2006. 'The Return of Jesus: Similarities and differences about the second coming of Jesus between Christians and Muslims. The Messiah at the End of time in Judaism' *The Religion of Islam*. Accessed from: <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/363/viewall/return-of-jesus/> 20 Dec. 21.

¹⁰¹ These include a widespread increase in immorality, incidences of heinous crimes, general lawlessness, devastating wars, natural disasters, calamitous pandemics, debauchery and falling away from the faith.

Last Day.¹⁰² This difference in the mission of Jesus' return to earth (in Islam and biblical Christianity) must be carefully handled when being employed as a bridge to the Gospel!

Bridges and Barriers to the Gospel

Regarding the consummation of faith, the expectation of *Akhirah* (Arabic for life after death) provides a great point of gospel conversation. The understanding of the afterlife's connection to one's life now provides an opportunity to speak of righteousness and certainty. Similar to biblical Christianity, Islam believes in a coming day call the Judgment Day (*Yawm ad-Din*, in Arabic) when Allah (the all-knowing and all-righteous Judge) will decide how people will spend their afterlife. The reality of a paradise as well as a place of judgment is a further steppingstone to gospel conversation. Furthermore, it is precisely in the understanding of judgment that gospel takes precedence due to the ultimate uncertainty of salvation for the Muslim. As has been shown in the preceding chapters of this work, however, the Bible emphatically assures Christ-followers that any human being may receive the certainty of the forgiveness of sin and salvation through the atoning work of Jesus Christ (see the Rescue chapter above). Therefore, the absolute reliability of God's promises to everyone He has saved is the essential element of biblical Salvation, not any trick or scheme that would leave a forgiven person in utter uncertainty this side of Heaven. Another point of connection bridge is the common belief in Islam that Jesus will return to earth; however, the radically different understanding of Jesus' purpose and role in his return can be a barrier to fruitful discussion. The Christian must be clear about the distinctive differences! A final point of connection is the certainty of a cosmic judgment in which not only will Satan and the demons be cast into hell, but also the earth will be destroyed.¹⁰³

Despite the significant points of contact, several barriers are created due to the understanding of the consummation of faith. The first barrier to the Gospel in Islam is the belief in Allah's transcendence and separateness. The fact that in Islam Allah cannot mix with creaturely humans is a potent hinderance to the Gospel. Muslims argue that Allah has never been in fellowship with humans before and therefore Muslim theology does not see any need of human beings

¹⁰² Ricky Brown, "Muslim Worldviews and the Bible: Part II—Jesus, the Holy Spirit &the Age to Come" *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. Vol 23:2 p. 56.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

approaching Allah; all they must do is obey Allah's commandments as revealed in the Qur'an through Muhammad their final prophet. A second barrier to the Gospel in Islam is about their teaching on the nature of the general resurrection. Although Muslims believe that there will be a general resurrection on the last day, they still hold that all people will be resurrected with the same kind of bodies and "those who are in hell are half dead, or else they suffer frequent death and resuscitation."¹⁰⁴

As for consummation, then, use the understanding of judgment as a starting point for a conversation around the gospel and move to the uncertainty about salvation that is a part of Islam. This reality can be contrasted with the complete efficacy of the work of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The consummation of our faith is the assurance that "He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). Just as creation began with God so consummation reminds us that the ultimate joy is to dwell forever with God. The Consummation not only assures that salvation is secure but declares with absolute certainty that the end of our faith is absolutely worth the journey. There is a promise of the resolution of the mysterious desire beyond the here and now as C.S. Lewis once explained: "creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water... If I discover within myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."¹⁰⁵ Further, there is the hope of our purpose will be fulfilled:

At the beginning of God's story, we learned that His plan was for people to worship and obey Him, the Creator, thereby filling the Earth with worshippers to magnify God's name forever. Sin derailed our ability to walk in this purpose, but the substitutionary death of Jesus made that purpose possible once again. By faith in Him, we are brought into God's promise to fulfill His plan for us

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1952), pp. 136-137 as cited in *The Story*, p. 98.

throughout eternity. Through newness of heart and spirit when we embrace Jesus as our Saviour, God works in us to fulfill the purpose HE had for us. What we couldn't do on our own, God did for us through Jesus Christ. All of creation will be worshipping and obeying in perfect shalom.¹⁰⁶

The journey of Scripture moves us from the design of Creation, through the tragedy of the Fall, to the amazing grace of the Rescue, and finally to the joyous future hope of the Consummation. The follower of Jesus can stand in anticipation of that day of the vision granted the Apostle John:

**“Then I heard a loud voice from the throne:
‘Look! God’s dwelling is with men, and He will live with them.
They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.
He will wipe away every tear from their eyes
Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer because the previous things have passed away.’
Then the One seated on the throne said,
‘Look! I am making everything new.’”¹⁰⁷**

¹⁰⁶ *The Story*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁷ Revelation 21:3-5a

PART 2:

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IN
PRACTICE

CHAPTER 5

INTEGRATION OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IN MINISTRY

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”¹

How can a proper understanding of biblical theology enhance ministry? Ultimately, the goal of this volume has not been simply to provide an overview of biblical theology, but to provide a foundational understanding of biblical theology that can impact ministry positively in one’s local context. As mentioned in the opening chapter, biblical theology is a foundational discipline for other theological endeavours—most notably systematic theology. Beyond theological studies, biblical theology also provides great insight and perspective for various ministry tasks. The firm placement of the biblical narrative in one’s understanding of Scripture and history can provide a helpful lens for the many aspects of ministry.

In this chapter, biblical theology and practical ministry is examined in connection to three ministry tasks, specifically: teaching, preaching, and evangelism. While other aspects of ministry can be highlighted, these three are foundational in fulfilling the great commission. Each ministry will be considered separately although some overlap and progression is acknowledged. Teaching as the more foundational discipline will be considered first and a baseline for the engagement with the Bible in ministry is established. Preaching is considered second not because it is a lesser task, but because it builds on the task of teaching. One sample sermon is provided as an illustration of preaching with a bibli-

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16. The phrase “inspired by God” is literally “God breathed” in the Greek version and a clear reference to the creation narrative where God breathed life into Adam. In the same manner, Scripture has “life.” The Holy Spirit led the author of Hebrews to declare “For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints, and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart” (4:12).

cal theological lens. Finally, the impact of biblical theology on evangelism—a call given to every believer—is examined. Two examples of gospel presentations are included in Appendix B.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AS FOUNDATIONAL FOR TEACHING

In the foregoing discussion in this work, we have defined biblical theology and established the Christ-centeredness of the grand narrative of Scripture. Roark and Cline rightly posit, “If the story of Scripture is all about Christ the King, this reality ought to impact the preaching and teaching ministry of the local church directly.”² In this chapter, therefore, we will demonstrate how biblical theology impacts the teaching ministry of a local church and offer some practical tools and next steps to facilitate the application of biblical theology in the local church’s teaching ministry.

Roark and Cline helpfully point out that biblical theology can serve both as a good protection and guide for teachers of Scripture. Firstly, “guard against two perennial enemies for those who regularly teach the Bible: prooftexting and moralism.”³ Secondly, “biblical theology helps guide ... teachers toward evangelistic, Christ-centered exposition that emphasizes the glorious Hero of the whole story, Jesus Christ.”⁴ Building on these observations, one needs to engage three tasks to develop an understanding of the foundational relationship of biblical theology and the ministry task of teaching for teachers of the Bible in Churches on our continent of Africa. Firstly, one needs to understand how biblical theology keeps the main thing the main thing of Bible teaching—a focus on God’s work of salvation. Secondly, the manner by which biblical theology helps protect against the common errors of prooftexting and moralising as an outcome of exegesis. And thirdly, identify some practical steps for teaching from a biblical theological foundation.

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

A biblical theological approach to teaching can facilitate the keeping of the main thing the main thing for ministry in Africa (and anywhere else for that matter!).

² Nick Roark & Robert Cline, *Biblical Theology: How the Church Faithfully Teaches the Gospel*. 2014 (Wheaton: Crossway) p 75.

³ Ibid.

⁴ ibid

The integration of biblical theology as a foundational framework to the teaching ministry in a local church will undoubtedly benefit its health as it will watch and warn Christ's flock from spiritual danger by teaching the main thing of Scripture as the main thing: "to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15b). Any approach to teaching which misses this core criteria of *Salvation in Christ Jesus* misses the main thing of the grand narrative of the Bible. The Holy Spirit through Paul was clear in the counsel to Timothy, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing those from whom you learned, and that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:14-15). One of the strengths of biblical theology is the unpacking of salvation history as the unifying theme of Scripture. As a result, biblical theology should provide guidelines for the teaching ministry of the church to understand the climax of Scripture. Moving through the entire canon, one discovers the progression of God's historical engagement with humanity leading toward the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The New Testament provides God's continued engagement with the church in response to the call and commissioning for ministry following Jesus' resurrection. Biblical theology, then, provides "guidrails" for the teacher—both in the larger scope of the canon, but the directional scope of salvation history. Cline and Roark rightly argue that "biblical theology helps clarify the Bible's main purpose."⁵ They explain,

In the Bible, the triune God explains who he is and what he is like and how he's at work throughout history by his Spirit and in his Son, Jesus Christ the King, and how we ought to glorify him in this world. Biblical theology helps us to grasp this main purpose by looking at each passage of Scripture in light of the whole Bible so that we understand how every part of Scripture is related to Jesus.⁶

Furthermore, the pastoral task of teaching the local church comes with the injunction to watch and warn God's flock from doctrinal error and personal sin. Mayhue designates the task of teaching in the local church as critical among the pastors' duties when he writes,

⁵ Robert Cline & Nick Roark. *4 Reasons Why We Need Biblical Theology*. 24 March 2018. Crossway Online article, Accessed from <https://www.crossway.org/articles/4-reasons-why-we-need-biblical-theology>. 18 March 2022.

⁶ Ibid.

Guarding Christ's flock of believers from spiritual danger is one of the most neglected pastoral duties in today's church. In addition to commissioning sentinels to watch over His flock by directing them into truth and righteousness, God has charged these sentinels to protect the flock from doctrinal error and personal sin. Ezekiel 3, 33, and Acts 20 provide clear instruction on the why's and how's of being a pastoral watchman. Undershepherds of the flock will be good servants and obedient imitators of the Chief Shepherd when they regularly watch for and warn of encroaching spiritual dangers.⁷

It is noteworthy, therefore, that a foundational understanding of biblical theology for the teaching task not only keeps the main thing the main thing of ministry, but also will free pastors from the charge of dereliction of duty.

Christ-centered Teaching instead of Proof-Texting and Moralising

Two common misguided approaches to Scripture are searching the Bible to find proof-texts to support actions or beliefs and the reduction of biblical narrative to a moral lesson. First, consider the role of biblical theology in aiding teachers of the Bible to avoid the error of proof-texting and guiding them toward teaching Christ from the entire Bible. Proof-texting happens when a teacher uses the Bible to prove a point of argument without considering the context of the passage. By so doing, the teacher reads their meaning into the passage instead of discovering the meaning from the passage. This practice is easy to do as one does not have to perform the painstaking and prayerful task of understanding the original writer's intended meaning required to achieve faithful Bible exposition. Teachers who embrace proof-texting as their way of doing ministry dishonour God by claiming that God has spoken to them when in fact He has not done so. This approach is a crisis in our churches in Africa (and of course everywhere) because those who teach and preach God's Word to God's people must do their task well "as one who speaks oracles of God" (1 Pet 4:11) for Jesus Christ's glory. Biblical theology highlights the historical context of God's progressive revelation throughout the canon. The historical reality of God's

⁷ Richard L. Mayhue, "Watching and Warning," in John MacArthur, Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (eds.), *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically*. 2005 (Nelson Reference & Electronic: Nashville), p 272.

continued engagement with His people demands that one understand that context to understand more fully the meaning of any given text.

The crisis is dire because instead of endeavouring to study a passage of the Bible and obeying it, proof-texting approaches the text with a meaning God never communicated in the original context. Therefore, teachers of God's word must endeavour to correctly interpret the Bible. Consider the Holy Spirit's injunction to Timothy through Paul, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, *correctly teaching the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15, emphasis added). Furthermore, proof-texting seeks to manipulate God's Word by misrepresenting the truth and misleading the hearer. The Holy Spirit through Paul clearly points out the importance of integrity in teaching and preaching when he writes,

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not give up. Instead, we have renounced shameful secret things, not walking in deceit or distorting God's message, but in God sight we commend ourselves to every person's conscience by an open display of the truth. (2 Cor. 4:1-2).

This passage warns the teacher against distorting the word of God. The use of proof-texts to teach whatever one desires is a clear distortion of Scripture in contrast to setting forth the truth plainly. Unfortunately, churches and all who use the distortion of proof-texting will inevitably produce an unstable foundation for church wellbeing. But how does biblical theology help guide the teacher away from the error of proof-texting? Biblical theology challenges the teacher to view each passage of Scripture within both its immediate context as well as the larger context of the Grand Narrative of the Bible (this task will be discussed more below in the unpacking of tools and steps for the teaching faithfully). Roark and Cline astutely advise, "Biblical theology guides the [teacher] toward proclaiming Christ from all of Scripture. Knowing the big story of Scripture helps Bible teachers to proclaim Christ from every part of the Bible."⁸

Second, consider the role of biblical theology in aiding the teacher to avoid the danger of moralism by guiding them to understand how Jesus is the Hero of the whole story. Teaching which is immersed in moralism simply emphasises the positive or negative character qualities in a biblical person for the purpose of be-

⁸ Ibid., p 77.

haviour change. The danger of moralism is that it motivates hearers to improve their behaviour but does so by weakening the gospel. Moralism is a problem because the Bible's grand narrative is not primarily a behaviour modification programme, and the good news of the gospel is not a moral self-improvement programme! Pastors and teachers are called to ministry with the aim of proclaiming Jesus Christ, "warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). All Scripture has the power to "instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Therefore, every teacher's task is incomplete if their teaching has not made clear how any passage they are handling fits in the grand narrative and glories Jesus.

For example, biblical theology also helps the teacher faithfully teach a passage like 1 Samuel 17, the story of David and Goliath. This passage is not intended simply to teach Christians how to fight the "giants" in their lives. The point of the passage is not merely to emphasize David's courage in the face of a daunting battle. Although David undoubtedly demonstrated a lot of courage by running head long to fight the giant Goliath, the main point of the passage is to show that the real hero of the narrative is God Himself who enabled him to slay Goliath. David's courage was an expression of his faith in God; however, if a teacher's focus is that "David was courageous and hence a person must endeavour to be courageous and confident like David," then that teacher has been unsuccessful in "rightly handling the word of truth" and has dishonoured God, who merits all glory and praise. In placing the text within the larger biblical theological context, the teacher is enabled to avoid the problem of moralism by demonstrating that the "God who rescues" is the Hero of the biblical story. David is merely an example of placing faith in God who alone accomplishes the goal of victory in the grand narrative of redemption.

Moralism is not only a problem when teaching Old Testament texts, but also when teaching from the New Testament. Biblical theology guards against the danger of moralism by guiding the teacher toward keeping their focus on the saving work of Christ, even when teaching from the Gospels. The Gospels were written to emphasise the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when teaching from the Gospels one must never lose sight of the centrality of Jesus Christ and His redeeming work. Biblical theology thus helps the teacher to avoid the problem of moralism. By adhering to the centrality of Christ in the Gospels, the teacher will ask first and foremost, 'What does this text say about the Lord Christ?' instead of being drawn into reading the text and asking, 'Who am I in this story?' or 'What does this text say about me?' as

the focal point of the passage. This statement is not meant to imply that one does not find truth about humanity in the Scriptures; rather, the observation is a reminder that the ultimate focus is on the God who rescues.

Practical Steps to Teaching with a Biblical Theological Perspective

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that integrating biblical theology in the teaching ministry of a local church is indispensable for healthy church formation and the development of the community of Christ followers. One might rightly ask, however, “How can a teacher of the Bible integrate biblical theology in the curriculum of their church?” Put differently, “What steps can a teacher take to build on the foundation of biblical theology in their local church?” Some tools are readily available to help with this task, namely, study tools and storyline tools. The study tools group concentrates on the interpretation of the passage toward understanding the context of the passage and the original intention of its writer. The tools in the first group are for the exegetical task aimed at getting the meaning of a Bible passage. The second set of tools, the storyline tools assist the reader understand where a text fits in the grand narrative of the whole Bible and how that text contributes to its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. These tools focus is on the divine author and the grand narrative of whole Bible.

In keeping with the working definition of biblical theology provided in the introductory chapter, three primary steps for the engagement of any text through a biblical theological lens are considered: (1) the progressive historical revelation of God revealed in Scripture, (2) the importance of considering the whole of the canon, and (3) the understanding of salvation history as the unifying theme of Scripture (and the essential plotline of the Grand Narrative of the Bible).⁹ Each of these essential elements will be considered separately.

Reading a Text as a Part of God's Historical, Progressive Revelation

The first step in doing biblical theology is about reading a text in its *full* context. Context is the first interpretive lens by which a text is examined toward understanding what the writer intended to communicate to their original audience.

⁹ Roark and Cline suggest that when doing biblical theology there are at least five interpretive lenses which may be used to examine and correctly interpret passages in the Bible. These lenses help the reader of a passage with arriving at the writer's original intended meaning. The following are the five interpretive lenses for a passage: (1) Context, (2) Covenant, (3) Canon, (4) Character of God, and (5) Christ (Ibid, p 89). Some of these ideas have been incorporated into this chapter as well.

Without taking this step of reading a text in its context the reader is left with no objective way of testing their interpretation. Thus, an understanding of any biblical text must start through reading it thoroughly in its immediate historical context. Furthermore, for the reader to have a better chance of understanding the passage, they must also understand its larger context within which it is located—what is its placement within a given passage or book, or its literary context. Finally, one must consider its placement within the elements of the Grand Narrative of Scripture: Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Consummation.

Discerning the Historical context¹⁰

What then is the historical context of a passage? Duvall and Hays rightly note that the historical context of a passage “... involves the biblical writer, the biblical audience, and any historical-cultural elements touched on by the passage itself. Historical-cultural context relates to just about anything outside the text that will help you understand the text itself...”¹¹ Therefore, the historical context is constructed by answering such questions as, “Who is the writer of this book?” “When was the book written?” “Are there any historical markers in the biblical passage itself that would indicate this?” “What did the passage mean to its original readers?” “Who were these readers and what was the occasion of the writing?” or “What needs did the writer seek to address?” Arriving at the original, historical meaning of a passage seeks to provide an objective point of control against subjective and arbitrary readings of the Scripture. “Whenever the plain meaning is abandoned, control over Biblical Theology interpretation is gone, and Scripture comes to mean anything the interpreter sees in it.”¹² For example, consider the value of historical context when the studying the book of Lamentations. These poems of lament were written following the Babylonians’ destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC (Jeremiah 52). Knowing this historical context is important for rightly interpreting and understanding the scope and meaning of the laments. Such an approach is true of any book of the Bible.

While it is true that one can never fully know all the dynamics of an ancient context, the precautionary maxim that “a text without a context is a pretext to a

¹⁰ As this volume is not focused on the investigation of biblical hermeneutics—which is considered in another volume of the ATS, the authors accept an historical-grammatical critical approach as the primary tool for the establishment of historical context.

¹¹ J. Scott Duvall and J Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2012) p 118.

¹² Roark and Cline, p 91-92.

proof-text”¹³ holds well all the time. A good interpreter, therefore, always starts by looking at the text through the lens of its historical context. The historical context may be discerned both through a reading of its larger biblical text—what is the narrative history provided by the Scripture—and through the help of exegetical tools such as biblical history and commentaries. Understanding the historical context of a text will help the reader grasp the progress of revelation of the story line of the Bible at the time of writing.

Understanding the Literary Context

Having established the historical context of a text, the reader must then seek to establish its literary context. The literary context “relates to the particular form a passage takes and to the words, sentences, and paragraphs that surround the passage you are studying.”¹⁴ Further, the literary context refers to the placement of a passage within the book of the Bible in which it occurs. The interpreter therefore must read the passage in both its immediate and larger contexts to have a good chance of arriving at its originally intended meaning. The maxim that “context is king” means that the meaning of a text is determined by its context. The immediate context of a passage is made up of the words, sentences and paragraphs that come before it and the words, sentences, and paragraphs that follow it. There is also a larger context of a passage which include chapters, books, corpus of the author, Testament, and the canon of Scripture. Therefore, the interpreter must read the passage in both the immediate and the larger context to arrive at its right meaning as intended by the Holy Spirit.

Within the task of understanding the literary context of a passage is located the need to interpret it according to its genre. For example, in the Old Testament, an interpreter will want to determine whether the passage they are studying is narrative, poetry, prophecy, law, wisdom, or apocalyptic. Similarly, in the New Testament is divided in three primary genres: historical narratives (the Gospels and Acts), epistles (or letters), and apocalyptic.

Rightly handling the word of truth partly entails recognizing a passage’s genre and allowing that understanding to impact how one reads, interprets, and apply it. Once an interpreter determines the genre, then they want to examine how the passage is organized in the book. This phase starts by studying the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p 91. Duvall and Hays will go further in declaring that “context determines meaning” (Duvall and Hays, p. 118). Such language may be viewed by some as a bit overstated; however, the sentiment regarding the importance of understanding the context is not and should be heeded.

¹⁴ Duvall and Hays, p 150.

words and grammar of the passage itself. This task includes looking for any clear structural markers, words or phrases which are repeated, and appreciating the passage's tone.

For an interpreter to study a passage in context entails they get a clear sense of what the passage means in both its immediate and larger literary contexts. In establishing the immediate context, the questions “What comes right before the passage?” and “What comes right after it?”, are answered. The larger context concerns what the passage means considering, the chapters surrounding the text, the whole book, books of the same writer, the whole testament, and the whole canon of Scripture.

Placing the Text in the Context of the Grand Narrative

Biblical theology demands a third layer of context beyond the historical and literary. One must consider how the passage fits within the larger narrative of the Bible within the broad strokes of Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Consummation. Does the passage find its meaning in the exposition of the creation narrative? Does the passage illustrate the impact of the consequence of sin? Does the passage anticipate the hope of God's rescue of humanity or reflect upon the Rescue of humanity in the work of Jesus? Does the passage find its meaning in the promise of hope yet to come? While every passage of Scripture should not be understood as a direct chapter in the Grand Narrative, every passage does move along this divine story. Every passage is a part of the continuation of God's story of His engagement with humanity in history—prior to Israel, with the nation of Israel, with the church, or in the New Heaven and New Earth. Biblical theology provides the solid foundation of the certainty of the historical reality of God's progressive engagement with humanity. This third layer of context must be engaged by the teacher. This task will be considered more fully below in connection to the third lens of interpretation.

Interpreting a Passage within the Whole of the Canon

The second interpretive lens to consider when doing biblical theology is the lens of looking at the whole canon of the Bible. In this step of interpretation, the reader must always recall the hermeneutical principle of sound interpretation that Scripture does not contradict itself. In other words, the reader must remember that Scripture is the best interpreter of itself. Therefore, the reader wants to read the text and look for connections to other parts of Scripture through themes, prophecy, type and antitypes revealed, promises made and ful-

filled, and issues of continuity and discontinuity. This task means that the reader of a text must ask themselves, “What connections does the writer make to the rest of the Bible?” Checking cross-references and using them to aid understanding of the meaning of the text within the context of the whole canon of Scripture is imperative in this step. Additionally, when interpreting an Old Testament text which is quoted by a New Testament writer, the reader must adhere to the New Testament’s writer’s understanding or application. Consequently, the question “How does the New Testament writer’s understanding of this passage influence my interpretation?” is unavoidable if one is to arrive at the ultimate interpretation of an Old Testament text. This process is what is termed here as reading a text canonically.

Reading a text canonically, however, involves much more than just establishing its connections to other parts of the Bible. Reading canonically requires the interpreter’s meticulous reading of a passage looking out for themes, prophecy, typology, promise-made and fulfillment, and issues of continuity and discontinuity found therein.¹⁵ In Schreiner’s words, canonical reading of a Scriptural text occurs when, “We read the scriptures both from front to back and back to front. We always consider the developing story as well as the end of the story.”¹⁶

Identifying Themes

Regarding themes, the interpreter must look for what major biblical themes can be identified in each text. The interpreter is challenged to consistently look beyond the immediate context to gain a fuller understanding. Themes are not static within the text; rather, themes are developed across the biblical narrative and are impacted by the major elements of the Grand Narrative. Every theme in Scripture develops across the biblical narrative from the exposition of Creation to the impact of sin to the redemption of Rescue to the ultimate expression in the Consummation of faith. As one interprets a passage, one should look for connections to thematic developments in the canon of Scripture. Throughout this volume, the themes of Temple/Tabernacle, Image of God, Covenant, and Kingdom of God have been examined in light of each element of the Grand Narrative. One can break down such themes to individual passages that help

¹⁵ Roark and Cline, pp 95-97.

¹⁶ Schreiner, p 28.

move that theme along. This task is necessary if one is to gain a canonical perspective of any passage.

Interpreting Prophecy

At the most basic level, prophecy is composed of a promise made and promise kept dynamic. To understand prophecy, the interpreter must look back and look forward. For some prophecies, the reader can expect multilevel fulfillment of their passage. In other words, one may find an immediate fulfillment of promise yet also uncover an ultimate fulfillment later in the canon. This dynamic was explored more fully in chapter 3 above. When interpreting any passage, then, one should ask if there is any promise of God evident that is to be considered. Interestingly, the dynamic of prophesy is particularly profound in the narratives of Luke and Acts where one finds four different types of prophecy: OT prophecies fulfilled in the Gospel of Luke;¹⁷ prophecy and fulfillment both in Luke;¹⁸ prophecy in Luke and fulfillment in Acts;¹⁹ both prophecy and fulfillment in Acts.²⁰ This dynamic of God's promises made and God's keeping of those promises provides clear movement along the axis of salvation history. This movement provides snapshots of God's progressive revelation in history.

Understanding Typology

In contrast to prophecy which centres on the deliverance of a promise, typology examines patterns in Bible. These patterns might be found in an event, a person, or an institution in the Old Testament that points forward and is fulfilled in the New Testament. The Bible's historical patterns teach truths about the King and his kingdom. For instance, Paul writes that Adam was a type of Christ: "Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is *a prototype of the Coming One*" (Rom. 5:14, emphasis added). When Paul writes to the church at Corinth about the wilderness wanderings of Israel, he says, "Now these things happened to them as examples, and they were written as a warning to us, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). In the exodus, the Passover lamb was a type which pointed to a greater spotless Lamb who would be killed to rescue the people of God through an even greater exodus (Ex. 12:1–13; John 1:36; 19:36; 1

¹⁷ See Isaiah 29:18ff and Luke 7:20ff; Malachi 3:1 and Luke 7:27.

¹⁸ See Luke 9:21-22 and Luke 18:31-33; 24:6-8, 44.

¹⁹ See Luke 9:5; 10:11 and Acts 13:51; Luke 21:12-15 and Acts 4: 3-5, 14; 5:17-42.

²⁰ See Acts 21:10-14 and Acts 21:30-35.

Cor. 5:7–8; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6). The study of typology has often been abused where merely a superficial resemblance between two things in the Bible has been taken as a type. Roark and Cline helpful caution, "... the safest way to establish a type is to let the biblical authors have their say by rooting the type explicitly in the biblical text itself."²¹

The Promise Made and Promise Kept Dynamic

Observing the promise-fulfillment dynamic is important to right interpretation of the Bible. While this element has been considered in connection to prophecy above, the relationship is seen in the idea of the "already" and "not yet" experience of the follower of Jesus. God is faithful to his promises and the interpreter will do well to look out for the fulfillment of all His promises in the Bible. In fact, many of God's promises in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament. Hence it is the utmost duty of the reader of a New Testament passage to look backward to see the original promise in the Old Testament and observe its fulfillment in the New. A key question to pursue whenever handling texts of this nature, however, would be, "Is this promise partially fulfilled now and awaiting complete fulfillment in the consummation?" Or "Has the promise been completely realized?" The interpreter should constantly be alert to the "already and not yet" facets of some promises fulfilled by Jesus Christ in the rescue of humanity. The Holy Spirit through Paul explains how the "already and not yet" facet of the promise fulfilled dynamic will engage with the realities of salvation in Romans 6-8. For example, in Romans 6, the Christian is told that in a real sense, one has died to sin and is delivered from the slavery of sin; nevertheless, one continues to struggle with the presence of sin in life this side of Heaven (Rom 7). Currently the Christ follower has been delivered from the slavery of sin, but the consummation the deliverance from sin awaits the glorification. (Romans 8; Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2-3; Rev 21-22).

Grasping the Significance of Continuity and Discontinuity

The continuity-discontinuity principle comes into play when an interpreter of a passage must pose the question regarding a text; "What in the meaning or application of this text is the same as before, and what has changed?" Here the interpreter also asks, "Is the writer highlighting differences or similarities in the passage?" For instance, if interpreting Genesis 17, where God commands

²¹ Roark and Cline, p 96.

Abraham about circumcision, the canonical context leads the interpreter to consider the discontinuity stated in a passage like Galatians 6:15: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” The interpreter’s questions would then be, “What has changed between Genesis 17 and Galatians 6? What is the same?” Answering these questions will assist the interpreter through observing canonical correlations between the two passages and see how they point them toward the coming of Christ and the results of the saving work of Jesus.

The Unifying Theme of Salvation history as an Organizational Rubric

The third and final interpretive lens provided by biblical theology in engaging the teaching of a text of the Bible is the unifying theme of salvation history. The salvation history lens puts the person and work of Christ at the heart of the interpretive task. For any valid interpretation of a text to occur the interpreter must first understand where in salvation history that passage fits. This process is aptly described as reading a passage of the Bible in a Christological way. Each text of Scripture must be considered in light of its context and place in the canon. One must—for every text—consider “how it relates to the person and work of Christ. Every time we open the Bible, we should labour to understand where this text fits into the big story.”²² Since we have demonstrated that Jesus Christ is the central figure of the metanarrative of the Bible, Roark and Cline adeptly identify five crucial questions to help establish a Christ-centered focal point of interpretation and application:

1. What does this passage reveal about Jesus Christ, his life, and his work
2. Does this text point forward to Christ’s first coming?
3. Does it anticipate Christ’s return?
4. How does the gospel affect my understanding of the text?
5. How does the text anticipate or reflect upon the gospel?²³

This approach to interpretation and application of texts is called the Christocentric (Christ-centered) reading of Scripture and is aided by a biblical theological foundation and understanding. Furthermore, it is hardly an overstatement that the Christocentric interpretation of Scripture is the method the Lord Jesus Christ taught

²² Ibid., p 98

²³ Ibid.

His disciples. For example, the Holy Spirit makes this point in Luke's account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance and conversation to Cleopas and his colleague on their walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:15-34). The two were exposed to the Christocentric method of expositing Scripture: "Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus] interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (vs. 27). Further, after the two re-join the disciples in Jerusalem, Jesus appears and explains:

Then He [Jesus] told them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He also said to them, "This is what is written: the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem..." (Luke 24:44-47).

This Christ-centered way of reading Scripture, especially the Old Testament, was taught by Jesus himself. Edmund P. Clowney rightly observed in Luke 24:44 as "The first preaching of the resurrection is Christ's own exposition of the Old Testament."²⁴ The disciples of Christ continued with the Christocentric way of interpreting the Scriptures in their Gospel labours as seen in the book of Acts. Clowney further explains, "This core of Christian preaching given by Christ himself to the disciples is expanded in the book of Acts, with the greatest fidelity to the pattern of interpreting Scripture. The structure and even the vocabulary of this passage [Luke 24:44-47] moulds Luke's reports of the apostolic witness in Acts."²⁵ The apostles continued with the Christocentric way of interpreting the Scriptures in the New Testament. Roark and Cline adeptly conclude, "And if we are to be found faithful interpreters of God's Word, then we must help our people to know and love Jesus from all the Scriptures."²⁶ Essentially, embracing the Christocentric interpretive approach is one way that biblical theology will help our churches on the continent of Africa (and anywhere else, of course!) avoid the pitfalls many unhealthy applications of Bible texts.

²⁴ Edmund P. Clowney. *Preaching and Biblical Theology*. 1973, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co; New Jersey. p 30.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p 31.

²⁶ Roark and Cline, p 99.

For the teacher, a biblical theological foundation will undoubtedly transform, guard, and guide the local church to healthy and biblical growth. The challenge to view Scripture as unified around the theme of salvation across the entirety of the canon through the historical and progressive activity of God is one that will bear fruit in the task of sound teaching.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AS FOUNDATION FOR PREACHING

There is definitely a famine for the word of God in the evangelical church on the continent of Africa today. Much of what passes as preaching in not a few churches in Africa hardly demonstrates an understanding of the theological worldview that pervades God's word. The development of mature, biblical Christianity is hindered in the continent because the place of Christ-centered preaching has been occupied by 'other' competing worldviews.

Pastors have the responsibility to proclaim "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) and should be making every effort to preach the canonical (whole-Bible) storyline, the theology of the entire Bible. In other words, pastors who are committed to discharging their ministry faithfully and effectively should embrace biblical theology as foundational for their preaching. Indeed, it is important that pastors use biblical theology in their preaching because biblical theology concentrates on the storyline of scripture—the telling of God's plan of redemption in history, with the result that in every passage one preaches, one considers the place of that passage within the entire storyline of the Bible.

Furthermore, as Brian Rosner rightly points out, biblical theology "lets the biblical text set the agenda"²⁷ for preaching. The situation of preaching in Africa is precarious because preachers choose not to let the Bible determine the agenda of pastoral preaching resulting in having God's people who are ill "equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17). Carson articulates well the impact of biblical theology for preaching, "But ideally, biblical theology, as its name implies, even as it works inductively from the diverse texts of the Bible, seeks to uncover and articulate the unity of all the biblical texts taken together, resorting primarily to the categories of those texts themselves. In this sense it is canonical biblical theology, 'whole-Bible'

²⁷ Brian S. Rosner, "Biblical theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S Rosner (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), p. 5.

biblical theology.”²⁸ It is noteworthy that biblical theology in preaching entails preaching from both the Old and New Testaments and is not confined to either Testament.²⁹ This perspective means that the canon of the Bible fundamentally works together to unravel the theology of Scripture. Both Old and New Testaments are necessary to unpack redemption history.

The integration of biblical theology in preaching, therefore, inexorably involves a dialectic between the Old and the New Testaments, where the New Testament is the climax of the history of redemption initiated in the Old Testament. This truth also implies logically that biblical theology is a narrative theology. Biblical theology, thus, assists the preacher of God’s world to explain God’s saving work in history as revealed in Scripture. It maintains the historical unfolding of salvation history in sharp focus. As mentioned with the discipline of teaching above, a profitable approach is to view the Bible from the perspective of promise and fulfillment: what is promised in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament. Schreiner fittingly urges preachers to embrace biblical theology in their preaching in these words, “We must beware of erasing the historical particularity of OT revelation so that we expunge the historical context in which it was birthed.”³⁰

Another key aspect of the importance of biblical theology to effective preaching is the acceptance of the progressive character of revelation from the Old Testament to the New. Biblical theology acknowledges the preliminary nature of the Old Testament and the conclusive word that comes in the New Testament. This position does not relegate the Old Testament to being unimportant since one can only understand the New Testament when they have also understood the meaning of the Old Testament, and vice-versa. thus, typology³¹ is a valid form of integrating biblical theology in preaching.

²⁸ D.A. Carson, “Systematic and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S Rosner (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000) p. 100.

²⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” *SBJT* 10, No 2 (2006), p23.

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ Schreiner aptly defends typology as part of doing biblical theology when he writes, “Some are hesitant to embrace typology, but such an approach is fundamental to biblical theology, for it is a category employed by the biblical writers themselves. Nor is typology limited to the NT, for the OT itself employs the exodus theme typologically, for both Isaiah and Hosea, among others, predict a new exodus that is patterned after the first exodus. In the same way, the OT expects a new David who is even greater than the first David. We see in the OT itself, then, an escalation in typology, so that the fulfillment of the type is always greater than the type itself. Jesus is not only a new David, but the greater David. Typology acknowledges a divine pattern and purpose in history. God is the final author of scripture, i.e., the story is a divine drama, and God knows the end from the beginning, so that we as readers can see adumbrations of the final fulfillment in the OT.” (*Ibid*).

Biblical Theology and Antecedent Theology

When preaching the Scriptures as with teaching the Bible, it is critical to understand where the any given text fits on the redemptive historical timeline. Walter Kaiser counsels that a preacher must be concerned about the antecedent theology of each text as they preach Scripture.³² For example, when one preaches from Exodus, one must consider the story recorded in Genesis. A preacher will scarcely interpret the message of Exodus correctly if they read it out of the context of Genesis as the book which comes before it. Genesis literally explains the events that led to Israel coming to reside in Egypt as a people. Further, the covenantal relationship that will be established with the people of Israel at Sinai in Exodus is anticipated by God's engagement with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis. Therefore, the theological statements of Genesis are important to understanding the book of Exodus. The emancipation of Israel from Egyptian slavery and the promise that they will overcome Canaan also denotes a fulfillment of the Lord's covenant with Abraham, for the promise of land is now being fulfilled. At this stage, Israel now functions in a sense as a new Adam in a new land.³³ Like Adam they are expected to live by faith and in obedience in the land that the Lord provided for them. If one reads Exodus without the antecedent message of Genesis, one will not understand the fuller meaning of the story.

The important truth for preachers is that they must preach in such a manner that they place their sermons in the bigger story of redemptive history in the whole canon. The preacher's audience must see the big picture of what God has been doing, and how each part of the Bible contributes to that picture. One need not attempt to achieve all this challenge in a single sermon; rather, the use of sermon series often enables the preacher to engage a theme across the entire canon. The preacher ought to desire to preach in a manner where the audience is challenged to see what God is doing in the larger narrative of Scripture. Biblical theological preaching helps a preacher and his audience not lose God's larger viewpoint of salvation history.

Biblical theology and Canonical Preaching

As important as understanding the theology that precedes a given passage in Scripture, Canonical ('whole-Bible') preaching is indispensable to faithful

³² Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), pp. 134-140.

³³ Thomas Schreiner, p 25.

preaching. Biblical theology helps the preacher of the Gospel keep a focus on the entire canon of Scripture in their proclamation. Therefore, every preacher of the Gospel must not only proclaim antecedent theology—what has occurred before a given text—without considering canonical theology—how a passage is connected to the whole of the biblical narrative. For instance, when one preaches the first chapters of Genesis, they must also declare that the promised seed of the woman is ultimately Jesus Christ, and that the adverse effects of the fall on creation will be reversed by the work of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:18-25). The audience of the preacher must be helped to understand that the old creation is not final, but there is a new creation in Jesus Christ our Lord. When preaching from Genesis it is, therefore, important to demonstrate from the book of Revelation that the consummation is better than the beginning and is yet to come. Canonical theology tells us that the blessings of the consummation will far outstrip the original creation in glory.

Similarly, what is preached from a biblical theological lens from Leviticus must be cast considering the fulfillment that has occurred in Jesus Christ. Certainly, the preacher today must declare that the Old Testament sacrifices have been fulfilled in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Additionally, the regulations about food laws and cleanness are to be interpreted canonically, so that the congregation understands that there is no longer the requirement of Christians adhering to the food laws or cleanliness regulations (Heb 9-10). These rules were pointing to something greater which are the holiness and new lives Christ followers must pursue today (1 Cor 5:6-8; 1Pet 1:15-16). It also means that the New Testament does not require Christ followers abide under the Mosaic law (Gal 3:15-4:7; 2 Cor 3:7-18). That is to say, the old covenant has been replaced with the promised New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (see Heb 8-9).

The task of biblical preachers is to declare “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Preachers will not accomplish their calling if they fail to integrate biblical theology in their proclamation. They will be considered unfaithful to their congregations if they fail to demonstrate that the whole Bible points to Jesus Christ. Thus, it is the duty and responsibility of every biblical preacher to guide their congregation to gain a better understanding of the grand narrative of the Bible. The integration of biblical theology in preaching facilitates canonical (‘whole-Bible’) preaching.

Biblical Theology and Christocentric Preaching

Is it possible to preach a biblical sermon without mentioning Christ? This question raises the issue of the centrality of Christ in integrating biblical theology to

preaching. Graeme Goldsworthy retorts well, “NO! No Bible passage yields its true significance without reference to Jesus Christ in his gospel”³⁴ (emphasis his). He then adds, “...a biblical passage explicated and then applied to the hearers does not constitute a biblical sermon if the application is made without reference to the person and work of Christ.”³⁵ Goldsworthy gives two reasons for why “every sermon, to be biblical, must include Jesus.”³⁶ First, for those in the audience “who just happen to be there only once ought to at least have the opportunity to hear what we are really on about.”³⁷ For example, if the preaching is a series in an epistle and on that Sunday the preacher is dealing with ethical exhortations, and we only expound these without reference to the wider context of the gospel, then the first-time visitor will totally misunderstand Christianity. The visitor will go away with the misconception that being a Christian is all about attempting to live a moral life. Christ-centered sermons are in this way indispensable to biblical preaching. The second reason for Christ-centered preaching by integrating biblical theology has to do with the actual nature of preaching. Goldsworthy pithily writes,

It needs only to be said that the nature of preaching ...can only be defined in terms of the setting forth of the way of salvation... the gospel event upon which our salvation is grounded must be carefully delineated in terms of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But salvation that these events achieve is the whole process by which sinners under the judgment and wrath of God are reconciled, restored, justified, sanctified, and finally glorified. Salvation must be seen as the whole process culminating in the consummation of the kingdom.³⁸

Goldsworthy means that the preacher is duty bound to make clear to their audience that the benefits of the gospel are available to Christ followers because of Jesus Christ’s salvatory work. The benefits of the gospel are all given by God’s grace and are not the reward of any moral determination on the part

³⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching*, 2000 Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids (Kindle Edition) p 122, location 2616.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 124, location 2665.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 123, location 2641.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 124, location 2657.

human beings (Ephesians 2:8-10). Goldsworthy is thus unequivocal on the centrality of Christ to biblical preaching: “Any sermon, then, that aims to apply the biblical text to the congregation and does so without making it crystal clear that it is in Christ alone and through Christ alone that the application is realized, is not a Christian sermon. It is at best an exercise in wishful and pietistic thinking. It is at worst demonic in its Christ-denying legalism.”³⁹

Sermon Example: “God With Us”⁴⁰

When approaching sermon preparation and preaching from a biblical theological lens, one of the easiest places to start is with the “promise made/promise kept” dynamic found in the relationship to the Old Testament and the New Testament. In other words, as one identifies an Old Testament prophecy, institution, or narrative that finds fulfillment in the New Testament a natural connection is created. Such a relationship is noted in the book of Hebrews where the Holy Spirit not only identifies Scriptural promises fulfilled in Jesus,⁴¹ but also festivals such as the Day of Atonement,⁴² institutions such as the New Covenant,⁴³ and narratives such as the comparison of God’s appearance to Israel at Mt. Sinai and the future hope of Mt. Zion.⁴⁴ The redemptive dynamic of the relationship between OT promises and NT fulfillment is not, however, the full lens of biblical theology. One should consider how the promise reflects the original design of Creation as well as the results of the fulfillment by Jesus. Finally, is there a consummative expression of that promise? Remembering, the progressive nature of the larger biblical narrative, one can highlight “movement” in the sermon.

The following sample sermon is one example of bringing a broader, biblical theological lens to the opportunity and privilege of preaching. This sermon is a natural Christmas season sermon but is not limited to Christmas. The sections are abbreviated to highlight the focal points, but can be expanded for a more full sermon.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 124, location 2657.

⁴⁰ A version of this sermon was preached by Ronnie Davis at Claremont Baptist Church in Cape Town in Dec 2020. It can be accessed online at: <https://youtu.be/coLefOx6PkI>

⁴¹ The Book of Hebrews includes the most direct OT quotes as well as paraphrases and allusions. Throughout all thirteen chapters, OT passages are discussed in relation to Jesus.

⁴² See Hebrews 10:1-18. Also note 9:11-28

⁴³ See 9:11-28.

⁴⁴ See the exhortation in Hebrews 12:18-24.

Introduction

In the wonder of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve experienced no lack. Food was plentiful, work was rewarding, and relationship was marked by harmony. The most wonderous reality, however, was the nearness of the presence of God. In the early chapters of Genesis, God is described as “walking” in the garden with Adam and Eve. This radical harmony with God is truly the greatest aspect of the early description of creation. Similarly, the Fall of humanity as described in Genesis three is made all the more tragic in the realization of the lost harmony with God. Now, as God arrives to walk in the garden, Adam and Eve hide themselves in shame and fear. As the consequences of the Fall unfold over the chapters of the Old Testament, the separation between God and humanity remains tragic. As God moves redemptively again and again for His people, they continue to sin against God. Nevertheless, God continues in His love for His people. Further, God provides a promise to Israel that calls to mind the wonder of the created order and the wonder of His presence. Let us consider this promise in four parts as we move through the larger biblical narrative.

Part One: The Promise of Presence—God with Us

The first specific promise of God’s presence is found in Isaiah 7. The setting of the passage reflects a time of tension for Israel as they are experiencing persecution from two different kings who are converging on the nation. God sends his prophet with a word and offers for King Ahaz to ask for a sign; however, the king is afraid of angering God further and he refuses to request any sign. God, however, provides a sign in verses 13-16:

Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. By the time he learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating butter and honey. For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned...”

Consider the nature of the promise, the scope of the promise, the reality engaged, and the Messianic hope. The sign is a promise of deliverance. God is promising to deliver Israel from its frightening circumstance. More specifically,

the scope of this promise is for a radical deliverance—in the short time it takes for a child to be born and be weaned, these two kings will be but a memory. Further, God will achieve it in an unusual manner—he will use another nation (Assyria). For the king, however, the difficulty of the circumstance (two kings converging on them), makes it difficult to believe. God, then, highlights the truth that circumstances do not define God; rather, God defines the circumstances. In this case, that which is the difference is that God is present! The promised presence of God is enough to usher in deliverance. This promise—of the presence of God amidst oppression and darkness—becomes the foundation for the hope of a coming Messiah. One who will truly bring deliverance, who will be “God with us.”

Part Two: The Coming of the Son—God Incarnate with Us

Throughout the Old Testament, God provided promises about the coming deliverer—the promised Messiah. These promises pointed to and found fulfillment in Jesus, including the promise of “Immanuel.” The Holy Spirit through Matthew makes this connection clear:

The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated “God with us” (Matthew 1:18-25).

Consider the nature of the promise, the scope of the promise, the reality engaged, and the Messianic hope. The birth of Jesus is directly connected to the fulfillment of the promise of God’s presence—God with us. As with the original declaration, God acts according to his own design. The scope of the prom-

ise is two-fold: Jesus is the promised son of David and Jesus is the promised Saviour who will save His people from their sins. The radical reality that is promised here is the wonder of the incarnation. God is with us, because God is incarnate in Jesus! The Holy Spirit through Paul captures the wonder of this truth in Philippians 2:5-11 and pushes us to understand that Jesus is God in human form—as a voluntary limitation (v. 6-7); Jesus is the only one who can truly reveal God (v. 6); Jesus is the one who fulfils the promises of God through his obedience (v. 8); Jesus is the only one who can secure our salvation (vv. 8-11)! The Messianic hope, then, is fulfilled in Jesus—there is finally deliverance. Jesus is the one who rescues us!

Part Three: The Gift of the Holy Spirit—God indwells us

Jesus provided insight into the results of his work—the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises a radical new presence with God both in John’s gospel and the book of Acts. Consider these promises:

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever... But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit—the Father will send Him in My name—will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Your heart must not be troubled or fearful” (John 14:16, 26-27)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

And the fulfillment of this promise is recorded by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4:

When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech.

Consider the nature of the promise, the scope of the promise, the reality engaged, and the Covenantal reality. Jesus promised a new experience of the presence of God for his disciples. This promise had been hinted in the hope of the new covenant where God would write upon the hearts and the covenant would be experienced internally. Jesus builds upon it but explicitly promising the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new way for the believer. The scope of this promise is seen in the promise of an indwelling of the Spirit with the result of radical peace, fulness of understanding, and a power to be a witness for Jesus. The radical reality of this presence of the Spirit is the fulfillment of the new covenant. The believer knows the ever-present reality of God in a new way and is never alone for the very presence of God indwells the follower of Jesus. Thus, this radical presence of God is the proof of our new covenantal relationship with God. As the Holy Spirit will write through Paul, the Spirit is the “down payment” of what is coming, the certainty of our hope.

Part Four: The Promise of the Father—God Dwells with Us

In the Book of Revelation, one finds the consummation of the promise of God’s presence:

Then I [John] saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea existed no longer. I also saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look! God’s dwelling is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. HE will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer, grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away (Revelation 21:1-4).

...The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. Night will no longer exist, and people will not need lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever (Revelation 22:3b-5).

Consider the nature of the promise, the scope of the promise, the reality engaged, and the eschatological reality. We find in this vision, the certainty of the consummation of our relationship with God. We encounter Eden as it should have been and moved to its ultimate expression—not only God “walking” in the garden, but God dwelling with His people! A new level of intimacy between God and us is now promised. Think about the scope of this promise: radical access to the presence of God. There is no source of light, but the glory of God. There is no opportunity to be misunderstood or to misunderstand; rather, we will live in the presence of God. This new radical reality is the fulness of our hope—an eternity with God. A place of permanence—dwelling together. The opportunity and ability to worship in fulness, serve without limitations, and know without doubt. This eschatological reality is the living hope made real!

Conclusion

The presence of God seen in creation and promised in Isaiah can be celebrated in the incarnation of Jesus, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and, ultimately, dwelling with God. The radical presence of the Holy Spirit reminds us of the assurance of the promises yet to come. The nearness of God now and the hope toward which we are moving—to dwell in the presence of God in the light of His glory, worshipping God and serving God for eternity.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AS FOUNDATION FOR EVANGELISM

As noted in chapter three above, one of the implications of the Rescue for the follower of Christ is the establishment of purpose and mission. As mentioned, this purpose is established by both the desires of God—for His glory and the salvation of people—and the commands of Jesus—to make disciples. One of the tasks given the Christian which engages both foundational realities is evangelism. Evangelism, broadly stated, is the proclamation of the gospel message. This proclamation requires that the disciple use language which is understandable to the target audience. Beyond simply being able to speak a dialect, one needs to be able to communicate effectively the gospel message. This requirement includes understanding well both the target culture and the biblical content. Biblical theology is particularly effective in preparing the follower of Jesus to bear witness to the gospel effectively.

Narrative Conversations Versus Propositional Presentations

Context can often change the meaning of a simple phrase or sentence. One may be able to make sense of the words of a sentence without necessarily grasping the meaning. Keller illustrates this truth wonderfully:

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre famously illustrates that stories are necessary if we are to assign meaning to anything. He imagines standing at a bus stop when a young man he does not know comes up to him and says, “The name of the common wild duck is *Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus*.” He knows what the sentence literally conveys, but he has no idea what the young man’s statement and action mean. The only way to know that is to know the story into which the incident fits. Perhaps, alas, the young man is mentally ill. That sad life story would explain it all. Or what if yesterday someone had approached the young man in the library and asked him the Latin word for the wild duck, and today the young man mistakes the man at the bus stop for that person in the library. That trivial story would explain it as well. Or perhaps the young man is a foreign spy “waiting at a prearranged rendezvous and uttering the ill-chosen code sentence which will identify him to his contact.” That dramatic story would make sense of the incident too. But without a story, there’s no meaning.⁴⁵

The need to understand context and story is also true when sharing biblical truth. In 2011, Spread Truth publishing produced an evangelism training resource, *The Story*.⁴⁶ While not using the term “Biblical Theology,” the approach was centred on understanding that the gospel is truly understood in the context of the larger metanarrative of the Bible.⁴⁷ Further, the “training” aspect of the methodology was to learn the story well so that one can more naturally share the story of the gospel conversationally. This shift in approach is critical as it

⁴⁵ Timothy Keller, “The Story of the Bible: How the Good News about Jesus Is Central,” in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, Gen ed D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), p. 8109.

⁴⁶ *The Story* (Bloomington, IL: Spread Truth Publishing, 2011). The material has been updated and re-packaged.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, the rationale for and basic perspective of the approach are laid out in the first two full lessons of the training on “Understanding the Story,” pp. 14-41.

engages two important elements: the need for Christians to understand better the biblical narrative, and the need to engage others at the level of one's worldview.

Understanding the Grand Narrative and Evangelism

Many Christians, unfortunately, have learned biblical truth as a series of individual stories or narratives without “connecting the dots.” As a result, the purposeful activity of God is often lost in amidst individual pericopes. This learning of individual parts of the Bible without understanding the whole often results in a fragmented grasp of the Bible which Colin Smith likens to “having a handful of pearls with no string to link them together.”⁴⁸ It is vitally important for every believer to grasp the dynamic of creation, fall, rescue, and consummation connected to the past, present, and future activity of God. Not only for evangelism, but primarily for one's own discipleship and growth. A proper understanding of the design of God and God's activity of redemption is foundational in our living out of faith.

As to evangelism, the better that one understands God's story as expressed in Scripture, the easier it is to communicate that story in various forms. Almost every current gospel presentation moves through the narrative in some form.⁴⁹ The better the disciple of Jesus grasps the meaning of the gospel, the more flexible that disciple can be in expressing the gospel. This flexibility is incredibly important in the move away from propositional gospel presentations to gospel conversations.

The Story training aids the Christian in understanding the larger biblical narrative by breaking the story into ten elements around the four major stages of the story: Creation (God; Creates All Things; There Was Harmony); Fall (Disobedience; Consequences; Need); Rescue (Promise Made; Promise Kept); Restoration (All Things New; Forever with God).⁵⁰ All of these elements have been highlighted in the preceding chapters. It is critical, however, that one does

⁴⁸ Colin S. Smith, *Unlocking the Bible Story: Old Testament 1* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), p. 13 as cited in *The Story: Guide-Leaders Edition*, 2nd Edition (Bloomington, IL: Spread Truth Publishers, 2011), p. 14.

⁴⁹ One popular Gospel presentation that intentionally moves through the biblical narrative is C2C (Creation to the Cross). Resources and a phone app have been developed to help the disciple use the Creation to Cross as a narrative presentation (see C2C Story – Telling the Story of Creation 2 Christ accessed at <https://c2cstory.com/> on 27 Dec 2021).

⁵⁰ Spread Truth has created a training video with hand motions for the ten elements: <https://vimeo.com/19313760> accessed on 27 Dec 2021.

not reduce the story to ten points of a presentation! Rather, the elements highlight points of emphasis within each stage of the story and provide a guideline to help explain the progression of the grand narrative. In other words, in considering the expositional role of Creation, one needs to explain that the starting point is God. And that all things in existence came into being through the actions of God. Furthermore, in the creation narrative one sees a picture of God's intentional design of creation with the state of harmony between God and humanity, man and woman, and humanity and creation. All these components help relate the significance of creation and set the stage for the rest of the story. Similarly, in explaining the significance of the Fall for understanding current human experience, it is imperative to explain the sequence of intentional activity of humanity in sinning against God which had dire consequences. These consequences had such impact that humanity could not reverse their state and ended in a place of need—which is the pattern for all human sin and experience! Similarly, in discussing the redemptive work of God, one should not begin with Jesus; rather, the very nature of God as the God who rescues was seen throughout the biblical narrative. Furthermore, God promised a complete rescue from sin with a multitude of prophecies and statements in the Old Testament. Jesus fulfils these promises completely. The redemptive work of Jesus is complete in nature and efficacy. Finally, any discussion of our future hope in the consummation of our faith needs to reflect the promises of all things created new and the true joy of dwelling forever with God. These basic elements of the narrative can be told in a number of forms. One of the early forms of gospel presentation to incorporate the biblical narrative is “Creation to the Cross.” The presentation intentionally moves from God's design in creation to the impact of sin and the wonder of Jesus' substitutionary atonement on the cross. Two other presentations, the Three Circles and the Two Kingdoms, are provided as examples in Appendix B. The more confidence the Christian has in understanding and communicating the biblical narrative, the more effectively a disciple can explain the gospel message. “The Gospel has been purposefully and lovingly woven from Genesis to Revelation with the climax being Jesus' perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection. It is in the Gospel that we find the justification, forgiveness, acceptance, and love we desperately need.”⁵¹

⁵¹ *The Story*, p. 20.

The Grand Narrative, Worldviews, and Evangelism

At times, the Bible is used to pick out a few verses so that one can share the minimum required to get a basic gospel message shared. This use of key verses to provide a truthful statement is relying upon the propositional truth of Scripture. Without a doubt, the truthfulness of the Word of God can be discerned without having to read the entirety of the Bible; however, the primary problem with presentations that rely on propositional truth is that such an approach requires the hearer to share the same worldview as the Christian. As J.D. Crowley, a missionary to the people of Cambodia aptly explains the problem with the assumption of a shared worldview:

Propositions save people. Truth saves people, even truth that is separated from the storyline of the Bible. I'm sure thousands have come to faith in Christ through propositional evangelism... but these days? Fewer and fewer. In Cambodia, almost none. Why? Because when we strip-mine the amazing forests and mountains and valleys of the biblical storyline in order to extract bare propositions, it only works if the person already knows the storyline and has already bought into part of it.⁵²

At the heart of the issue, a biblical theological lens equips the Christian to converse at the world-view level with others who need to hear this gospel.

Worldview is essentially a perspective of the working of the universe that is used to explain reality. Several key areas of understanding are involved in most worldview: origin of life; the reality of suffering and evil; the nature of hope; the future. One of the exciting truths about the biblical narrative is that it is effectively engages every critical worldview question. "How did we get here?" is addressed in the Creation narrative. "Why is there so much suffering and evil?" is explained in the Fall and the lingering effects of sin. "Is there any hope for us?" is answered in the redemptive story of the Rescue. "What does the future hold for us?" is revealed in the Consummation.⁵³

⁵² *The Story*, p. 24.

⁵³ Spread Truth produced a short film of the Story for Easter in 2015. Each segment of the story is introduced with one of these worldview questions. It was uploaded to YouTube in July of 2015: <https://youtu.be/f0gflvN9zv4> accessed on 27 December 2021.

This reality allows the Christian to more easily move from gospel propositions to gospel conversations. As the Christian engages in conversation with someone, pay attention to the type of topics upon which the other person focuses. Connect these topics to the essential worldview questions about reality. Once one can discern where the other person is struggling in their worldview perspective of reality, the disciple then knows which part of the biblical narrative is critical to be understood. For example, if the current state of the world and the reality of hardship and suffering seems to be a consistent talking point, then the disciple knows that one must be very clear in explaining the fall. One can begin with the reality of a broken world as a starting point for a gospel conversation and then move to the story of God's design, the consequences of the Fall, the true hope of Rescue, and the future expectations of the Consummation. Grasping the relevance of the biblical narrative in its intersection with worldview formation is important in moving toward genuine gospel conversations. Engaging with another at the level of their worldview enables the truth of the gospel to be heard more clearly and more readily understood.

CONCLUSION

Integrating biblical theology to the ministry of a local church will shape its approach to whole categories of its ministry. Biblical Theology is foundational to teaching, preaching and evangelism in the local church. Biblical Theology provides tools to teaching Christ in the local church through keeping an appropriate focus upon (1) the historical progression of revelation in Scripture, (2) canonical (whole-Bible) reading of biblical texts, and (3) highlighting the unifying theme of salvation history.

Biblical Theology is a needed foundational discipline for every follower of Jesus, not only teachers and pastors. For the people of God to be grounded in biblical theology, biblical theology must be engaged in preaching, teaching, and in all levels of ministry in the local church. This challenge requires a commitment to keep the Grand Narrative in front of the people of the church. As soon as Christian children are old enough to understand the sense of the narrative, they should be taught the "big picture" of the biblical story. Furthermore, Old Testament preaching should be done in a manner that demonstrates how the entire Bible testifies to Christ. Thus, biblical theology integrated in the ministry of the local church will encourage teaching, preaching, and evangelism which proclaims the Christ of the whole Bible rather than a pale reflection of

Him. Thus, one comes to grasp the significance of the declaration of the Holy Spirit to Timothy through Paul:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

CONCLUSION

“Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.”¹

“So what?” One preaching professor would ask this question after every sermon preached in class. He argued that there should be some meaningful insight gained from the exposition of God’s word—not just something to be learned, but something to be lived. He challenged his class to apply this question not only to sermons, but also to lectures heard and books read. With a nod to this past professor, we want to help answer this same question in this final chapter. This book has moved through the stages of the Grand Narrative of Scripture identifying not only the components of Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Consummation, but also investigating the significance of each component in the larger biblical witness. Furthermore, in the previous chapter we considered the basic steps of connecting the foundation of biblical theology to ministry. Hopefully, one has been pushed to see biblical theology as integral to the life and ministry of the Christian. The question of the impact of the lens of biblical theology for the follower of Jesus deserves some answer. While one may come away from this introductory work with many different learning points or insights, three aspects should be highlighted: the power of story, the centrality of the gospel to the whole of Scripture, and the foundational nature of biblical theology for other theological study.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AS A FOUNDATION

In the introductory chapter, the declaration that biblical theology is to be viewed as a foundational discipline for other theological fields was given as a starting point for understanding these relationships. The primary points of contact noted for biblical theology and other theological disciplines were the understanding of authority and content—Scripture is both the authoritative revelation of God and

¹ Psalm 119:105

provides the boundaries of reliable content. Through the chapters of this volume, this reality has been highlighted primarily through two exercises. First, the realization that each component of the biblical narrative has impact across all of Scriptures. For example, while the redemptive activity of God is most clearly seen in the climax of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus on the cross, God had already been acting redemptively with humanity for generations prior to the incarnation of Jesus. Similarly, the impact of the creative activity of God did not stop with Eden. The elements of Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Consummation provide movement and highlight the intentional work of God across all of history. Second, the thematic content of Scripture is viewed within this movement of God. In each chapter only four themes were examined (Tabernacle/Temple and the Presence of God; the Image of God in humanity; the Kingdom of God; and Covenant); however, virtually any theme identified in Scripture can be carried through the movement of the Grand Narrative of Scripture. In the *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, one finds individual articles examining a number of themes through a biblical theological lens: The Glory of God; Creation; Sin; Covenant; Law; Temple; Priest; Sacrifice; Exile and Exodus; The Kingdom of God; Sonship; The City of God; Prophets and Prophecy; Death and Resurrection; People of God; Wisdom; Holiness; Justice; Wrath; Love and Grace; The Gospel; Worship; Mission; Shalom; and The Consummation.²

The foundational nature of the discipline of Biblical Theology can be recognized in the implications of the approach. Biblical Theology highlights the nature of the boundaries of theological study. It is not enough to acknowledge that Scripture provides the content of theological practice; rather, the understanding of the Bible as a progressing, connected narrative provides direction within the boundary of Scripture. One ought to expect to find a more complete picture of the plans of God in the Gospels than in the Law; however, one must acknowledge the work of God within history that anticipates the climax of Jesus. Further, Biblical Theology helps keep other disciplines grounded in the historical reality of God's activity as revealed in Scripture. For example, soteriology (the study of salvation) can never be disconnected from the historical activity of God in God's engagement with Israel throughout the Old Testament, in the incarnational activity of Jesus, and in the future consummation of faith in the coming kingdom. By providing a foundational perspective of the biblical

² *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, Gen Ed D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), pp.8126-8248.

testimony of the scope, progression, and direction of God's activity, biblical theology lays the groundwork enabling other disciplines to flourish.

THE GOSPEL IS THE CENTRE

In addition to arriving at the understanding that Biblical Theology is the foundational discipline for other theological endeavors, the reader has hopefully grasped that the centrality of the Gospel is seen more clearly when one puts on the lens of Biblical Theology. As was indicated in the introductory chapter, the driving story of Scripture is seen in salvation history. Carson argues that “the gospel is integrally tied to the Bible’s storyline. Indeed, it is incomprehensible without understanding that storyline.”³ The Holy Spirit declared through Peter that the redemptive work of Jesus was planned “before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet 1:20); this truth is clearly displayed in the larger biblical narrative. As the Grand Narrative of the Bible has been unpacked over the preceding chapters, the continuity of the story of Scripture has become clearer. The glimpse of God’s design for creation seen in the opening chapters of Genesis provides the backdrop for both the devastation of the impact of the sinful actions of humanity and the wondrous hope of salvation promised by God. Keller rightly notes that the “basic plotline of the Bible is the tension between God’s justice and grace.”⁴ This tension between the deserved punishment and the promised deliverance is felt throughout the Old Testament and is only resolved in Jesus. Keller captures the wonder of this truth well:

The stakes are literally cosmic: everyone and everything is at stake. It seems impossible that God could be true to himself— fully good and loving, fully righteous and just— and still save us. It seems impossible that after all we have done there should be any hope. But victory is achieved through one man’s infinite sacrifice on the cross, where God both punishes sin fully yet provides free salvation, where he is revealed as both just and justifier of those

³ D.A. Carson, “The Biblical Gospel” in eds. Steve Brady and Harold Rowdon, *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present, and Future* (London: Evangelical Alliance, 1996 as cited in *The Story Guide: Leader Edition* (Bloomington, IL: Spread Truth Publishing, 2011), p. 33.

⁴ Timothy Keller, “The Story of the Bible: How the Good News about Jesus Is Central,” in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, p. 8111

who believe (Rom 3: 26). Jesus stands as the ultimate protagonist, the hero of heroes.⁵

One must grasp the importance of this truth—the Gospel is the centre of everything. Not only the biblical narrative, but all human history swirls around the nexus of Jesus. Any theological endeavor, therefore, must also keep this primary truth as central. Jesus demonstrates this need in his engagement with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. One may remember that after the crucifixion, two disciples were returning home “discussing and arguing” (Luke 24:15) about the events around Jesus. Jesus appears and questions them about their discussion. By their response (vv. 19-24), they had clearly misunderstood the role of the coming Messiah—as they were seeking the redemption of Israel (v. 21) most likely in the form of a new king and political revolution. Jesus, however, rebukes them for their short-sightedness and declares the necessity of the suffering of the Messiah. Jesus then “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” (v. 27). The centrality of the gospel keeps Jesus as the centre of Scripture and the redemptive work of Christ at the forefront of God’s activity across history. One preacher described Jesus’ redemptive activity as “true and better” expressions of prominent Old Testament stories and characters:

- Jesus is the true and better Adam who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is [given] to us.
- Jesus is the true and better Abel who though innocently slain has blood that cries out for our acquittal not our condemnation.
- Jesus is the true and better Abraham who answered the call of God to leave all the comfortable and familiar and go into the void not knowing whither he went.
- Jesus is the true and better Isaac, who is not just offered up by his Father, but actually sacrificed by his Father.
- Jesus is the true and better Jacob who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserve so that we like Jacob only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 8110-8111

- Jesus is the true and better Joseph who at the right hand of the king forgives those who betray him and sold him and uses his new power to save us.
- Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant. Jesus is the true and better rock of Moses, who struck with the rod of God's justice now gives us water in the desert.
- Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends.
- Jesus is the true and better David whose victory becomes his people's victory, although they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.
- Jesus is the true and better Esther who didn't just risk losing an earthly palace but lost the ultimate heavenly palace and who didn't just risk his life but gave his life to save his people.
- Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast into the storm so that we could be brought in.
- Jesus is the ultimate lamb, the ultimate priest, the ultimate king.⁶

From abstract theology to practical ministry the intentional purposes of God as revealed in Scripture are critical. For example, the great commission by Jesus of his followers in Matthew 28:18-20 is precisely held as the mission of the church both because it is the command of Jesus and because it reflects the heart of God. Further, any systematic examination of God must include the purposes of God as expressed in the Gospel—for God consistently engaged humanity as the one who rescues so that it is a very part of God's nature! Biblical Theology, then, reminds the follower of Jesus that there is a plotline of redemption that unfolds in Scripture and continues as a focus of the life and ministry of the disciple.

THE POWER OF STORY

"If you want people to hear truth, tell them. If you want people to know the truth, tell them a story."⁷ A final important "takeaway" from the introduction

⁶ *The Story*, pp. 32-33. The passage is originally attributed to Sinclair Ferguson, as quoted in a sermon by Timothy Keller at Gordon-Cromwell Theological Seminary (*Ibid.*, footnote 14, p. 147).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22. The quote is original to author Eudora Welty.

and survey of Biblical Theology is that Story is important in making sense of human life, especially the life of a Christian. Many African cultures express worldview not in systematic analysis but through cultivated stories. This reality reflects the truth that story offers a better way of processing life for most people. When considering biblical truth, the power of understanding the larger story is critical. Consider three areas of importance: narrative versus propositional truth; the divine story as the framework for broader human history; the relationship of God's story and the Christian testimony.

Propositions or Story?

Expressing biblical truth through propositional statements or a collection of gathered Scripture verses can be an effective means of summarizing larger doctrinal content. Essentially, "propositions are the key summary points of any story."⁸ For anyone with a solid foundation of biblical knowledge and worldview, "bullet points" of Scripture are enough to support one's understanding. When such a foundation is missing or replaced with another worldview, however, propositions gleaned from Scripture and delivered without context are not effective. Rather, the ability to explain the biblical worldview and the gospel story in a more narrative form becomes a better bridge to engage others.

Story is the primary means of human communication, particularly in African communities. In daily life—from home, work, or other gatherings, people relate to one another in the context of some shared story. Whether relating sporting results, assigning tasks, or simply discussing the day's events, the most effective communication is in narrative. Most families have that one member who is the prized storyteller that everyone prefers to hear relate events. Biblical Theology challenges the Christian to understand the wonder of the incredible connections across Scripture and begin to see the "narrative" of God on display. The disciple must become fluent in explaining this Story.

History as God's Story

Biblical Theology provides the lens for interpreting the entirety of the Bible—and biblical history. Everything is understood in terms of God's plan of the rescue of humanity from the consequences of the fall. The Christian, however,

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

can also better understand all of human history and developments when operating from a biblical worldview. The tension of fall and rescue is demonstrated daily in communities around the world. The reality of human sin that results in consequences impacting individuals and communities is evident. Further, the futility of human effort to address and fix the consequences of sin through human ingenuity or wisdom is readily seen—from individual conflicts to national crises. At the same time, the impact of the grace of God and the redemptive work of God is also on display. Alvin Reid in considers the rationale for the prominence of “heroic” stories in most cultures:

We love stories. We love the fact that once upon a time everything was cosy in the Shire; once upon a time, Dorothy and Toto were just playing in Kansas; once upon a time there was this peace and quiet in Gotham city. And we love to watch movies and read stories that something sinister happens and there’s this Wicked Witch or there’s the Joker or these really bad-teeth looking Orc things. And the stories intrigue us and they draw us in and we know there has to be something to resolve that. And along comes Batman or Dorothy finds her fearless helpers—or not so fearless helpers—and we have a young guy like Frodo who becomes a great hero even though he is just a little teenage Hobbit. And there’s this rescue. And we love stories that end: ‘And they all lived—you can finish it—happily every after.’ Have you ever thought about why we’re so intrigued by those stories? Why in cultures all around the world these kinds of stories endure? It’s because there’s some truth in those stories that compel us. And you see this in the whole beauty of God’s word.⁹

Truly, this basic tension of the reality of human brokenness and the need for rescue resonates with the human condition. The desire for “fair” and “justice” is expressed alongside the hope for “grace” and “love.” Longing exists around the world for something more than this world has to offer. The truth of

⁹ Alvin Reid, “The Importance of the Whole Story,” Video included in the companion training resources for *The Story*. Transcribed on 11 Jan 2022. This excerpt relies on three examples from American culture: *The Lord of the Rings* (references to the Shire, Orcs, and Hobbits); *The Wizard of Oz* (references to Dorothy, Toto, Kansas, and the Wicked Witch); and *Batman* (references to Gotham City, the Joker, and Batman). Every culture, however, has “hero” stories that are comparable.

God's redemptive activity feeds the longing of humans for a story of true rescue. The impact of Christians living as "light and salt" in their community leads to transformation—both of individuals and communities. The ultimate hope of humanity is found only in the saving work of Jesus and the assurance of consummation of that work.

The Christian's Testimony and God's Story

For the Christian, the Grand Narrative of Scripture is not some abstract truth; rather, the testimony of every believer is only understood in the context of this biblical narrative. For too many, an approach to reading the Bible as series of stories or verses viewed as self-contained units has produced a more self-centred perspective on the Bible. This approach can result in the Word of God being "reduced solely to a reference book that only answers the many questions we have on how to live."¹⁰ While Scripture does indeed provide instruction for daily living, such living only makes sense when held within the larger picture of the Bible. This reference book mentality often fails to perceive God's unfolding story of redemption.¹¹

Further, too often one takes the goal of unconnected stories of the Bible as portraits for one to imitate—be like David or Joshua and don't be like Jonah or Judas. A subtle consequence of such an approach to Scripture is that the individual becomes the centre of interpretation—as the Bible is seen as being about making one a better version of themselves. The follower of Jesus, however, must understand one's own testimony in step with the story of fall and rescue revealed in the biblical text. Just as the focus of Scripture is the redemptive activity of God so one's testimony is about the saving grace of God! God is the centre of the Christian's testimony and story as well. J.D. Greer expresses this reality well:

The essence of sin is that we've taken God out of the centre of the universe, out of the centre of our stories, and we've made ourselves the centre. And so what happens is as we hear different biblical truths—different biblical stories, we end up interpreting these stories as if the point was still us, as if it was all about us. As opposed to figuring out how we fit into God's story, we're

¹⁰ *The Story*, p. 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

trying to figure out how God fits into ours. What it means to become a disciple is that you have a “Copernican” revelation. Just like Copernicus discovered that it was not the Earth that was at the centre of the universe, but instead it was the sun at the centre of the solar system, and we operated around it, we have to discover that God is the point of it all, and that we ourselves are not the point... We have to learn to re-express and rediscover our stories around the centrality of God in His story. And learn how our trajectory—our point of living—ultimately fits into His point and His purposes for the universe which is the glorification of His name and the accomplishment of His kingdom.¹²

God is the centre of life and the believer revolves around God. Our story is intimately caught up in God’s story! Our story has meaning as it reflects the truth of Scripture—that one was lost, but now found!

SO WHAT?

Returning once again to the important question of relevance, the understanding of the centrality of the Gospel—not only in the biblical narrative, but also for the life of the Christian—must be expressed in the living out of one’s faith and discipleship. As every believer’s story of rescue is reflective of the story of God’s redemptive work across history and within the biblical narrative, so the life of every believer is bound to the direction and desire of God.

The truth of the Grand Narrative is experienced in the life of the follower of Jesus and should be expressed in daily living. This dynamic is seen in a variety of dimensions. For the pastor, not only does the lens provide insight for preaching and teaching, but the mission of the church is firmly grounded in the heart of the Father and the commands of Christ. For the church member, “ministry” is expressed in the context of daily life and work. Every vocation is given new purpose and meaning by the undergirding of God’s design for humanity and the opportunity to glorify God in living. Ethical living finds its foundation in the character and commands of God revealed in Scripture. The opportunity exists to live and work with an eye toward reconciliation to the glory of God. Hence Jesus commands

¹² J.D. Greer, “God is the Main Character,” Video included in the companion training resources in *The Story*. Transcribed on 11 Jan 2022.

his disciples to live godly lives in the presence of others "...so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16).

Further, the God of Creation inspires the creative expressions of the Christian so that the opportunity is given to reflect the truth of the Story in so many ways. Many examples can be found in modern culture. One enjoyable example is a "spoken word" that unpacked the significance of "Joy" and moves from contemporary experience to the biblical narrative with great skill. Consider the bridge:

Joy.

A word seemingly chosen at random amidst the sordid squalor we squander our thoughts in. From the abysmal dismal outlook we cast upon our day-to-day grind to the appalling blind eye we turn to a kind smile.

We are more than the shifting whims of a whimsically wind-swept shift in popular culture whose vultures lurch at every turn and keep you looking over your shoulder with doors half-open, half-closed looking for the newest definition of beauty from the eyes that behold you.

Since when has radical escapism even scathed the knee of radical change? Since when has radical freedom come without radical cost or pain? We take aim and pray we hit the right vein -
Not with bullets or knives but with that esoteric liberation game.

So raise a glass to the blood shed and praise the name of the one whose exile among us makes angels dance and demons' main occupational calling cause them fear and shame. His hands and feet transparent from the damage we made apparent from Day One in the manger

Away with this stranger with whom I dance!
A tango macabre with my cadaver,
Entranced as my rebellious actions sever and fracture into factions the loose reactions I claim as Invictus:
Self-determined satisfaction, and with this, the death of my innocence.

Oh that this grave truth was not the firstfruits of the grave our common ancestors dug and gave to us,

A strange inheritance, incoherently choking on the sweet nectar that marked the Eve of the downfall of the original parents
Crying out from bodies crippled, walking with Cains, for a heel that is Abel to crush the head of the serpent we allowed to raise us.

And so he came:
Robed first in humility, but upon second with a mighty name etched into his side
As he rides on powerful strides with echoes of lightning and thunder beside.

So ask you of joy and I answer with majesty
Of status and I'll point you to selfless royalty without whom the course of history is a pessimistic menagerie of purposeless misdemeanors
Swaddled in self-proclaimed identity issues typed out haphazardly in comic sans.

And so Heaven and Nature can sing joy at the works of his hands:
A master plan not of devious indulgent whims
But of the benevolent brilliance of Elohim.
And so with the hosts above and the spirit within
Let us sing joy to the one whose death erased the power of sin.¹³

For the follower of Jesus, Scripture provides boundaries and direction for life as the only authoritative revelation given by God to his people. The Christian should declare thanks to God in agreement with the psalmist:

“Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.”

¹³ Simeon Davis, “Joy.” Released 23 Dec 2020. Accessed at <https://youtu.be/qepkfFelvZo> on 11 Dec 2021.

APPENDIX A

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE METANARRATIVE IN EACH BOOK OF THE BIBLE

In 2013, The Story ESV Bible was published by Crossway in cooperation with Spread Truth Ministries. The Bible included an overview of the metanarrative of Scripture in the opening pages of the version and a section on “Developing the Story” in the introductory page for each book of the Bible. This appendix reproduces those sections verbatim with permission.¹ Page numbers are noted after each entry. Note, the format of the original is kept with key words for the metanarrative in bold as well as words of emphasis in italics. The term “restoration” is used in the place of “consummation” in this Bible and, therefore, has been reproduced here in keeping with the original. Similarly, some entries use “American spelling” of words instead of “British spelling” in keeping with the original.

DEVELOPING THE STORY: THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis

Genesis is where the **Story** begins. It describes God’s marvelous **Creation** (chs. 1-2), the **Fall** of man into sin (ch. 3), God’s gracious promise of **Rescue** (3:15), and the hope of **Restoration** (12:1-3).

¹ Cherie Froelich, Office Manager at Spread Truth per e-mail received on 1 June 2021. The pertinent sentences: “We are happy to grant your request to use the chapter introductory pages in the appendix of your book. We simply ask that no changes be made and that proper credit is given to Spread Truth Ministries.”

Genesis describes how a perfect beginning is tragically spoiled by the influence of evil—yet not without hope. God’s sovereign power over all **Creation** was revealed as he created everything good. The first human, Adam, was God’s representative for all mankind (Romans 5). He was created with the ultimate purpose of worshiping God by ruling as his representative over all of **Creation**. But Adam willingly disobeyed God, bringing guilt, ruin, and death into the entire created order, making humanity an enemy of God. The result of the **Fall** was humanity’s slavery to sin and deep rebellion against God.

Yet we see the heart of the **Story** as God’s sovereign grace toward sinners is put in motion through his amazing plan of salvation. Soon after Adam and Eve’s terrible disobedience, God promised that a **Rescue** would come through one of their descendants—the “seed” of the woman (Genesis 3:15). This promise travelled down the families of Adam (chs. 3-5), Noah (chs. 6-9), Abraham (chs. 12-25), and Jacob (chs. 25-50). Although each of these families would themselves be under the curse of sin, God sustained his people as a demonstration of his love and provision to keep his promises.

While Adam brought about the **Fall** through his disobedience, the **Story** ultimately points to God’s promise of the “second Adam,” Jesus Christ, who would perfectly accomplish the **Rescue** and **Restoration** through his life, death, and resurrection (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:20-22).

Exodus

Exodus offers a historical account of God rescuing his people from enslavement to a wicked Egyptian ruler. The events of Exodus provide redemptive themes that point forward to humanity’s final **Rescue** from the **Fall** by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

At the end of Genesis, the people of Israel were enjoying tremendous blessing in Egypt. Yet 400 years later, as the book of Exodus begins, they were living in cruel slavery. Nevertheless, God would keep his promise of blessing the world through the chosen people (Gen. 12:1-3). God protected the young child Moses (Exodus 1-2) and then prepared him to lead Israel out of Egypt. Through a series of supernatural plagues against Egypt, God brought Israel out from their bondage. The final plague brought death to the firstborn son of every Egyptian family, whereas every Israelite family whose home was marked with the blood of the Passover lamb was spared (chs. 11-12).

Yet after all this, the hard-hearted Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued Israel to destroy them. By parting the waters of the Red Sea, God provided a

miraculous path of escape for Israel, ending with the destruction of the Egyptians (ch. 14). This series of events would be celebrated by God's people annually in the Passover meal to remind them to trust him in times of difficulty (12:25-27; 15:1-27; Psalm 136). God also gave the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), accompanied by other ceremonial and social laws, to establish a pattern of faithful living for his redeemed people. The people were to keep the law not in order to *be* redeemed but because they *had been* redeemed.

Viewed from the perspective of the whole Bible and the entire **Story**, Exodus offers a powerful glimpse into the **Rescue** and the promise of final **Restoration**. It points to the day when God's rescued people would be marked by their faith in Jesus Christ, the final Passover sacrifice, who perfectly fulfilled all that the law demanded (Matt. 5:17-18). This lamb would not only cover their sins, but also deliver them from sin's bondage (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19).

Leviticus

Leviticus carries on the **Story** by showing the results of the **Fall** and the beginnings of **Rescue**. The ceremonies and sacrifices it describes all look forward to the final great rescue of humanity through the saving work of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the pages of the New Testament.

Leviticus describes the absolute holiness of God, the many ways in which his people become defiled or unclean, and God's provision of purification in the sacrificial system. This elaborate system of sacrifices requires priests as mediators to offer the sacrifices. This makes painfully clear to God's people that their sin separates them from a holy God. Yet the sacrificial system also brings a real hope of rescue, for in the sacrifices the sin and uncleanness of the person is indeed forgiven.

The sacrificial system also cultivates and ever-increasing longing for true and final cleansing. Such cleansing would come with Jesus Christ, who is the climax to the **Story**. He would be the high priest to end all high priests (Heb. 7:23-28; 9:24-26) and the sacrifice to end all sacrifices (1 Cor. 5:7; Eph 5:2), bringing the entire sacrificial system to fulfillment.

Numbers

Numbers continues the **Story** of God's redemption by describing how Moses led God's people through the wilderness from Mount Sinai, where God had given them the Law (Ex. 20:1-17), to the edge of Canaan, the land he had promised first to Abraham (Gen. 12:5-7) and later to Moses (Ex. 3:6-17).

Because of the people's stubborn rebellion, their journey is marked by an extended period of wandering. We see their sinfulness and lack of faith in sharp contrast to God's steadfast love and determination to rescue and restore them. The family genealogies and census figures are prominently featured throughout the book to highlight God's faithful desire to form a people for himself from the descendants of Abraham. Though chosen by God to lead Israel on its journey, Moses sins against God, and God reveals that Joshua—not Moses—will be the one to lead the people into the Promised Land (Num. 27:12-23).

The New Testament refers to Numbers several times to warn us not to rebel against God (see 1 Cor. 10:2-11; Jude 11; Reve. 2:14) and to confirm God's eternal promise of **Rescue** through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:14-15). Jesus is the true and final leader of God's people, who never wavered, never failed, and who lives forever to protect and provide for his people. He will bring them one day into the final **Restoration** in the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1).

Deuteronomy

Each character in the **Story** is faced with decisions and choices. Deuteronomy is Moses' farewell speech, with detailed laws and instructions about how God's people should live in light of mankind's Fall and God's promises to save them from the results of their sin.

Having entered into a promise-bound agreement (a "covenant") with God, a new generation of Israelites stood on the edge of the Promised Land. They had a choice to make; they could either love, trust, and obey God, which would lead to life and blessing; or they could distrust him and reject his laws, leading to death and despair. Ultimately, like all mankind living after the Fall, they rejected God (Jer. 31:32; Rom. 3:23). But God's love was greater than their sin, and he demonstrated his love toward his people with the promise of a new—and better—covenant (Deut. 3):1-6; Jer. 31:31-34). This covenant would bring transformation from the inside out, granting internal heart-change to his rescued people. No longer would the dominion of sin hold God's people captive.

Ultimately, this new covenant would be made available to all nations through faith in Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Christ's perfect life, death, and resurrection, applied by the Spirit to the believer, provide the final Rescue from sin and condemnation (Matt. 26:28; 1 Pet. 3:18).

Joshua

The death of Moses marked a sad chapter in the Story as the mantle of leadership was passed to his assistant, Joshua (Num. 27:18-19). Although Moses had rescued the people from the Egyptian captivity, he failed to lead them into Canaan—the land that he too had been promised, as a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:5-7; Ex. 3:6-17). After the Israelites wandered through the wilderness for 40 years, God chose Joshua to lead them into the Promised Land.

Despite the enemies awaiting Israel in Canaan, God assured Joshua that “every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you” (Josh. 1:3). Just as God had used miracles to free his people from Egypt, so now he demonstrated his favor upon Joshua by using miracles to lead Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land (chs. 2-5). The defeat to the mighty city Jericho marked the beginning of Israel’s conquest of Canaan as they defeated enemy after enemy (chs. 6-12). Where Moses fell short of fulfilling God’s commands, Joshua succeeded (11:15), and all of God’s promises to Israel regarding the Promised Land were fulfilled (21:43-45). Even though parts of Canaan were left unconquered, Joshua properly divided the conquered lands exactly as God had instructed Moses (chs. 13-21).

At the end of his life, Joshua reminded Israel of God’s faithfulness and of their former enslavement to Egypt and the gods of other nations (chs. 22-24). Even though Israel’s rescue would be temporary, their salvation was put on display for their enemies to see as God rescued them many times. In the end, the blessing of their presence in the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua would serve to foreshadow the **Rescue** through Jesus Christ and the hope of the **Restoration** of all things.

Judges

The book of Judges records a sad and tragic chapter in the **Story**. We see a repeated, destructive pattern of events in the life of God’s people: they rebel against God; they are delivered by a “judge” (a warrior-champion); they enjoy peace for a time; and then once more they lapse into rebellion. Yet Judges also offers a redemptive pattern, as time and again God graciously sends a judge to rescue and restore his people, despite their rebellion.

The death of Joshua and the leaders who had served with him (Josh. 24:29-31) had left Israel surrounded by enemies and without a leader. Even though God had provided Israel deliverance from Egyptian bondage and had led them to the bountiful land promised to their forefather Abraham (Gen. 12:3), Israel’s

repeated rebellion and idolatry demonstrated the cruel reality of the **Fall**. In response, God provided a total of twelve judges, who ruled at different times and delivered Israel from the oppression of their enemies. Sadly, however, each judge ultimately proved to be an imperfect leader, and each new rescue offered only a temporary salvation for God's people. This showed the need for a true and faithful King who could bring eternal **Rescue** and complete **Restoration** (Judg. 2:16-19).

The book of Judges ends in a way similar to its beginning, with Israel without a leader: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). Nevertheless, in the midst of failed leaders and faithless people, the mercy of God abounded as God's earlier promise of a king still remained (Deut. 17:14-20). Who would it be? When would he come? In the New Testament, with the coming of Jesus, we see the final great answer to such questions and hopes.

1 and 2 Samuel

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel advance the **Story** by highlighting the dangers of looking to sinful human leaders (marked by the **Fall**) rather than to God. The prophet Samuel would guide God's rebellious people through the transition from the time of the judges to the time of the kings (1 Samuel 1-7). God had promised to choose a king for Israel and had warned them against choosing their own king (Deut. 17:14-20); 1 Samuel 8). But they ignored his warnings and chose a young man, Saul, on the basis of his outward impressiveness. The destructive impact of Saul's self-centered leadership would be just as God had warned (1 Samuel 9-31).

While Saul was still king, God set his favor upon a young shepherd, David, to become Israel's future king (1 Samuel 16). David spent much of his youth running from Saul's jealous attempts to kill him, but God's hand of protection was always with David. Eventually, David became king (2 Samuel 2, 5), and God established a covenant with David ensuing that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7; see also Ps. 89:20-29; 2 Sam. 23:5).

Sadly, David's reign became marred by sin (2 Samuel 11-24) as the devastating effects and consequences of the Fall were seen in him and his offspring. Nevertheless, God's promise that an heir of David would one day bring complete salvation from sin would be fulfilled centuries later in the final great Rescue by the ultimate Son of David, Jesus Christ (Luke 1:32-33).

1 and 2 Kings

Against the backdrop of the **Story** of redemption, 1 and 2 Kings display the best and the worst of human leadership marked by the Fall.

The books begin with great hope as David's son, Solomon, becomes king. Though Solomon is blessed with wisdom from God to lead the people to know right and wrong, his own moral failures eventually result in a divided kingdom. From that point on both the northern land of Israel and the southern land of Judah experience God's judgment for their lack of faith and trust in him. The faithfulness of God's people never rises above that of their earthly leaders.

Amid their sin and rebellion, however, God faithfully spoke to his people through prophets who confronted the kings by challenging their unfaithfulness to the covenant God had made with his people.

God's judgment on Israel and Judah's sin eventually resulted in the destruction of the temple and the exile of his people into foreign lands, where other gods were worshiped. Nevertheless, even while they were in exile, God was saving a remnant of people for himself. Their hope rested in the forthcoming **Rescue** to be ushered in by a King, Jesus Christ, whose perfect reign would last forever in the final and permanent **Restoration**.

1 and 2 Chronicles

First and Second Chronicles offer a clear demonstration of God keeping his covenant promises to his people even when they are unfaithful. God's promise of a deliverer (Gen. 3:15) is consistently reaffirmed as each account of the **Story** unfolds.

Beginning with **Creation**, the Chronicler shows that the one who will rescue humanity is a descendant of Adam (Gen. 3:15; 1 Chron. 1:1; Luke 3:38), Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 1 Chron. 1:28; Gal. 3:16), and David (1 Chron. 1:1; Chron. 17:11-14; Matt. 1:1, 17, 20). First Chronicles portrays God's covenant with King David (1 Chronicles 10-29; see also 2 Samuel 7), the second king to lead the Jewish people. His leadership foreshadowed the arrival of his descendant Jesus Christ—the greater Son of David—who would reign eternally as King of kings and Lord of lords (Reve. 19:16).

In 2 Chronicles (chs. 1-9), the importance of David's lineage to the development of the **Story** is again highlighted as the account of his son, King Solomon, offers a portrait of a wise king and builder of God's temple. This was another foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, who would be the wisest King and builder of God's temple, the church (1 Cor. 3:16), in anticipation of the final **Restoration**.

Throughout 1 and 2 Chronicles, the major themes of the Davidic covenant, the temple, and the people of God are woven together in a beautiful tapestry, which provides an important reminder: God is always in the midst of his people, keeping his covenant promises. His word can always be trusted. The full account of 1 and 2 Chronicles, with its many genealogies and other historical references, shows further that the great Story of God's redemption is a part of real human history.

Ezra

The book of Ezra continues the **Story** from where 2 Chronicles ended. The first part of the book (Ezra 1-6) gives a brief history prior to Ezra's call by God. Despite Israel's sinfulness and their exile to Babylon, God's plan of **Rescue** was secure.

Israel's Babylonian captors were themselves later defeated by Persia. The Persian King Cyrus then issued a decree allowing the exiled Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple. Eventually the temple is rebuilt on the same spot where Solomon's far more glorious temple had once stood (chs. 1-6). More than 50 years later, Ezra is introduced as "a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses" (7:6), whose success is due to "the hand of the LORD" being upon him (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). Ezra preaches God's word, and the people turn away from their sin (10:9-17).

Throughout the book, God's control over the nations is highlighted as he works through powerful world rulers—even his enemies—to accomplish his saving purposes (6:22). Though God demonstrated his kindness by returning Israel from exile, his grace is also extended to other nations (6:21). The focus on the temple serves as a signpost in the **Story**, pointing back in time to the importance of the temple in saving people from the effects of the **Fall**, and forward in time to the final **Rescue**, when the temple would be replaced by the person and work of Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:6; John 2:19). Through his own work, Jesus provides the access to God that the temple was intended to provide.

And in the new heavens and the new earth, the **Restoration** at the end of all things, God himself will be the temple (Rev. 21:22); perfect fellowship between God and his people will be restored.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah serves to continue the **Story** of God's gracious redemption down through history—of his people and indeed of the whole cosmos. For Nehemi-

ah provides a beautiful picture of God restoring his people in the Promised Land and continuing to fulfil the promises made to Abraham.

The stories of Ezra and Nehemiah work together as a record of God's people renewing their commitment to him as a nation and as individuals. Ezra the scribe taught God's law to the people, while Nehemiah the governor secured the city by leading the massive reconstruction of its walls. After the walls are built (Neh. 6:15), the people gather together to hear the reading of the Book of the Law and to renew their covenant with God. This forms a beautiful picture of spiritual restoration (chs. 8-10), marked by both corporate worship (ch. 12) and rest for God's people (ch. 13).

While the historical details of the rebuilding project highlight God's faithfulness to physically protect his people, Nehemiah shows more broadly the "great and awesome God" (1:5), who acts in redemptive history for the good of his people. Orchestrating the smallest of details through common people, he preserves the greater **Story** of the **Rescue** that would come through Jesus Christ and ultimately the **Restoration** that will come at the end of history when Jesus comes a second time.

Esther

The story of Esther, a beautiful Jewish orphan girl, is a historical account of God using unlikely characters to accomplish tasks that would be impossible apart from his divine hand. Throughout the **Story** we see the seemingly fragile future of God's people but as his sovereign hand of protection over them.

Though God is not mentioned at all in the book of Esther, the improbable timing and irony of events speak clearly of his control over Esther's story, just as he is in control of all of our stories—even in his apparent silence. Esther and her cousin Mordecai become God's instruments of grace for the unsuspecting Jewish people in Persia.

Through a providential chain of events, Esther had become the queen of Persia, though her Jewish heritage remained unknown to the king (Est. 1:1-2:8). Unfortunately, a man named Haman, an enemy of the Jews, had become second in command to the king. Haman tricked the king into allowing an irreversible decree calling for the execution of all Jews (3:1-15). When all seemed lost, Mordecai and Esther devised a successful plan resulting in the execution of Haman and an ironic reversal of authority. Mordecai himself became the second in command of Persia, issuing a decree that would save God's people from the original decree against them (chs. 4-10).

An amazing story of deliverance, the book of Esther advances the **Story** by preparing the way for the **Rescue** that would save God's people once and for all: the life, death, and resurrection of the Author of life (Acts 3:15). If Haman had succeeded, the entire Jewish people would have been destroyed, and the story of God's saving work in and through Abraham's descendants would have come to an end. There would have been no fulfilment in Christ, and therefore no gospel and no Christian church. Esther is therefore part of a much larger story that runs all the way from Abraham to Christ and, through him to the church today.

Job

The book of Job connects the **Story** of redemption to the life of an individual going through tremendous suffering. Job helps us understand our own suffering in a world ravaged by the **Fall**. The author allows us to see what was happening behind the scenes as God allowed Satan to put Job's faith and godliness to the test (1:6-12; 2:1-6).

Job was a good man, blessed in every way, who suffered the loss of all that he held dear in this life. Like most who suffer, he did not know why he suffered in this way, and the advice offered by his friends was a mixture of truth and error that provided no answers and actually intensified his affliction.

To demonstrate the authenticity of Job's faith, God allowed Satan to attack. Though Job experienced much suffering, he trusted God to rescue him. He "blessed...the name of the LORD" even amid his pain (1:21), and he boldly declared, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25).

In the end, God reminds Job that no one can fully understand the matchless wisdom of his sovereign ways (chs. 38-41). Yet God's generosity and goodness is seen as he eventually blesses Job with even more than he had lost. This is ultimately a picture of the final **Restoration**, where suffering will be no more. This great restoration comes only by the **Rescue** provided in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Psalms

Written over many years and by various authors, the Psalms is a songbook of heartfelt praise, prayer, and lament used in corporate worship. It is not so much a continuation of the **Story** as a description of it. The Jewish people were keenly aware that they played a significant role in God's unfolding drama.

The magnificence of **Creation** is declared with beautiful poetic expression in Psalms 8; 19; 24; 50; and 104. The psalms of confession (Psalms 6; 32; 51; 130; and

143) show the sin and brokenness of the **Fall**. The **Rescue** in the person of Jesus Christ is anticipated in Psalms 2; 8; 16; 22; 23; 34; 68; 69; 89; 102; and 110. This coming Savior would enter the world to suffer, die, and rise again in his work of atonement for the sins of mankind. The **Restoration** is anticipated with great hope for God's eternal kingdom (145:13), when all the nations will praise him.

God's redemption **Story** is repeated and cherished throughout this book, to which the reasonable response is Psalm 67:5: "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!"

Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is filled with promises of blessings for those who live wisely and judgment for those who do not. This "wisdom literature" fits into the **Story** by providing a look at the results of the **Fall**, as well as giving insight into the character of the Rescuer.

Sadly, the **Fall** had produced devastating consequences in all areas of life including the human mind rendering it incapable of possessing true wisdom apart from God. Specifically, Proverbs describes the natural human inclination to think foolishly (1:7; compare Rom. 1:21-23). Nevertheless, in God's great **Rescue**, Jesus Christ comes as the ultimate "wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24; compare Prov. 8:22-26), who makes the mind totally new through faith in him (2 Cor. 5:17). This wonderful transformation affects the way we think and live (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Phil. 2:1-5).

Proverbs does not describe how to find acceptance and forgiveness with God, but it does show how those who have been accepted and forgiven should think and live. Pointing to the Rescuer, Proverbs provides a portrait of a blessed man. Through faith in Jesus Christ, God's rescued people can live the blessed life of wisdom depicted in Proverbs—that is, a life lived faithfully in light of the **Rescue** and with the anticipated hope of the **Restoration**.

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes wrestles with the effects of the **Fall** that are felt throughout life. It depicts someone who embraced every possible pleasure (2:1) only to discover the futility of a life not centered on God.

As a book recounting universal human experience, Ecclesiastes offers practical insight into the futility but also the value of work, the reality but also the limitations of pleasure, and the dangers of greed and envy. These meditations remind us that nothing in **Creation** should become a substitute for God.

Everyone was created to worship God only. Therefore, the restlessness each person experiences can end only when they truly lean to “fear God and keep his commandments” (12:13). God’s Creation is good, and we should enjoy it (3:10-13; 9:7-9). Yet if we worship created things rather than the Creator, it will only lead to the same emptiness and vanity that has marked humanity since the tragedy of the **Fall**.

Ecclesiastes is not a manual for how to live wisely, but it does point each person away from depending on his or her own strength, wisdom, and pleasure. Ecclesiastes anticipates Jesus Christ, whose gracious **Rescue** of sinners provides the true source of strength wisdom, and pleasure.

Song of Solomon

The beauty of God’s redemptive **Story** can often be seen in the context of relationships, particularly in marriage. This book offers a poetic journey through the development of a covenant relationship between a man and woman, leading to marriage and intimacy. The other figures in this book serve to develop the relationship between the man and the woman, much like actors from an ancient play. King Solomon is featured as the shepherd bridegroom with an unlikely Shulammitte shepherdess as the bride.

Though the **Fall** has broken all human relationships, the anticipated pleasure for the future wedded couple in this poem illustrates God’s design for the intimate union between man and woman in marriage. Their marriage also foreshadows the very personal covenant relationship between Jesus Christ, the perfect Bridegroom, and his church. Marriage is therefore best understood as a demonstration of the redemptive plotline found throughout the **Story** as God pursues his bride, the church, at all costs. He was even willing to die for her, as is seen in the great **Rescue** he accomplished on the cross.

The perfect relationship once enjoyed between God and mankind in Creation will be fully realized in the **Restoration** as Jesus Christ returns for his bride, the church (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2-3). Meanwhile, the love of Christ for the church is the model and motivation for the love that should characterize Christian marriages (Eph. 5:22-33).

Isaiah

This hope-filled book sets forth a vision of a glorious God, the Holy One of Israel, whose plan of lavish grace and salvation to all nations will not be thwarted.

As with other books within the **Story**, Isaiah revealed the coming judgement on God's people for their faithlessness, hardness of heart, and rebellion. At the same time, anticipation of the Rescue continued to build. Specific facts regarding the birth of the one to rescue God's people indicated that he would be born of a virgin, be given the name Immanuel (meaning "God is with us"; Isa. 7:14), and come in the form of a servant who suffers on behalf of those he came to save (52:13-53:12). Isaiah's prophecy clearly points forward to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, who would be "pierced for our transgressions" (53:5). It was understood, however, that this would not be a tragic accident. Rather it was God's own plan—"it was the will of the LORD to crush him" (53:10).

Remarkably, Jesus' death would redeem not those who deserved God's favour or who were more upright than others, but rather those who had "gone astray" and deserved his wrath yet had humbled themselves before God (53:6; 66:1-2). Isaiah is ultimately humbled and awestruck by God's promise of the coming Rescue as well as the glimpses he is given of the final Restoration, the age to come when the effects of the Fall will be reversed (ch. 11). One day, God's redeemed people will enjoy the new heavens and the new earth, where they will be restored to God and will worship him forever in eternal joy (65:17-25; 66:22-23).

Jeremiah

Jeremiah recorded the continuing struggle of God's people as they dealt with the consequences of their sin. Yet he also looked forward to the **Restoration** of all things at the end of history, when the **Story** will be brought to final completion.

Jeremiah knew that the hard, sinful hearts of his people would soon bring them down, as God sent his well-deserved judgment. It was an inevitable and disastrous result of the **Fall**: Israel's sin would lead to their exile and death. And yet God desired to rescue his people, and Jeremiah therefore urged them to repent. But their rebellion was evident as they refused to turn from their sinful ways.

God had made a covenant with Israel, based on his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12-50). As time passed, God's covenant with Israel included his promise to David of an eternal kingdom (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17). God now promises to his people through Jeremiah that a final **Rescue** is coming. This would be the climax of human history, when God would make a new covenant with his people, and they would receive hearts able to obey their Lord (Jeremiah 30-33). This new covenant was ultimately achieved through the promised son of David, Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection meant that

the original covenant was no longer necessary (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:13; 9:15; 12:24). In Jesus, God's final **Rescue** has dawned in human history, and the **Restoration**, the renewal of all things, will surely come as well, in God's good time.

Lamentations

Lamentations is best understood within the greater context of the **Fall** and the reality that all of God's **Creation** is broken and marred by sin. Grieved by the sins of his people, God's judgement (1:18) was to exile them from the land he had promised, which led to the horrible realities presented in Lamentations: cannibalism, hunger, rape, and murder, all marked by the apparent absence of God under the rule of Babylon.

Still there is a clear note of hope. Lamentations looks forward to the time when God will answer the prayers of his people and deliver them. Amid deeply tragic circumstances, God's people are challenged to trust God to keep his covenant with them, even though they have broken their covenant with him. They must wait for the time when God will rescue and restore them as a demonstration of his mercy and grace. Will God respond? When will he do so? Lamentations showcases the tragic consequences of sin, which leads to separation from God. Nevertheless, God uses tragedy to bring about the greatest good as God's people recognize their sin and cry out to him for deliverance.

The hope of **Rescue** (3:19-24) and **Restoration** (ch. 5) for God's people would ultimately be realized in the **Rescue** achieved and the **Restoration** secured through Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus cried out with the ultimate lamentation as he was forsaken by the Father –so that all who lament now but trust in Christ can be assured that their sorrow will one day turn to joy.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel's prophetic visions draw attention to the high and holy God, who offers new life to all who will receive it. The God of **Creation**, who breathed life into Adam (Gen. 2:7), breathes new spiritual life into his people (Ezekiel 1; 37; note also Gen. 2:7). Ezekiel shows clearly the rampant and destructive effects of the **Fall** as God's people continue in their sin and rebellion. Because of their sin, God removes his presence from the sanctuary that they have defiled (Ezekiel 8-11).

This raises the questions of how and when God will restore his defiled people to himself and to the land. Ezekiel answers these questions with the promise of a final Rescue. In contrast to the untrustworthy leaders who have plagued Israel, God promised to personally shepherd his people back into wor-

ship and obedience (Ezekiel 34). In restoring them, he would breathe life into their spiritually dead hearts (chs. 36-37). God's rescued people would be brought back into the land, and the temple that God had forsaken due to their sin would be restored (chs. 440-48). God would once again take up residence in his temple, signaling final rescue from his judgment (43:1-12).

The promise and hope of **Rescue** is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who brings broken and dead humanity to life by dying on the cross and rising again. Ultimately, Ezekiel's vision anticipates the glory of a greater **Restoration**, when God's people will worship and dwell with him in a totally renewed earth (48:35; Revelation 21-22).

Daniel

Ever since the **Fall** of mankind into sin (Genesis 3), a spiritual war has raged between the god of this age, Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), and the true God of **Creation**, who rightly reigns over heaven and earth. The book of Daniel begins with God's people living in captivity under the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:1). During this period of captivity, a few Jewish men continued to submit to God's rule and were able to boldly display the supremacy of God's power and rule of all earthly kings (1:8-9; 2:47; 3:28-30). As God's people found themselves living under different kings, their circumstances fluctuated between favourable and unfavourable. Yet God's power and ability to rescue are not hindered by earthly circumstances.

The book of Daniel thus continues to shape the **Story** by declaring that final victory is certain for God and his people. Daniel prophesies that a "son of man" will come "with the clouds of heaven" and be "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (7:13-14). At the pinnacle of the **Story**, Jesus Christ identified himself as the "Son of Man" and signaled his role in the **Rescue** of his people, which fulfilled Daniel's prophetic words and demonstrated that God ultimately wins (Mark 14:61-62).

The promise and final **Restoration** will then be fulfilled with the second coming of this true Son of Man, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hosea

God masterfully paints a beautiful portrait of the **Story** of redemption in the life and ministry of the prophet Hosea. Hosea ministered during a time of tur-

bulence in Israel, and his own marriage served as a provocative example of the ugly effects of the **Fall** and the desperate need for God's redeeming love.

God instructed Hosea to marry and remain loyal to an adulterous woman. This served to illustrate God's love for his sinful and unfaithful people, who had committed spiritual adultery against him by worshiping other gods (1:2; 2:19-20). Hosea's relentless and painful pursuit of his wayward wife provided a glimpse of how God would rescue Israel from their sin (3:1-3). Hosea's use of graphic illustrations to describe Israel's idolatrous ways underscores the seriousness of all unfaithfulness to God.

Although God's holiness demanded that he judge his people for their sins, God's mercy is revealed as he promises to restore those who repent (14:1-7). Hosea's steadfast love for his wife provides a glimpse of the lengths to which God will go to bring **Rescue** and **Restoration** to his sinful people.

Joel

The book of Joel provides a stark portrait of the devastation of the **Fall**, which continues to haunt humanity and indeed the whole **Creation**.

The symptoms of the **Fall** were highlighted as Joel ministered in the midst of a national disaster brought about by Israel's continuous rebellion and idolatry (ch. 1). A picture of God's forthcoming judgment was illustrated as Joel described "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (2:1-2). The inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem could rightfully expect a dreadful day of destruction, which would decimate their crops and threaten their livelihoods.

Hope emerged, however, as God would also provide **Rescue**. In light of God's mercy, Joel exhorted his fellow countrymen to repent (2:12-13). Following his judgment, God would bless his people with agricultural abundance, reversing the prior destruction (2:18-27), and "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Joel 2:32). This salvation was finally accomplished in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10-12).

For those who reject God's Rescuer, there remains only judgment (Joel 3). But those who trust and follow him are not only rescued from condemnation; they will enjoy final **Restoration** in the new earth, where the abundance foreshadowed in Joel 3:17-18 will become reality.

Amos

Far from the Story's perfect beginning in **Creation**, the dark consequences of the **Fall** continued to be displayed as God raised up a shepherd, Amos, to highlight the unswerving justice of God over all people.

The human depravity resulting from the **Fall** was in full view as Amos described the sins of the nations encircling Israel and pronounced judgment over them (1:2-2:5). Though God was going to deal severely with Israel's enemies, however, there was little reason for the Israelites to be smug: an even greater punishment awaited Israel, who had falsely assumed that their material prosperity was a sign of God's blessing. The reality was that their "blessing" had been achieved by the work of their own hands as they repeatedly broke God's covenant and fed their greed and lust. They had oppressed the poor, engaged in forbidden sexual activity, and silenced the prophets sent to rebuke them (2:6-16). Most of Amos's message is devoted to revealing God's well-deserved judgment on Israel through specific times, events, and places as evidence of his righteous authority and reign over all things (3:1-9:10).

Yet God would leave Israel and all nations with reason to hope, as he had first promised Abraham (Gen. 12:3). In the face of coming judgment, Amos's words end with a promise of God's ultimate **Rescue** and final **Restoration** that would come through the lineage of King David, offering salvation to the entire world—Jew and non-Jew alike (Amos 9:11-15; Acts 15:16-17). Eden would one day be restored, bringing eternal abundance and blessing to all the world.

Obadiah

Obadiah, the shortest book in the Old Testament, was written in the wake of the horrific destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The destruction can be seen as a severe consequence of the **Fall**, both in terms of the sins of Israel that led to it and the brutality of the Babylonians as they destroyed the city. It was also God's means of judging his own people.

But the main focus of Obadiah's prophecy is the Edomites, who betrayed God's people and assisted the Babylonians in their conquest of Jerusalem. While certain judgment awaited Edom, God reminded his people of their future **Restoration** and his coming kingdom (vv. 19-21).

Obadiah reveals God as the supreme ruler who punishes the wicked, rescues the repentant, and remains ever faithful to his covenant people. All this is finally and truly accomplished in his own Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus achieves the **Rescue** that paves the way for final **Restoration** in the new heavens and the new earth.

Jonah

The depths of the **Fall** and the nature of the **Rescue** are on display in all four chapters of this brief story. God commanded Jonah to deliver a message to

Israel's enemy, the Ninevites, which would have them from judgment. But Jonah's rebellious response was to board a ship headed as far from Nineveh as possible (Jonah 1:1-3). In a powerful display of his authority and love for Jonah, God sent a severe storm to threaten the safety of Jonah's escape vessel and its crew. In the midst of their desperation, God exposed Jonah's rebellion to the sailors, who tossed him overboard and vowed to serve God as the stormy waters immediately ceased (1:4-16).

Meanwhile God brought judgment on Jonah by holding him prisoner in the belly of a large fish for three days. When Jonah reached the end of himself and humbly surrendered to the Lord, the fish vomited him onto dry land (1:17-2:10). He then obediently went to Nineveh to deliver God's message to its people. Jonah had mistakenly assumed that God had plans of mercy for Israel but no for other nations. God's grace toward Nineveh, however, demonstrated his compassion for *all* people (3:1-10).

While Jonah had clearly seen the evil of Nineveh, he had failed to see the evil of his rebellion and arrogance (4:1-11). In the end, the deliverance of Nineveh would serve as a foreshadowing of the climactic **Rescue** in all of human history: Jonah's three days in the belly of a fish pointed to the three days Jesus Christ would spend in the grave (Matt. 12:40-41). Ultimately, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection provide a way for even the most rebellious people to be restored to God (Rom. 5:6-11).

Micah

Micah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Israel (Judah) during a time of economic prosperity. He confronted God's people for misusing their wealth, oppressing the poor, and living apart from God—all effects of the **Fall**. The book offers both the warning of coming judgment against Judah's sin, and the hope of future **Rescue** and eventual **Restoration**. In 722 B.C., while Micah was ministering in the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom fell under God's judgment due to similar sin and refusal to repent.

Micah reveals God's patience with his people who have been marked by the Fall, as well as his faithfulness to keep his promises both to judge sin and to rescue sinners. In the midst of the warning of coming judgment, God still promises a bright future for his people (ch. 4), which ultimately is fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah—Jesus Christ—who would be born in Bethlehem (5:2). With the coming of Christ, a great **Rescue** has dawned which will ultimately be completed in the future **Restoration**.

Nahum

God sent his prophet Nahum (whose name means “comfort”) with a powerful and timely message of rescue for Judah. In this prophecy the Lord pointed to his own holiness (1:2-3), sovereignty over **Creation** (1:4-5), goodness (1:7), and protection for his people (1:7-8).

A century earlier, God had graciously prevented the destruction of Nineveh, capital of Assyria, as the whole city turned from wickedness in response to the warnings of Jonah (Jonah 3). Things had changed drastically in Nineveh, however, as Assyria plotted against God and threatened to harm Judah (Nah. 1:9-11). Though God held Assyria responsible for its actions, he took ultimate responsibility for Judah’s affliction by Assyria as a means of disciplining them for their unfaithfulness (1:12). The ensuing destruction of Nineveh (chs. 2-3) served as a sobering reminder of God’s severe wrath toward his enemies as the effects of the **Fall** continued to be felt.

Still, the hope of the **Rescue** remained secure, as Judah had already been promised that the Messiah would come from their midst (Mic. 5:2). This would be fulfilled six centuries later in Jesus Christ (Matt. 2:1-6). In Jesus we see before our eyes the “stronghold in the day of the trouble” in whom believers can “take refuge” (Nah. 1:7).

Habakkuk

The story of Habakkuk serves as the microcosm of God’s sovereign authority over all that has transpired as a result of the **Fall**, leading to his eternal promise of **Rescue**.

Habakkuk cried out to God regarding the violent and destructive patterns of his own people, Judah. But the response he received is not one he expected, as God declared that things would get worse before they improved. By using Judah’s enemy, the Babylonians, God would exact judgment upon his people (1:5-11). But how could this be, Habakkuk wondered? How could a holy and righteous God use the wickedness of another nation to deal harshly with the wickedness of his own people? God shows Habakkuk the folly of Judah’s rebellious independence by declaring a simple truth found throughout the Story of the Bible: “the righteous shall live by faith” (2:4; compare Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Judah had failed to stay faithful to God, and God would sovereignly direct Babylon’s wickedness to be a means of accomplishing his purposes to punish and ultimately to restore his people. Indeed, salvation for Judah was certain, as God also revealed his plan to destroy and overthrow Babylon (Hab. 2:6-20).

Habakkuk's story foreshadows the ultimate example of God using the injustice and wickedness of others to bring about the final justice and perfect righteousness for his people, for that is exactly what he did through the ultimate **Rescue** in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:8). Habakkuk also gives a brief glimpse of the future **Restoration**, which will be overflowing with God's glory (Hab. 2:14; Rev. 21:23; 22:5).

Zephaniah

Zephaniah offers a message of hope amid stern warnings of impending judgment upon God's people as well as all the peoples of the earth. The impact of the **Fall** has left the people of God (in this book, "Judah") mired in the depths of sin. Their sin has rendered them unable to fully keep their covenant obligations to God. This problem has persisted as they have passed their unfaithfulness to each successive generation.

However, God is portrayed in Zephaniah as the great covenant keeper who is calling Judah and all mankind to repent—that is, to turn from sin—and to put their hope only in him. As they trust God in this way, he will rescue them and lavish his covenant promises upon them. This **Rescue** was accomplished ultimately in Jesus Christ, who by his life, death, and resurrection secured God's covenant promises for all those who are in Christ.

The book ends with a beautiful portrait of future hope as God's salvation spreads beyond Judah to the surrounding nations (Zeph. 3:9-10). This anticipates God's promised **Restoration**, where he will put all things right and bring lasting justice amid the salvation of his people (3:14-20), all through the true King, Jesus Christ.

Haggai

Like the rest of the world, God's own people were affected by the **Fall**. This short book describes God's relationship with his rebellious people, Judah, whom he had sent into exile, away from the Promised Land, because of their sin (2 Chron. 36:17-21). Now that they had returned from exile, Haggai pointed them back to their true identity as God's chosen people. He called on them to complete the rebuilding of God's temple as a symbol of his presence among them.

Though the people had downplayed the importance of God's presence, God looked past their disobedience and provided Haggai with a powerful message of hope: "I am with you declares the LORD" (Hag. 1:13). This rekindled the people's efforts to restore the temple.

Someday, of course, God's **Rescue** of his people would be complete, and he would be "with them" forever as Immanuel, "God is with us" (Isa. 7:14). Hundreds of years after Haggai's contribution to the **Story**, the New Testament revealed that Immanuel is Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:23). Christ's sinless life, substitutionary death, and miraculous resurrection from the dead rendered the temple obsolete, as God's rescued people—the church—became the true temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

Haggai concludes with a promise of **Restoration**: One day God will defeat all of Judah's enemies and will take his people to be with him forever (Hag. 2:20-23; Revelation 20-22).

Zechariah

Although God has restored his people to the land of their inheritance, they had grown weary and discouraged as they waited for God's promised restoration of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the temple, a symbol of God's presence and blessing.

Zechariah called the people to repentance, pointing them to their sin of unbelief in God. Though God had never abandoned them, they had failed to trust him to judge all people and bring justice to a world broken by the **Fall**. God reveals several promises to Zechariah in a series of visions—some tragic and some hopeful—which culminate with the final triumph of God as the Shepherd and King over all nations.

God's promise to bring judgment on Israel's enemies and to pour out of his Spirit as a means of repentance and cleansing for their sins pointed to the **Rescue** that would be accomplished by Jesus, the final and true Shepherd of God's people (12:10; 13:1; compare John 10:11).

God's final encouragement in Zechariah offers a captivating glimpse of the **Restoration** at the end of history, when he will reign as King over all the earth and will restore all things to himself (Zech. 14:9, 16).

Malachi

As the Old Testament **Story** concludes in this final book, the reality of the **Fall** and the glaring need for a **Rescue** reach a climax. Malachi's prophecy begins with God's affirmation, "I have loved you" (1:2). God's ongoing covenantal love and subsequent blessings should have caused his people to trust and glorify him as they remembered what he has done. Instead, God's people (Judah) were once again lost in rebellion. They demonstrated irreverence for his name and covenant, and their worship was half-hearted.

God therefore appoints Malachi to issue one of the most terrifying warnings in the **Story**, promising fiery vengeance against those living in rebellion (3:2-3). But in the midst of looming condemnation a sparkling promise of **Rescue** points to the promised Messiah. A prophet like Elijah would announce the Messiah's arrival and would restore the hearts of God's people (3:1; 4:5-6).

The words of Malachi were followed by 400 years of God's silence prior to the New Testament. Yet as the New Testament opens, the realization of Malachi's important prophecy would unfold in the birth and ministry of John the Baptist, who announced the arrival of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah (Mark 1:1-8; John 1:19-34). In Jesus, God's great **Rescue** is accomplished.

DEVELOPING THE STORY: THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew

In Matthew we see a momentous and decisive development in the **Story**. Here the **Rescue** of God's people comes into full clarity, as the biblical story climaxes with the coming of Jesus Christ. The entire Old Testament has been preparing for Jesus, and the entire New Testament now portrays Jesus, beginning with Matthew's Gospel.

More than any other Gospel, Matthew shows the connections between Jesus and the Old Testament. The **Rescue** so long anticipated and longed for is now unfolding in Jesus of Nazareth. He has come to undo the wreckage introduced into the world in Adam's sin at the **Fall**. Through Christ's death and resurrection, **Rescue** is accomplished and the final **Restoration** is assured. And surprisingly, those who will be part of this great victory are those who are poor in spirit and meek (Matt. 5:3-10), not the religious elites (23:1-36). The gospel truly is for "all nations" (28:19).

Mark

The Gospel according to Mark shows how the great **Story** of the Bible is all about redemption from sin. This **Rescue** is brought about by the Messianic King of Israel, Jesus the Messiah, as he suffers on our behalf. Mark focuses mainly on what Jesus did rather than what he said. He moves quickly from one amazing event to the next, introducing each change of scene with the word "immediately." This action-packed drama reveals a God whose mission is to draw ordinary people to himself (1:16-20; 2:13-14).

Only through repentance (1:14-15) and faith in the good news of the gospel can anyone come under the saving rule of this suffering King. Those who do so are given the authority to do extraordinary things (6:7-12), which Jesus manifests in his miracles throughout the book (see 1:21-28; 2:1-12; etc.). There is also a growing tension in the book, as Jesus challenges the arrogant religious authorities of his day. These confrontations lead ultimately to the most tragic event in human history: the death of Jesus on a wooden cross.

This most tragic event was, however, also the most glorious event in God's eternal plan of **Rescue**, for by his death Jesus paid the penalty for our sin, making it possible for us to be a part of his eternal kingdom, the **Restoration** of all things.

Luke

Luke goes to great lengths to give an accurate historical account (Luke 1:1-4) displaying Jesus as the central character of the entire **Story**. He wrote his Gospel to explain how Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's promise of **Rescue** (22:37; 24:25-27, 44-45).

Luke begins by giving a detailed account of Jesus Christ's miraculous conception (chs. 1-2) and ends with a detailed account of his crucifixion and resurrection, confirming his identity as the promised Messiah anticipated in the Old Testament (4:17-21; chs. 23-24). From beginning to end, Luke paints a vivid picture of Jesus' compassion for the sick, the poor, and those most grievously wounded by the Fall (5:12-14; 21:1-4). Also featured is Jesus' interaction with his disciples, whom he would commission with the responsibility of spreading the good news of the entire world (24:47; Acts 1:8). Every aspect of Jesus' ministry was rooted in his identity as the Son of God (Luke 3:22, 38; 4:41) who lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The amazing reality of the **Rescue** revealed that salvation comes by God's grace through faith in Jesus for all who repent and believe (24:46-49). Those swept up in this **Rescue** will one day be part of the final **Restoration** of the whole cosmos when Jesus comes a second time.

John

John the apostle provides this eyewitness account of Jesus' life so that people might believe in him and have eternal life (3:16; 14:6; 20:30-31). The events recorded by John clearly demonstrate the following: Jesus is God himself (1:1; 10:30), he is the author of Creation (1:2-3), and he is the Saviour promised to

redeem humanity after the Fall (1:9-13; Gen. 3:15). Although Jesus was the Messiah or “anointed one,” his own people rejected him (John 1:11-12) as they blindly misread the Scriptures, which set the stage for his life and ministry.

John repeatedly affirms that Jesus is the central character of the **Story**. Jesus declares, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”(14:6). This is one of several “I am” statements of Jesus throughout John’s Gospel that reveal his authority over heaven and earth, identifying him with *the* “I am” himself, Yahweh (see Ex. 3:14).

Throughout this Gospel account, then, Jesus reveals his nature and the ultimate motivation behind his earthly ministry—namely, the **Rescue** and **Restoration** of humanity. The darkest moment of the **Story** occurs as Jesus is crucified at the hands of sinners to pay for his people’s sins, just at the Scriptures foretold (John 19:17-42; Isaiah 53). Yet three days later the **Rescue** was realized as Jesus emerged from his tomb, demonstrating his authority over life and death, and providing the only path to the final **Restoration** in the new heavens and the new earth (John 14:3; 20:1-10).

Acts

With the climax of the Story complete in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the church—God’s rescued people—is commissioned to tell this **Story** to the nations. As a continuation of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit fills and empowers the people of God to proclaim the gospel—the good news about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-5).

As a people enslaved to sin because of the **Fall** find freedom through trusting in Christ for salvation, they begin to realize their part in God’s great **Story**. They become followers (disciples) of Christ. The church multiplies, and the news of the **Rescue** spreads first in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), then to Judea and Samaria (chs. 8-10), and then to the ends of the earth (chs. 11-28).

Along the way, we see a beautiful portrait of the early church. It is filled with people devoted to the teaching of the apostles, sacrificially caring for one another, wholeheartedly worshiping God, and faithfully praying for one another (2:42-47). Luke highlights key leaders in the **Story**, starting with the apostle Peter and ending with the apostle Paul. Peter’s ministry to the Jewish community and Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles (non-Jews) serve to advance the gospel in a unified way, often at great risk to their lives, in order that people from all ethnic groups might hear the good news of salvation. These men, along with many

other unnamed followers of Jesus, endure suffering and experience persecution as they advance the mission of the church.

In the end, we see that nothing can hinder the spread of the gospel even though the world has been plagued by the **Fall**. One day, full and final **Restoration** at the end of history, secured by Christ's **Rescue** in the middle of history, will wash over this world and make all things new.

Romans

The beauty of the **Story** unfolds in this letter to the ethnically diverse believers in Rome—the centre of the known world in the apostle Paul's day. In Romans, Paul provided solid theological foundations for understanding the gospel. And, on a more practical level, he expressed his desire to use Rome's strategic location and ethnic diversity for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to the rest of the world (Romans 1:15).

Beginning with **Creation** (1:20), Paul wants the churches in Rome to know that God's promise of **Rescue** is fully answered in Jesus (chs. 1-3). By God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone, both Jew and Gentile, as God's holy and righteous children (ch. 5), have equal access to the promised inheritance of Abraham (chs. 4; 15). The **Fall** tragically brought sin and sadness and death into **Creation**. Yet the **Rescue** demonstrates decisively that nothing—even death—can separate God's children from his eternal and steadfast love (ch. 8-9). And God's children are to proclaim this message throughout the world (ch. 10; Matt. 28:18-20).

As God has carried along his people throughout the **Story**, he continues to sustain and sanctify his rescued people—declaring them holy and making them holy—through his Holy Spirit (Romans 6-7; 12-14). For those who have been rescued, Paul closes his letter with a beautiful picture of eternal unity and purpose to be fully realized in the **Restoration**: they will glorify the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ “with one voice” (15:6).

1 Corinthians

Paul's letter to the young church at Corinth affirms the good news of the **Rescue** accomplished by Christ on the cross. Now, God's rescued people must make it their goal to live as his holy people.

Paul begins his letter by calling the Corinthians “saints” or “holy ones” (1:2). Yet because they have failed to live in unity as God's holy people, Paul also has to rebuke them (1:10-17). In doing so, he directs them to the heart of the **Sto-**

ry: “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). Living according to the gospel seems like foolishness for those outside the church, but for those who are indwelt and instructed by the Holy Spirit, it is the very wisdom of God (1:18-2:16).

The church and each of its members have become the true temple: the holy dwelling place of God on earth (3:16). By the Spirit’s empowering, therefore, they are to set aside the destructive patterns of the **Fall** in their lives. This will be realized as they embrace God’s holy calling by encouraging one another (chs. 3-6) and by surrendering their man-given rights for the sake of doing all things for God’s glory (chs. 8-10; 12-14). Even the God-given abilities—“gifts”—each person has been given are to be lovingly utilized for the sake of others in the church, the physical expression (or “body”) of Jesus Christ (chs. 12-14). Above all else, the members of the church are to love each other as they have been loved by their Lord and Saviour (ch. 13).

In the end, the ability to live increasingly according to the gospel comes only through faith in the reality of the Rescue accomplished by Jesus (15:3-7, 20-22), as the church hopefully awaits final Restoration (15:42-49).

2 Corinthians

The devastating effects of the **Fall** were on full display in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, as he had to address serious issues of sin and disunity in the Corinthian church. Thankfully, as he wrote this second letter a year later, he had heard that the Corinthians had experienced spiritual renewal as they embraced the full power of the gospel. They had moved beyond their pettiness (1 Cor. 1:10-17) as they found strength in “all the promises of God,” which were fulfilled in the great Rescuer, Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). Paul described this as a “triumphal procession” led by Jesus (2:14-17), whereby the presence of God’s glory in their lives through the Holy Spirit led to their ongoing glorious transformation (3:1-18). This victory manifested itself through human weakness (12:9-10).

All these things point back to Christ’s victory in the **Rescue**, as he himself was crucified in weakness on our behalf (13:4). Paul reminded the Corinthians that while the outer body is wasting away, God is renewing the inner nature of his rescued people (4:16-18). This enables Christians to rejoice in the face of suffering, mindful of the final **Restoration** yet to come. At the same time, the **Restoration** is not only a future hope but also a present reality because of new natures marked by a selfless mission to bless all people as God’s ministers of reconciliation in the **Rescue** (5:17-21). Through faith in Jesus, God’s rescued

people can become cheerful givers (9:7-8), destroy Satanic strongholds (10:4), discern the Spirit of God (11:1-15), and endure suffering (11:16-33).

Though Paul faced extreme adversity, he could rejoice in the faithful transformation of the Corinthians (7:4-10). His suffering—and theirs—highlighted their weaknesses, which ultimately led to their faithful and glorious dependence on the true Recure, Jesus Christ (chs. 12-13).

Galatians

In Galatians, the tragic and sinful tendencies of humanity under the **Fall** are displayed in the church as some individuals attempt to substitute cheap, man-made religious behaviour in place of faithfully living on the basis of God's gracious promise found only in the **Rescue** won for us by Jesus (1:6-10; 2:15-3:29).

After Paul proclaimed the gospel in Galatia, some of the new churches he helped start became infiltrated by false teachers known as "Judaizers." Failing to understand the freedom and perfection of the gospel **Rescue** accomplished by Christ on the cross, these Judaizers taught that Christians still needed to follow the Mosaic law. Many of the Galatian Christians were non-Jews (Gentiles). The Judaizers insisted that these Gentile converts had to be circumcised in order to be true Christians.

Responding to this heretical teaching, Paul insisted that if salvation comes through keeping the law everyone remains under the curse of the **Fall**—because none of us can measure up to God's perfect standards. In the magnificence of the gospel, Jesus Christ fulfilled the demands of God's law (5:1). Through the **Rescue**, the faith that first brought salvation is the same faith God's rescued people exercise in all of life as they depend on the Holy Spirit to produce holiness in them. This holiness is characterized by evidence (or "fruit") (5:22-25), which provides a beautiful display of how the Rescue influences human lives as God's people await final **Restoration** in the new earth.

Ephesians

Paul's letter to the Ephesians shows that God's plan for the **Rescue** in Jesus Christ was set in place before **Creation** (1:1-4), and that it was all according to God's purposes and sovereign will (1:11). The tragic effects of the Fall caused all humanity to be under the spiritual and physical curse of sin. They were "dead" in their sins (2:1) and under the sway of Satan (2:1-3). Yet God has graciously sent Jesus Christ to reconcile and unite all of **Creation** (1:10) and to

form one new people (the church) from all nations (2:11-22; 3:4-6), as he had promised throughout the Old Testament.

Through faith in the person and work of Jesus, people can have a wonderful new identity. They are holy and blameless (1:4), adopted by God (1:5), redeemed (1:7), forgiven (1:7), heirs of God (1:11), sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13), members of Christ's body (1:22-23), able to have access to God through the Spirit (2:18), citizens of God's kingdom (2:19), and the holy dwelling place of God (2:20-22). Christians are called to respond to these amazing realities by worshiping their Lord in a manner consistent with this new identity (ch. 4). God's redemptive **Rescue** in Christ transforms every aspect of human life (chs. 5-6) as believers do battle against the spiritual powers of this age (6:10-20).

Ephesians 1-3 tells us what God has done in the **Rescue**. Chapters 4-6 tell us how we gladly respond as his new people. As God's rescued people stand in awe of the glorious news of the rescue (chs. 1-3) they are "therefore" (4:1) able to live faithfully according to God's new calling on their lives (chs. 4-6), as they eagerly await the final **Restoration**.

Philippians

Paul's letter to the Philippians repeatedly directs attention to the main character of the **Story**: the person of Jesus Christ. There is a paradox in Philippians. It has joy as its main theme (1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 28; 3:1; 4:4), yet Paul wrote from a prison cell. Paul's obedience to God hadn't led to a problem-free life, but rather to persecution and hardship.

Yet the joy Paul describes goes deeper than the circumstances of life (4:11-13). In all things, Paul focused on the ever-present reality of Jesus (1:11, 21; 2:5), who alone provides the peace and contentment all hearts desperately desire. He is the one who provided the **Rescue** (2:1-11). He is the only one for whom it is worth forsaking all things, counting everything as loss (3:7). Believers who have come to know Christ delight to strive on to know him more, at whatever personal cost, even sharing in his sufferings (3:10-14). He himself is the supreme object of rejoicing for God's rescued people, as they place all joy in him, regardless of suffering or circumstances.

Ultimately, this letter is a reminder that God's redemptive **Story** is bigger than this life and its struggles. Believers, whose citizenship is in heaven (3:20), are headed toward an ultimate **Restoration** in which their bodies will be transformed "to be like his glorious body" (3:21).

Colossians

The apostle Paul wrote this letter from prison to the Colossian Christians as a declaration that Jesus Christ is Lord over all **Creation**, despite the present effects of the **Fall**.

As the image of the invisible God, Christ reigns over everything in heaven and earth, whether visible or invisible, which includes all earthly and spiritual powers (Col. 1:15-17). As Redeemer, he is the head over the church, bringing sinners back to himself through the **Rescue** he accomplished on the cross (1:18-23). This unfolding **Story** was not always understood in times past, but now it has been revealed clearly in Christ. The personal presence of Jesus in the lives of his people is the hope of glory, assuring them of their participation in the coming **Restoration** (1:24-29).

Paul instructs his readers to avoid the false teaching of various religions that promote a form of morality apart from Jesus (2:8-23). This is given as a loving word of caution to the young Colossian church. As God's chosen people, holy and beloved, they are to live out their faith as those united with Christ (3:1-17). Their lives should be marked by characteristics such as God-honouring submission and obedience in the home and in work relationships (3:18-25), and ongoing dependence on God through prayer (4:2). Paul trusted that God would open doors for the Colossians to continue to share the news of the **Rescue** with non-Christians. Therefore, being mindful and motivated by God's grace in their lives, he encouraged them to season their speech "with salt" (4:5-6; Matt. 5:13).

1 Thessalonians

Paul begins his first letter to the Thessalonians by reminding them of how they had received the gospel. They once had lived under the **Fall** as servants of false gods, but their hearts had been transformed through faith in Christ and they had become servants of the true and living God (1:1-10).

Paul's journey to Thessalonica had been treacherous and marked by suffering. Yet through his faithful efforts, God brought salvation to the Thessalonians and gave them Paul's example to follow in their new lives as Christians (2:1-12). Though Timothy had reported that the young church was doing well, Paul offered additional instructions to promote their ongoing sanctification. He wanted them to live Spirit-filled lives that were pleasing to God (3:1-4:12; 5:12-28).

A particular question had arisen within the Thessalonian church regarding the **Restoration**: would believers who had died miss out on the eternal blessing of Christ's return? Paul reassured them that everyone who participated in the

Rescue accomplished by Christ on the cross would also participate in the **Restoration**. In the middle of the **Story**, Jesus bore the full wrath of God as the exhaustive payment of sin for any who trust in him (5:9-10). And his resurrection signaled his victory over death and the dawning of the new age. As a result, physical death is only temporary. Each Christian can fully expect to be raised with Christ upon his return, when all **Creation** returns to God's original purpose (5: 1-11; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; Rev. 21:5). Freed from the bondage of sin, believers now can rest—in life or in death—in the eternal salvation that Jesus alone provides (1 Thess. 5:9-10).

2 Thessalonians

Shortly after his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote to the church again to build upon his previous instructions for living as God's rescued people in light of the future **Restoration**. He reminded them of the **Rescue** accomplished by Jesus Christ, who—in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises—entered human history, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father. In response, the church eagerly anticipates Christ's triumphant return as King over all **Creation** (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Even though the Thessalonians were faithful Christians (1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:4), some of them had become convinced that “the day of the Lord,” the day of Christ's second coming, had already arrived (2:2). Paul told the Thessalonians that this teaching was incorrect (2:3). He encouraged the church to stand strong in the face of persecution, remaining hopeful and mindful of Christ's second coming and the **Restoration** that would follow (1:6-12; 2:13-17). Meanwhile, the basic activities of human life were not to be abandoned. They should continue working hard for a living (3:10-12) and “doing good” for others (3:13).

While Jesus' first arrival ushered in the **Rescue** and decisively defeated the curse of the **Fall**, his second arrival will usher in the final **Restoration** and eliminate the presence of the **Fall** once and for all.

1 Timothy

Paul wrote this letter to warn Timothy, his fellow missionary and beloved “child in the faith” (1:2), against false teachers who had emerged in Ephesus, promoting Jewish traditions and religious practices. These false teachers were guilty of misleading others through vain discussions regarding various speculations and myths (1:3-7; 4:1-3; 6:3-10, 20-21).

Paul had entrusted Timothy to oversee the church in Ephesus and to maintain the integrity of what was being taught (1:3, 18-20; 4:6-16; 6:3-10). One way that Timothy was to guard the church was to make sure that it was orderly. Thus, Paul outlined behaviour for women and men assembled in corporate worship, recalling the events of **Creation** and the **Fall** to better understand God's purposes in these relationships (2:8-15). Paul also gave Timothy specific details regarding the qualifications for leadership within the church (ch. 3).

After additional instructions and more warnings about false teachers, Paul closes his letter with a charge to Timothy. As a “man of God” (6:11), he is to avoid deadly and destructive teachings while fighting “the good fight of the faith”—that is, fighting for the truth of the **Rescue** and the eternal hope of **Restoration**, both of which are enjoyed only through faith in Jesus Christ (6:11-16).

2 Timothy

Imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote this farewell letter to his disciple Timothy. Assuming that his own death was imminent, Paul charged Timothy as a pastor and beloved friend to continue speaking boldly of the gospel that had saved them—even if it meant suffering for its sake.

Paul recalled the beautiful picture of the **Rescue** at work in Timothy's family, beginning with his grandmother and mother (1:5). God had graciously rescued them from their sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul urged Timothy to remain faithful and unashamed of the calling God had placed on his life. As further encouragement, Paul pointed to his own calling and experiences as a minister of the gospel (ch. 1). The resurrection of Jesus Christ, the promised King from the lineage of David (Matt. 1:1), meant that Paul's suffering—and ultimately all suffering for the sake of the gospel—was not in vain (2 Tim. 2:1-13).

Though the effects of the **Fall** carried over into the life of the church, Paul charged Timothy to remain faithful to what he had been taught since childhood. Timothy was to preach that truth of all Scripture, which had been given for teaching, reproof correction, and training in righteousness for every Christian (3:16). In addition, he was to invest his time in training men who could teach others and protect the church from false teachers (2:2). In all these ways the truth of the **Rescue** would be guarded and spread.

Paul's ministry would soon come to an end. Yet the impact of his ministry carries on as the **Story** continues to unfold and the sure hope of **Restoration** draws ever closer.

Titus

Good and trustworthy leadership is vital for God's people and the church. By fulfilling God's promise of a Saviour in the Rescue, Jesus Christ had been revealed as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:14-16) and the chief Shepherd of the church (1 Pet. 5:4). Prior to Christ's final return to usher in the complete Restoration of heaven and earth, Paul gives specific instructions for finding men who would faithfully lead the church as Christ's "under-shepherds" (also called "elders" or "overseers").

Titus was such a man. Paul writes this letter as a pastor and mentor to Titus, who had journeyed with Paul to Crete and stayed behind under Paul's direction for the specific purpose of installing elders to lead new churches (Titus 1:4-5). Paul identifies the essential qualities and leadership characteristics of an elder, in contrast with the prevailing false teachers who were teaching things that made them unfit for any work of the church (1:6-16). As serious issues would arise, Titus and the elders he would install were to guard against false teachers who denied the gospel in word and practice (1:13-16). To oppose the false teachers, Paul provides both sound doctrine and instructions for proper Christian living empowered by God's grace. This letter includes two profoundly beautiful statements about the **Rescue** (2:11-14; 3:4-7).

Paul's letter to Titus serves as a portrait of the Christian life as a majestic display of the reality of the **Rescue** and the hope of **Restoration** (chs. 2-3).

Philemon

Broken relationships are a sad and ever-present reality after the **Fall**, but this short personal letter from the apostle Paul offers a beautiful picture of the **Rescue** and how it transforms human relationships.

Writing from prison to a fellow Christian, Philemon, Paul asks Philemon to receive back his former slave, Onesimus. Though it seems Onesimus had run away and perhaps had even committed some small crime against Philemon, God had orchestrated the events that led Onesimus to meet Paul in prison. During their time together, Onesimus's life had been transformed by the gospel, and he was now a follower of Jesus Christ. Onesimus, once a "useless" criminal, was now a "useful" servant of the Lord. Therefore Philemon should welcome him back as a fellow brother in Christ, not as a slave (vv. 11-16). No longer a slave to sin, Onesimus's true identity was linked to his adoption as a child of God.

This meant that the same forgiveness Philemon had experienced by the grace of God was to be the primary motivation for extending grace and for-

giveness to Onesimus and restoring fellowship with him (vv. 18-19). This brief letter thus provides a crucial message for every Christian: we are called to forgive and love others in light of the great forgiveness received from the Saviour, Jesus Christ (see also 1 John 3:11; Col. 3:13).

Those who have responded to Christ's offer of **Rescue** will one day participate in the final **Restoration**, which will include the restoration of broken human relationships.

Hebrews

Hebrews offers a captivating overview of the **Story**, with Jesus at its glorious centre. We see in Hebrews that the entire Old Testament served to foreshadow Jesus' supreme, unparalleled role in **Creation**, in the **Rescue**, and in the final **Restoration** (1:1-4).

Though he was fully God, Jesus was also fully human. As a man, he was able to sympathize with the weaknesses of each person, because he was tempted in every way just as they were. As a perfect man without sin, he alone could fulfil the **Rescue** and provide everlasting rest for his people (chs. 2-4). The dire consequences of mankind's **Fall** into sin is seen in the fact that the Old Testament priests had to continually offer sacrifices as a payment for the people's sin. The sacrifices could never permanently remove the sin (10:4). Jesus, the Messiah, did for us what the law could not do. He fulfilled the law's demands while at the same time becoming both the perfect sacrifice for sin and the only "great high priest" who could mediate an eternal covenant with God (4:14; chs. 9-10).

Hebrews highlights the unlikely means God used to carry along the **Story**: a rejected Saviour whose death on a Roman cross provides the **Rescue** of the world. Only faith in this crucified one brings salvation (ch. 11). As the church awaits final **Restoration**, Jesus is the founder and perfecter of their faith as he rules and prepares a kingdom that cannot be shaken (chs. 11-13).

James

As the **Story** continued to unfold, James encouraged Christians who were scattered abroad to consider the various circumstances of their suffering as a joyful means of growing in spiritual maturity (James 1:2-18). James presented practical guidance for God's rescued people as they lived out their faith in a world distorted by the **Fall**. Belief in the gospel should change everything about their daily lives (1:19-27).

True churches will be faith communities where people love one another impartially in response to the gospel (2:1-13). Such love is possible only through faith in Christ, which produces the fruit of good works (2:14-26). Failure to control the tongue (3:1-12), quarrelling and boasting (ch. 4), and indulgent living (5:1-6) all show the tragic ongoing influence of the **Fall**. In contrast, faith in Christ produces peaceful living (3:15-18), patience in suffering (5:7-12), and faithful prayer (5:13-18).

James's letter is a reminder that obedience to God is absolutely necessary in the Christian life. Yet such obedience is not superficial adherence to religious formalities. It is rather the by-product of the faith and love that are ignited and then cultivated as we believe the gospel. As God's rescued people live expectantly in light of the **Rescue** and with the hope of final **Restoration**, they will show compassion, obey his commands, and reflect his character.

1 Peter

In this letter, the apostle Peter celebrates the **Rescue** in Jesus as the fulfilment of God's promises throughout the Old Testament to save and restore his people (1:3-12). Despite ongoing struggles as a result of the **Fall** (1:6), the promise of **Restoration** at the end of all things is still secure (1:6-9). Those who have been rescued by God's grace have also received a great inheritance—a "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1:3). Mindful of this, Peter calls each Christian to sacrificial and holy living (2:1-11) so that their conduct reflects the magnificence of being God's rescued people (1:13-25), for the whole world to see (2:12-17).

Those who die to sin through receiving Christ's sacrifice on the cross are now fully restored as part of God's family. They are free to live as imitators of his love and righteousness (2:24). Jesus exercised patience and kindness even while suffering at the hands of sinners, and now all Christians are called to follow his example by no longer living for themselves but for the will of God (4:1-2; see also John 4:34; 2 Cor. 5:15). Examples of suffering in the specific contexts of work (1 Pet. 2:18-25), marriage (3:1-7), and ministry (5:1-4) are given as a practical means of connecting Christ's **Rescue** to the conduct of the church.

2 Peter

Peter's second letter is a vivid reminder of the tension Christians experience in this life. On the one hand, in his **Rescue** accomplished on Calvary, Jesus Christ has unleashed God's divine power. He richly provides all we need for life and godli-

ness (1:1-15). On the other hand, the **Restoration** is not yet complete, and will not be until the church is reunited with Jesus Christ upon his final return (3:1-13).

Meanwhile, just as is the case today, in Peter's day there were false teachers who denied God and promoted destructive teachings and ungodly lifestyles (2:1-3). Peter was one of several eyewitnesses of Jesus' first coming (1:16-18), the climax of the **Story**. He had seen firsthand the majesty of God revealed through Jesus' ministry. Peter warned, however, that despite this dramatic fulfillment of prophecy, the church would face ridicule for believing that Jesus would one day come again (3:4-7; Genesis 6-7),

The final day of the Lord is coming. It will be a day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly but a time of eternal Restoration for God's people. It will usher in the new heavens and new earth where godliness and righteousness reign (2 Pet. 3:8-13). Meanwhile, God delays the coming of that day, providing one last opportunity for unbelievers to submit by faith to the great **Rescue**.

1, 2, and 3 John

In three short letters, John focuses on love as the guiding principle for the church. This is because God by his nature *is* love, and first loved us (1 John 4:7-21).

John's first letter reveals the eternal presence and significance of Jesus Christ, who was with God from **Creation** (1:1; note also John 1:1). Through Jesus, God fully demonstrated his love for sinners when he laid down his life in the **Rescue** on the cross to reverse the curse of the **Fall** (1 John 3:16; see also John 15:13; Eph. 2:4-5). John exhorts his readers to believe in Christ, confessing their sins and thus walking in the light (1 John 1:5-2:11).

All this leads to practical instructions on devotion to God in light of the **Rescue**, as John warns of false prophets and antichrist. These are people who deny God by rejecting his Son. In contrast, true followers of Jesus Christ are people who live with the hope of **Restoration** (3:2-3) as they abide in him (3:6), love one another (3:11-18), keep God's commandments (3:22; 5:2-3), and believe in the name of Jesus (3:23). In his second and third letters John expands upon his first letter with a special emphasis on "truth" (2 John 1:4; 3 John 1:3-4). Jesus referred to himself as "the truth" (John 14:6). Now, his followers are to walk as Jesus walked, in truth and love (1 John 2:6), imitating good and not evil.

Jude

Jude writes this short, compelling letter to those "kept for Jesus Christ," that is, the church (v. 1). His letter is an urgent appeal to "contend for the faith that was

once for all delivered to the saints” (v.3). This “faith” is the **Story** of God’s redemptive work in Jesus.

Jude writes to remind Christians of their **Rescue** from sin and death, and to warn of those who either distort the message of the gospel or reject the authority of Jesus (vv. 3-4). Pointing to the tragic effects of the **Fall**, Jude recalls key historical events from the Old Testament and directs the reader to trust in Jesus as the Saviour of God’s people and the righteous judge of God’s enemies (vv. 5-16). Although Jesus has defeated sin and death, God’s enemies are still active in the world (vv. 17-19). Christians must persevere and continue to rely on God’s mercy and grace in anticipation of the **Restoration**. At the same time, they are called to speak the gospel to God’s enemies that they might be saved from his fiery wrath through faith in Jesus (vv.20-23).

Jude ends with a beautiful exultation in the preserving grace of God in the gospel and the honour and worship that he deserves as result (vv. 24-25). Christ’s tangible love on the cross is able to present his rescued people blameless. One day they will enjoy his glorious **Restoration** forever.

Revelation

Revelation is the triumphant final chapter of God’s unfolding **Story**. The entire Bible is brought together as John describes his vision of the cosmic warfare that will one day bring an end to sickness, sin, and death.

Revelation displays Jesus Christ as the supreme hero of history. Jesus, the promised offspring of Eve (Gen. 3:15), has conquered the Serpent who tempted the first humans to rebel against God (Genesis 3). What Adam and Eve lost in the Fall, bringing sin and death upon **Creation**, Jesus has regained in the **Rescue**, restoring purpose, rest, and the certain hope of final **Restoration**.

Christ’s triumphant return at the end of history (Rev. 19:11-16; chs. 21-22) will not be the end but the beginning—the beginning of life as it was meant to be for God’s rescued people. God will wipe away every tear, completely conquer all his enemies, put an end to death, and eradicate sin forever, as his people worship him eternally in the promised land of the new creation (21:1-22:5).

APPENDIX B

GOSPEL PRESENTATIONS

While many great presentations of the gospel message are available today, two specific presentations are covered in this appendix. **The Two Kingdoms** and **The Three Circles** presentations have been chosen due to their use of the larger metanarrative. Furthermore, both have been widely used in Africa and additional training materials are readily available for the Christian. In considering these two presentations a couple of observations are noteworthy. The authors have found that the Two Kingdoms presentation is particularly strong in explaining the origin of the spiritual realm alongside the physical realm. The identification of spirits with the kingdom of darkness is particularly helpful when engaging cultures with a strong emphasis on the need to appease the spirit world. The Three Circles presentation communicates very well to a younger generation as it speaks very bluntly about the reality of the broken state of the world and the need for rescue. Both presentations are included to illustrate that the framework of the metanarrative is present as the core meaning of both while the form of presentation can vary.

THE TWO KINGDOMS GOSPEL PRESENTATION¹

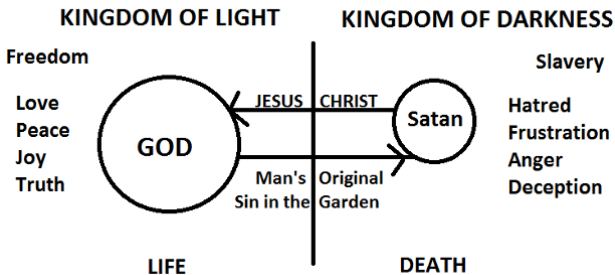


Illustration Five: The Two Kingdoms Gospel Presentation

¹ This particular teaching format is adapted from Gregg and Donna Fort, "Vision Casting for Believers: Training Session Two" in *Equipping Believers through Obedience Based Discipleship* (unpublished training manual), pp.8-9. A number of instructional videos around the Two Kingdoms presentation are available on YouTube (see The Hope Project Video <https://youtu.be/0YmX7rjr-ZY> accessed on 27 Dec 2021).

Part One

In the spiritual realm (world) there are two kingdoms.

The first kingdom is God's Kingdom.

(Draw a circle on the left and write God in it.)

When God created the heavens and the earth, he also created heavenly beings called angels. One of the angels was very proud and led a rebellion with some of the angels to overthrow God and take His place.

God, being holy, cast the sinful rebellious angels out of heaven. The rebellious angels are now called demons or evil spirits. As a result, there is a second spiritual kingdom, the Kingdom of Darkness.

(Draw a smaller circle on the right and write Satan in it.)

Part Two

The kingdom of light is ruled by God. In this kingdom His children live in freedom from sin and the power of the evil one. His children know His presence, His love, His peace, His joy and His truth.

(Write the words freedom, love, peace, joy and truth around God's circle)

When God created the world, He created a beautiful and perfect place in which His Children could live.

But because of one act of disobedience, the man and woman he created were cast out of God's Kingdom.

This is because God is holy and will not remain in the presence of sin and evil.

(Draw an arrow from the first circle to the second circle and write "Man's Original Sin in the Garden" near it.)

This kingdom is ruled by Satan, and people who live in this kingdom live as slaves to sin and Satan. Those in bondage in this kingdom know hatred, anger, frustration, and deception.

(Write the words slavery, hatred, anger, frustration, and deception around Satan's circle.)

Living in the kingdom of darkness causes people to live in fear of Satan and his power, but the truth is that His power as an angel of darkness is limited. He is not like God who is all powerful, all knowing, and ever present with His children. In fact, the Bible tells us (I John 4:4) that God's power is much greater than Satan's. Which kingdom are you in right now?

Part Three

So how can you move from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light?

The Bible tells us that we have all sinned (disobeyed God) and deserve the death penalty. Have you ever met anyone who has never sinned? But God loves us and does not desire for any of us to perish. Because people were enslaved in the Kingdom of Darkness, God made a way for them to return to the Kingdom of Light. He sent His Son Jesus to earth, in the form of a man. He came to teach us about God's love and the ways of the Kingdom of God. The religious leaders at that time were jealous of Jesus' influence and power and had him put to death on a cross. The Bible tells us that Jesus never sinned. In dying on the cross, He became an acceptable sacrifice to God for our sins. He died and was buried, but on the third day came back to life to show that he had conquered death and broken the power of sin. His death paid the price for us to be redeemed from slavery to sin and Satan. When Jesus was on earth He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6 ESV)

(Draw a cross that makes a bridge from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light. Put an arrow at the end of the crossbar connecting the two circles pointing to The Kingdom of Light. Write Jesus on the crossbar.)

Jesus made it very clear that He was the only way to escape the Kingdom of Darkness and enter the Kingdom of Light. If a person chooses in this life to enter the Kingdom of Light, he will live forever with God in that Kingdom after he dies - forever. If a person chooses to remain in the Kingdom of Darkness in this life, he will remain in the Kingdom of Darkness after he dies – eternally separated from God. The Bible calls this the Second Death because it is a place of eternal torment, pain, and decay.

(Write Life under the Kingdom of Light and Death under the Kingdom of Darkness.)

Part Four

Entering the Kingdom of Light

In order to enter the Kingdom of Light, **first** you must confess that you are a sinner living in the Kingdom of Darkness.

Second, you must ask God to forgive you of your sinful practices and break any ties you have with that spirit world. (Ancestor spirits are really evil spirits disguising themselves as our ancestors to get us to do things which do not please God. If you have a black cloth, or any other item which represents your ancestors or the spirit world you must either give them to another relative who wants them or burn them.)

Third, you believe that Jesus is God's Son who died on the cross in your place, was buried, and on the third day rose again to prove His power over Satan, sin, and death. You must also put yourself under His authority and ask Him to teach you the ways of His kingdom.

Would you like to move from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light?

If they say yes, you can provide them with an example of a prayer of surrender:

"Dear God, I confess that I am a sinner and have been living in the kingdom of darkness. I ask you to forgive me and cleanse me from my involvement in sinful practices. I ask that you be the ruler of my life. I pray all this in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, Amen."

Then ask them to lead in a similar prayer for themselves.

THE THREE CIRCLES GOSPEL PRESENTATION²

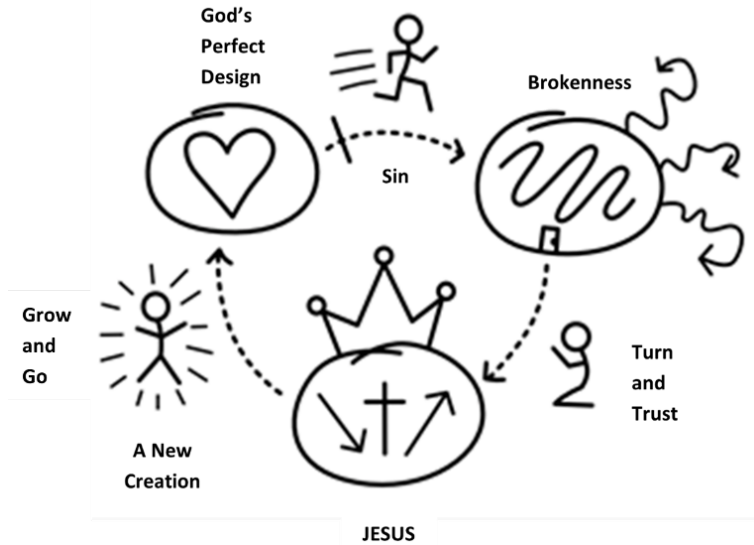


Illustration Six: The Three Circles Gospel Presentation³

The Three Circles presentation offers some flexibility as one can begin with either of the first two circles: “God’s Perfect Design” or “Brokenness.” The context of the conversation may be helpful in determining the most appropriate beginning point. For example, if one is in a beautiful setting, the transition to talk about God’s Design in creation is quite natural. On the other hand, if the conversation has included some discussion about sorrow or suffering, it is easy to transition to a statement about the brokenness of our world. For some, the starting point is one of preference of perspective—beginning with the image of God’s design versus beginning with the image of the consequence of sin. In the presentation provided, God’s Perfect Design is used as the first circle. The ex-

² A number of instructional videos around the Three Circles are available on YouTube (see NoPlaceLeft Training <https://youtu.be/5W8ynRMr59k> one of the earlier videos by Ray Vaughn <https://youtu.be/NYU-a2w1bxc>. A favourite is a video compilation of various people using this presentation on the streets of Australia in “3 Circles in 3 Minutes that Could Change Your Life” https://youtu.be/lcj5G_4dwrI all accessed on 27 December 2021).

³ Image without labels taken from <https://mike.allbutt.net/2018/09/sharing-the-gospel-using-3-circles/> The labels were added by the author.

ample of beginning with the circle of Brokenness has also been provided as an alternative at the end of the initial presentation.

Part One

Circle One: God's Perfect Design

May I share with you a story of three circles? Looking at the wonder of the world around me reminds me of God's Perfect Design.

(Draw a circle at the top left with either a heart inside or the words "God's Perfect Design").

In the beginning, God created everything that exists—both the seen and the unseen (the physical and the spiritual worlds). God's high point of creation was humanity—man and woman! God created in such a way that there was perfect harmony between man and woman; between man, woman, and creation; and most importantly between man, woman, and God. And this creation was very good.

Part Two

Circle Two: A Broken World

To be honest, when I look around at the world, I don't see that perfect harmony. I see a lot of brokenness.

(Draw a circle at the top right with "cracks" in it or a squiggly line filling it).

We can see lots of examples of broken behaviour in our world: crime, hatred, destruction (**let them help provide some examples**). But, if God's Perfect Design was one of harmony and peace, how did we get this broken world?

Part Three

Sin

God had provided boundaries for humanity in creation; however, the man and woman disobeyed God's instructions. This disobedience is called "sin". Sin had consequences which resulted in brokenness

(Draw an arrow from Circle One to Circle Two. Draw a stick figure “running” along that line and write the word “sin” either above or below that line).

The truth is that every person who has ever lived has done the same thing. At some point, we do what we know we’re not supposed to do or we don’t do what we know we are supposed to do. Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s glory and design. We all end up in a place of brokenness because of our sin.

Part Four

Need for Rescue

The problem is that we are all stuck in our sin and brokenness. People will try a lot of different ways to escape from their brokenness. Some think if they have enough money; others believe if they just marry the right person; some give up and try and escape through drugs or alcohol **(allow the other person to provide examples.)**

(As you describe different attempts to escape sin, draw squiggly lines leading out of circle two.)

But it is like a bungy cord and we just get snapped back into brokenness. There is no way we can escape on our own.

(As you use the “bungy cord” description, draw the escape lines going back into the circle of brokenness).

The cost of this sin and brokenness is death.

Part Five

Circle Three: Jesus

As we cannot escape our sin and brokenness, God has acted on our behalf.

(Draw a circle at the bottom halfway between the other two circles. Inside this circle, place an arrow pointing downward, a cross, and an arrow pointing upward).

The third circle is Jesus. As we could not rescue ourselves, God came as a person (Jesus). He lived a sinless life, showed us the character of God, and died in

our place as a substitute—taking on the penalty of our sin (he completely crushed our sin)

(Draw an X or line through the word sin).

But, three days later, he was raised from the dead! Now, you may be wondering, how does Jesus help us get out of our sin and brokenness?

Part Six

Connecting the Circles

Well, Jesus said that “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.” That means, that the only way back into a relationship with God is through Jesus.

(If you want, you can draw a small door on the bottom of circle two. Draw a line from Circle two to Circle Three—Jesus).

Jesus calls us to repent—which means to turn away—from our sin and brokenness and to trust—which means to rely on—him we can be saved. So, we “turn” from sin...

(Draw a picture of a stick person in a position of prayer)

...and “trust” in Jesus which means to make him king of our life and follow him...

(Draw a picture of a crown on top of Circle Three)

...that we will be forgiven of all our sin and will become a new creation...

(Draw a stick figure to the left of the Jesus circle with lines around it to indicate newness)

...and will be drawn into fellowship and harmony with God once again.

(Draw a line from Circle three to Circle One).

Part Seven

Grow and Go

Just like a baby doesn’t have all the skills and knowledge of an adult, so we all will grow in our faith. The good news is that God’s Spirit lives in us to help

guide us and God has given us his word, the Bible. We also have other Christians to help us on the journey. We will grow and we are called to go and tell this good news to others. **(Some prefer to share this thought only to those who make a decision to follow Christ)**

Part Eight

Calling to Decision

So, there are only two circles where we can find ourselves—in fellowship with God or in brokenness. Which Circle would you say that you are in? **(Allow them to answer. If they say they are in fellowship with God, celebrate that and ask them how they came to be in God’s circle. If they have any answer other than Jesus—return to the Jesus circle and remind them that Jesus said that no one comes to God except through him.)** If they say they are in the broken circle, ask a follow up question: Which circle would you like to be in? **(Allow them to answer. If they express a contentedness in their brokenness, do not argue, but offer prayer—how can you pray for them that they might know God loves them?)** If they say that they would like to be in God’s circle, ask them if anything is keeping them from making that decision? **(Allow them to answer. If they have issues or family or some reason, be sensitive, but gently firm).** If they have nothing keeping them from following, then share with them the call to turn from sin, accept Jesus as saviour and yield to him as Lord. Provide a sample of what a prayer of commitment might look like:

“Dear God, I confess that I am a sinner and have been living in the kingdom of darkness. I ask you to forgive me and cleanse me from my involvement in sinful practices. I ask that you be the ruler of my life. I pray all this in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Ask them to pray expressing their own commitment.

Alternative Version: Starting with Circle Two (Brokenness)

Alternative Version: Part One

Circle One—Brokenness

May I share with you a story of three circles? Looking around us today, it doesn't take long before we realize that this world is broken.

(Draw a circle at the top right with “cracks” in it or a squiggly line filling it).

We see crime, destruction, war (**let them help provide some examples**). But what if I told you that is not the original plan for this world?

Alternative Version: Part Two

Circle Two—God's Perfect Design

(Draw a circle at the top left with either a heart inside or the words “God's Perfect Design”).

In the beginning, God created everything that exists—both the seen and the unseen (the physical and the spiritual worlds). God's high point of creation was humanity—man and woman! God created in such a way that there was perfect harmony between man and woman; between man, woman, and creation; and most importantly between man, woman, and God. And this creation was very good.

From this point, the presentation follows the same pattern as you pick up with **Part Three: Sin** above.

The **Africa Theology Series** is a multi-volume set of books covering biblical, systematic and applied theology. The series is written in a way that will be accessible in nature and pastoral in tone. Each short book helps the reader understand the theological foundations, cultural implications and practical applications of key doctrines in the Christian faith. The series aims to give the pastor or lay leader contextualized tools needed to understand and defend their faith against the competing worldviews found in Africa.

A book, though containing many chapters, tells one story. Each chapter must be read as it relates to the other chapters and the book as a whole. The Bible is very much the same. This is why the authors of *Introduction to Biblical Theology* challenge the reader to “connect the dots” across the biblical narrative to understand the Grand Story of Scripture. The authors explain the discipline of biblical theology and then unpack the Grand Narrative of Scripture as they move through Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Consummation and show how major themes are impacted by this progression. Also, as part of the goal for the *ATS series*, the authors interact with the other major religions found on the continent highlighting bridges and barriers for gospel proclamation. The final section of the book examines how biblical theology can be practically applied in the ministry tasks of preaching, teaching, and evangelism.

DR RONNIE DAVIS (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves with the International Mission Board in Theological Education. He has served as a senior lecturer at the Cape Town Baptist Seminary since 2000 in the areas of biblical studies, evangelism, and church planting. He is an elder in his local church and works with CTBS students in church planting efforts in Cape Town. He is married to Gail, and they are blessed with four grown children, three daughters-in-law, and three grandchildren.

DR KENNEDY MULENGA (PhD, University of Pretoria) is originally from Zambia where he served as pastor and lecturer at the Christian Vocation Training Centre in Lusaka. He currently lives in Cape Town where he serves at CTBS as the Dean of Students and as a lecturer in the areas of practical theology and hermeneutics. He is an elder at his local church. He is married to Elizabeth, and they are blessed with three grown children, a daughter-in-law, and one grandson.

