

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 17 · Number 4

Winter 2013

Editor-in-Chief: R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Editor: Stephen J. Wellum

Associate Editor: Brian Vickers

Book Review Editor: Gregory A. Wills

Assistant Editor: Brent E. Parker

Editorial Board:

Randy L. Stinson

Daniel S. Dumas

Gregory A. Wills

Adam W. Greenway

Dan DeWitt

Timothy Paul Jones

Jeff K. Walters

Steve Watters

James A. Smith, Sr.

Typographer: Brittany Loop

Editorial Office & Subscription Services:

SBTS Box 832

2825 Lexington Rd.

Louisville, KY 40280

(800) 626-5525, x 4413

Editorial E-Mail:

journaloffice@sbts.edu

Suffering

2 Editorial: Stephen J. Wellum

Reflections on Living in Light of Sin and Evil.

6 Robert L. Plummer

The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul and the Mission of the Church

20 Christopher W. Morgan

Suffering According to James

34 James M. Hamilton, Jr.

Suffering in Revelation: The Fulfillment of the Messianic Woes

50 Russell T. Fuller

The Book of Job and Suffering: A Sermon

56 Robert V. McCabe

Navigating Life in a World that has Been Scared by the Fall:
Reflections on Ecclesiastes 9:7-10 and Living in a World of Suffering

72 The SBJT Forum

84 Book Reviews

Yearly subscription costs for four issues: \$30, individual inside the U. S.; \$55, individual outside the U. S.; \$45, institutional inside the U. S.; \$70, institutional outside the U. S. Opinions expressed in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* are solely the responsibility of the authors and are not necessarily those of the editors, members of the Advisory Board, or the SBJT Forum.

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*® a product of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, atla@atla.com, www.atla.com.

The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology is published quarterly by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280. Winter 2013. Vol. 17, No. 4. Copyright ©2013 The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. ISSN 1520-7307. Second Class postage paid at Louisville, KY. Postmaster: Send address changes to: SBTS, Box 832, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280.

Editorial: Reflections on Living in Light of Sin and Evil

Stephen J. Wellum

Living in this fallen world, we all face suffering and evil. One of the most common questions asked by non-Christians is how we, as Christians, explain the existence of evil and cope with it. Christians also are not immune to these questions and it is for this reason we have devoted an entire issue of *SBJT* to the topic. Our goal is to think through what Scripture says on the subject and how we, as God's people, are to live in this fallen world between the comings of Christ. In this expanded editorial I offer five reflections on what we call the problem of evil which will serve as an entrée into the other articles and forum pieces.

STEPHEN J. WELLUM is a Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and editor of *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.

He received his Ph.D. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and he is the author of numerous essays and articles and the co-author of *Kingdom through Covenant* (Crossway, 2012).

First, as an important apologetic point, it is not only Christian theology which must wrestle with the problem of evil; every worldview, Christian and non-Christian alike, must also wrestled with it, albeit for different reasons depending upon the specific view in question. For example, naturalistic/atheistic

viewpoints must first explain, given their overall view, how they can even *account* for the distinction between good and evil. What is the basis for objective, universal moral standards if, for sake of argument, naturalism is true? Naturalists will often raise the problem of evil against Christians, but in so doing, they *assume* a clear distinction between good and evil and that objective evil exists, which their own view cannot explain. Thus, in order to get their argument off the ground, naturalists, ironically, have to borrow parasitically from Christianity which can account for the distinction between good and evil tied to God as the standard. In this way, as a number of Christian thinkers have pointed out, many non-Christian worldviews, including naturalism, have a “problem of the good” since without the God of the Bible there is neither good nor evil in an objective and universal sense. The same could be said about other non-Christian views but my point is simply this: everyone must wrestle with the problem of evil in light of their own worldview claims. For Christians, our problem is not *accounting* for the

distinction between good and evil. We can make sense of our moral revulsion and condemnation of wicked actions. Our challenge is to make sense of why God plans and allows sin and evil, pain and misery. In answering these questions, we are driven back to Scripture and its entire storyline which unfolds God's plan of redemption in Christ.

Second, the Bible's storyline takes seriously the distinction between "creation" and the "fall" and thus the present abnormality of this world. A helpful and common way of thinking through the storyline of Scripture is by the grid: creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. When thinking about the problem of evil, and specifically the thorny question of the origin of evil and its relationship to God's plan, the distinction between "creation" and the "fall" is utterly essential to maintain. Scripture is clear that God created the universe "good" (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) and that everything from his creative hand was good. No doubt, Scripture teaches that sin and evil are part of God's plan, but Scripture *never* concludes that God is responsible for evil, nor does it conclude that a strong view of God's sovereign rule entails this conclusion.

Instead, Scripture distinguishes "creation" and "fall" and it roots this distinction *in history*. Sin entered the world by our creaturely act of rebellion, first in the angelic realm and then in the human world. Sin is *not* here because it is a metaphysical necessity tied to our finitude, nor is it here because that is just the way things are. Instead, sin and evil are a reality due to our moral rebellion against God in space-time history, and Scripture nowhere minimizes this fact. In fact, Scripture takes sin and evil so seriously that the entire plan of redemption is to destroy it and to remove it from God's universe! And, thankfully, because sin and evil are not metaphysically necessary, in removing sin and evil, he does not have to scrap us and start all over again. Instead, God must remove our sin by paying for it in full in Christ's cross, and then transform us by the power of the Spirit, thus restoring us to our state of good-

ness even in a greater way in Christ. All of this is to say that the God of the Bible stands absolutely opposed to sin and evil. The same Scripture which teaches that God foreordains all things, including sin and evil, also teaches that sin and evil are an abnormality, an intrusion and a distortion of his good world, which God alone can remedy by the incarnate Son, his cross work on our behalf, and the power of the Spirit to transform us. Furthermore, even though it is true that God makes use of evil in order to bring about his good purposes, Scripture never concludes that evil and sin are less than what Scripture says they are. Evil remains evil: totally, radically, and absolutely, and God stands completely against it as the entire storyline of Scripture makes abundantly clear.

Many application points could be drawn from this point, especially when we confront the reality of evil and suffering in this world. However, the main point is that since Eden and this side of the consummation, all of us live in an abnormal and fallen world, and none of us escape this abnormality. Ultimately, when we suffer it is due to the present condition of this world. This is why all suffering is *not* related to a specific sin, as the book of Job makes abundantly clear. Yes, it is true that some suffering may be due to our sin (e.g., Acts 5; 1 Cor 11; cf. Heb 12), but it is not always the case. Suffering first is part of the present condition of this world, now awaiting the consummation, which requires that we have realistic expectations when we face suffering. No doubt, we do not often know why specific suffering comes our way; that is tied to the sovereign plan of God. Yet we do know that we will face sin and evil, and when we do, God is not to blame; all blame is first placed back in Genesis 3, and thereafter with every creature who chooses to act contrary to the good commands and purposes of God.

Third, in God's plan of redemption, God not only demonstrates that he is sovereign over sin and evil, but also that in his sovereignty, holiness, justice, and grace he is rooting out sin and evil in the cross work of Christ, thus demonstrating that

he is perfectly good and trustworthy. Scripture teaches that in redemption, God is not indifferent to our suffering and plight. Even though we do not deserve anything from him but judgment, God has displayed his grace and has acted to defeat sin and evil. In fact, it is precisely because he is the sovereign and gracious Lord that we can have real hope, help, and comfort since he is able to sympathize with us and powerfully to save us. Is this not what Scripture teaches? In the coming of Christ, the promised “age to come” has dawned and in his death and resurrection he has defeated sin, death, and the evil one and won for us our salvation (e.g. Rom 3:21-25; Col 2:13-15; Heb 2:14-15; 1 Cor 15:56-57; Rev 5). In so doing, God has demonstrated that he is utterly trustworthy, just, and good. We might not know all the mysteries of his ways, yet we do know that the truth of God’s sovereignty and goodness is beyond question. In our redemption, God is not sitting idly by, without care or concern for his people. In the cross and resurrection we have the greatest demonstration imaginable of God’s sovereignty over evil and his willingness to identify with us in order to save us from sin, evil, and death. In our facing suffering there are many questions. But as we think of our sufferings in light of Christ and his cross, we learn how to trust. God the Son has suffered unjust suffering and when we remember this, we learn that God is for us and not against us, and that he stands opposed to sin and evil in a far greater way than we can even imagine. After all, what does the incarnation of God’s Son, his life, death, and resurrection teach us if not that God hates sin and evil and that he powerfully acts to destroy it, even though it is part of his foreordained plan (Acts 2:23). Thus, if we can trust God in using evil for good purposes in Christ, we can certainly trust him in all other events, including our lives.

Fourth, given the biblical balance between God’s sovereignty over sin and evil, creaturely responsibility for it, and God’s goodness and utter determination to defeat and destroy it, we must also fight with all of our might against sin

and evil, in line with what God himself is doing. A strong view of divine sovereignty does not negate this conclusion. Scripture teaches both God’s sovereignty over evil *and* his complete opposition to it and we must hold both together simultaneously without ever letting them go. In this regard, John 11:33-35 is a very important text. As Jesus approaches the tomb of Lazarus in sovereign power to raise him, he is literally “outraged in spirit, and troubled.” Jesus, as God the Son incarnate, is outraged at the death of his friend, and thus sin which has brought death into this world. He is not outraged with himself as the Lord, even though sin, evil, and death are part of God’s eternal plan and why he is going to the cross in the first place. Rather, he is outraged by what sin has wrought by creaturely actions, which he has come to defeat and destroy. Jesus in all of his sovereignty stands in complete opposition to sin and evil, and we must do likewise. When moral evil takes place, we do not blame God or respond in a *laissez faire* way. Rather, we fight sin and evil by proclaiming the Gospel, and by God’s grace, seeing people made new; by standing for justice and righteousness and punishing evildoers, through the appropriate authorities, for their responsible actions. We never justify sin and wrong actions by appealing to divine sovereignty at the expense of human responsibility, nor do we reduce God’s sovereignty in light of human choices. We hold the depth and breadth of biblical teaching together as we fight with all our might against sin and evil, in line with what God himself is doing.

Fifth, what about specific suffering in our lives? Often when we go through suffering we wish that God would have allowed us to go through something else. Why do we experience specific suffering? Why do some escape specific tragedies and others do not? There are many points that could be noted, but I finish with these thoughts. John 21:15-23 reminds us that God calls all of us to different callings in life. When Peter asked about John’s future, Jesus never answered him directly but instead said, “Follow me.” Our lives are part of God’s sov-

ereign plan and most of the time we do not know what the Lord has ordained for our lives. For us, as Christians, we are assured that even in our suffering in this life, which is part of the fallenness of this world order, God never allows us to experience anything we cannot bear by his grace and power (1 Cor 10:12-13). Sometimes the suffering we experience is due to persecution for the Lord's name, which we should consider joy (Mk 8:34-38; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-16). Other times it may be due to the discipline of the Lord (Heb 12:1ff). Yet in many cases, we experience difficulties related to the abnormality of this world and we do not know why the specific events have occurred. However, what we are assured of is this: our God is sovereign and the defeat of sin and evil is accomplished in Christ. We live our lives in full conviction that in Christ, we have every assurance that God is sovereign over evil and that until he returns, we can live confidently, trusting God's promises and Word.

It is no doubt the case that questions related to the relationship of God to sin and evil are difficult. Even though many questions remain, one thing

is sure: our sovereign and gracious triune God is worthy of all of our confidence and trust. The entire storyline of Scripture gives us confidence that our sovereign God is working out all things in this world for his glory and our good (Rom 8:28). We only have knowledge of God's plan and actions as creatures, but in light of God's actions in creation and redemption; in light of God's incredible plan of redemption centered in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and his incredible triumphant cross work for us; we have every reason to trust what God has said and to live in confident expectation for our great and gracious God to consummate what has already begun in Christ in a glorious new heaven and new earth (see Rev 21-22). While we continue to live between the ages, as we await the second coming of our Lord, may we live as those who trust God's promises no matter what we experience, proclaim Christ as our only hope and salvation, and stand with our great God against sin and evil as we long for Christ's appearing. It is my prayer that this issue of *SBJT* will help toward this end, for God's glory and the good of the church.

The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul and the Mission of the Church

Robert L. Plummer

INTRODUCTION

While Paul has traditionally been understood as expecting the churches to engage actively in outward-focused evangelism, this view has been increasingly challenged. It must be admitted that there is a lack of explicit imperatives to evangelize in Paul's letters. Nevertheless, a number of texts, however small, do seem to indicate that Paul both commended and commanded outward-focused missionary activity from the churches (1 Cor 4:16; 7:12-16; 11:1; Eph 6:15; Phil 1:12-18; 2:14-16).¹ As I have written elsewhere, Paul's presentation of the word of God as a dynamic entity which propels its bearers outward in mission provides the most significant theological basis for the missionary activity of the church in his letters.² The same dynamic word that indwelt Paul as an apostle

also indwelt his churches. This word determined both the church's identity and evangelistic activity in the world.

If the thesis I have outlined briefly above is a correct understanding of Paul, then one would expect the apostle to describe both himself and his churches as undergoing some of the same experiences and participating in the same missions-related activities. That is, if the word of God inevitably propels its bearers in mission, then one would expect to find Paul describing in similar fashion the missions-related activity of both apostle and church. Parallels can be drawn in a number of areas (e.g., teaching, praying, edification of the church), but for the purposes of this article, I will focus on one significant parallel—suffering in the life of the apostle Paul and the life of his churches. What does Paul's description of this common experience of suffering reveal about his understanding of his own mission and the mission of the church?

SUFFERING, CHRISTIAN IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

ROBERT L. PLUMMER is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also earned his Ph.D.

Dr. Plummer has written or edited several books, including *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission* (Wipf & Stock, 2006), *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* (Kregel, 2010), *Journeys of Faith* (Zondervan, 2012), *Paul's Missionary Methods* (co-edited, InterVarsity Press, 2012), *The Story of Scripture* (Kregel, 2013), and *Understanding the Bible* (Kregel, 2013). He also serves as an elder at Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, KY.

also indwelt his churches. This word determined both the church's identity and evangelistic activity in the world.

I will begin by briefly noting Paul's references to suffering in his own mission and the life of the church. I will then proceed to explore the reasons for Christian suffering. According to Paul, why is it that early Christians—both apostles and ordinary believers—suffer? We will see that Paul's understanding of Christian identity and the offensiveness of the gospel are important for answering this question. A brief study of the early Christians' social context will also help clarify this matter. Finally, we will discuss two Pauline texts (2 Cor 4:7-15; Col 1:24-25) and two Pauline letters (Philippians, Thessalonians) to see what additional insights they give us into Paul's understanding of suffering.

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY: WHY THE APOSTLES AND CHURCH SUFFERED

Paul could not conceive of his apostolic mission apart from suffering.³ This fact is made clear by numerous passages in the Pauline epistles.⁴ Likewise, in the book of Acts, Luke confirms that Paul saw suffering as inherent to his apostolic ministry (Acts 9:15-16; 20:23).⁵ In parallel fashion, Paul repeatedly describes the churches as undergoing suffering and signifies that he sees such ongoing persecution as a normal feature of Christian existence (Rom 8:16-17; Gal 6:12; Phil 1:29-30; 1 Thess 2:14-16; 3:3-4; 2 Tim 1:8; 2:3; 3:12).⁶

What was it about the apostles and churches that made them the target of outsiders' unwavering opposition? To answer this question, we must delve into Paul's thinking on two related topics: Christian identity and the offensiveness of the gospel. First, we will look at Christian identity—i.e., characteristics of Christian existence shared by both apostles and ordinary believers. And, second, we will see how, in Paul's thinking, such common elements of Christian existence proved offensive to non-Christians.

In discussing Christian identity, we must remember that Paul viewed the dynamic gospel as indwelling and determining the activity of both apostles and churches (1 Thess 1:6-8). In Paul's thinking, it was impossible to have a church or an

apostle apart from the gospel. The genuine presence of the gospel was the determiner of Christian identity (Gal 1:6-9). This gospel, which birthed and directed Christians (1 Cor 4:15), was nothing other than the salvific message about Jesus Christ and the assurance (to believers) of his indwelling presence (Rom 8:31-39; 1 Cor 1:23). It is for this reason that Paul can often speak interchangeably about the preaching of "God's word" or the preaching of "Christ."⁷ Paul can even describe his apostolic mission as carrying around in his own body "the death of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:10).

Paul not only viewed his apostolic existence, but the Christian life generally, as inextricably identified with Christ. Christians are "buried with [Christ] by baptism," and raised with him to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, believers "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In Romans 10:9-10, Paul says that to be a Christian, one must identify oneself with Jesus Christ—both externally and internally. He writes, "If you *confess with your lips* that Jesus Christ is Lord and *believe in your heart* that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (my emphasis).⁸ In Colossians 1:18, Paul describes Christians metaphorically as the "body of Christ," with Jesus Christ as the head (cf. Eph 1:22-23). In Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul says that believers are stones in a building, of which Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. In surveying Paul's various references to Christian identity it becomes clear that to be a Christian—to have received the life-giving message of the gospel—is to be inextricably associated with the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, for Paul, the whole of Christian identity might be summarized as determined by two overlapping qualities—the acceptance of and abiding presence of God's word, and the lordship of and abiding presence of God's Son.

The relationship of suffering and Christian identity becomes clear when we understand that Paul's two main identifiers of Christian existence—gospel and Christ—were offensive to the non-Christian world. This point becomes

especially significant when we note that Paul expected the gospel to spread spontaneously from its adherents (e.g., Phil 2:14-16; Col 1:5-7). An offensive message spreading spontaneously from the people who hold to it will inevitably result in opposition and suffering. Given this situation, Paul consistently presents Christians—apostles included—with two options: (1) being ashamed of the gospel, and thus denying the faith (Gal 1:6-9; 6:12), or (2) allowing the gospel to run its dynamic course through their lives and thus suffering for it (2 Tim 1:8; 3:12; cf. Luke 9:23-27). And, although a Christian's suffering may not entail persecution for the sake of the gospel (e.g., dangers from "rivers" and "bandits" [2 Cor 11:26; cf. 1 Cor 7:28; 2 Cor 12:7; Gal 4:13]),⁹ in Paul's mind, it usually does.

But what is offensive about the gospel? According to Paul, the gospel heralds God's judgment of human wickedness and false righteousness (Rom 1:16-32; Phil 3:7-9; 1 Thess 1:9; 2 Thess 2:11-12), and in defiance of that message, non-believers will attack the bearers of it (1 Cor 1:18-25; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 1:4-8; cf. Act 7:51-60; 1 Pet 4:1-5). The "world" which is opposed to God and his word (1 Cor 1:20-21; 2 Cor 3:14) will oppose the announcers of that word as well (John 15:18-19; 17:14, 16; Acts 9:4-5; 1 John 3:13; 4:4-6). Behind non-Christians' rejection of (and antagonism towards) God's messengers is not faultless ignorance or misunderstanding, but a morally culpable rejection of God's truth (Rom 1:3; 2 Thess 1-2). Furthermore, behind these human opponents stand demonic forces who oppose God and his Christ (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:10-18; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Thess 2:1-12).

The offensiveness of the gospel becomes especially clear when we consider the central subject of the gospel—Christ crucified. Paul views his gospel ministry (and, by extension, the description applies to the mission of the churches) as the parading of Christ crucified before the eyes of fallen humanity (Gal 3:1). This picture of the crucified Christ serves as a constant reminder that a horrific death was needed to rectify humanity's

desperate state. The crucifixion declares both the awesome love of God and the miserable "failing grade" that even the best of fallen human behavior deserves (i.e., the punishment Christ received was the just penalty for even the finest of human religiosity) (Phil 3:3-10). Such an assessment does not sit well with those who prefer a more favorable evaluation of their spiritual condition, and so such persons attack those through whom the gospel of Christ progresses (Phil 3:2-3; Gal 6:12-15).

Because the identity of both the apostles and ordinary believers is determined by the presence of an offensive gospel and identification with a rejected Messiah (Gal 3:10-14), true Christians must, by their very nature, face hostility. It is due to this fact—the fundamental Christological grounding of Christian suffering—that Paul frequently refers to his or other believers' suffering in direct relation to Christ's suffering (e.g., Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5; 2:14-15; 4:10; Gal 6:12; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24-25). Also, we should note that Paul's view that suffering is inevitable for all Christians demonstrates the apostle's expectation that the word of God and presence of Christ would advance to the non-believing world through all Christians (Rom 8:16-17; 2 Tim 3:12).

A similar understanding of the certainty of Christian suffering and its relation to Christian identity can be found elsewhere in the New Testament. In Acts 9:4, for example, Luke reports that Jesus asked the pre-Christian Paul, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Paul, of course, was not actually persecuting Jesus, but the early Christians who were his "body"—who were united with him in baptism, confession, and the Lord's Supper. These early Christians were so identified with their Lord that Jesus could refer to Paul's persecution of *them* as a persecution of *him*.

Likewise, in the Synoptic tradition, Jesus promises that his followers will face persecution and suffering (Matt 5:10-12; Luke 21:16). The reason for this persecution and suffering is the world's hatred of *Jesus* (Matt 10:25; 24:9; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:17). Indeed, it is outsiders' animosity

toward the *Lord himself* that elicits their attacks on Christians. The opponents of Jesus hated him because of his teachings and claims, which must have been embodied and promulgated by Jesus' followers if they faced the same opposition as him. Thus, we find in the Synoptic tradition a significant parallel to Paul's understanding of the relationship of Christian identity and suffering.

First Peter also witnesses to the connection between Christian identity and suffering. Believers are there described as "sharing Christ's sufferings" (4:13), "reviled for the name of Christ (4:14), and suffering "as ... Christian[s] ... [i.e.] because [they] bear this name" (4:16). Peter notes that if Christians are persecuted for their faith, they should rejoice because their suffering confirms that the Spirit of God truly does rest on them (4:14). The Christians' opponents are preeminently defined by their rejection of the gospel (and by extension, its bearers). That is, the opponents are those who "do not obey the gospel of God" (4:17).

In the book of Revelation, John also presents suffering as bound up with a Christian's identification with Jesus. In Revelation 1:9, John introduces himself to the churches as "I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the *persecution* and the *kingdom* and the *patient endurance*" (my emphasis). The three nouns italicized in the previous sentence are introduced by a single article in Greek—implying that there is a close relationship between them.¹⁰ John seems to assert that one cannot experience the kingdom without the accompanying persecution and requisite patient endurance. This holistic picture of Christian experience is pre-eminently defined by a Christological qualifier—that is, the totality of this experience is "in Jesus." The following seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor also make clear that identification with Jesus invariably results in persecution.¹¹

We have seen both in Paul's letters and the broader New Testament witness that the world is incited to persecute Christians because of their offensive gospel and rejected Christ. Yet, if everyone but Christians hates the gospel, it would seem

that the Christian faith would cease to spread. The miracle, however, is that God can change the hearts of his enemies. In this process, God uses the apostles and churches as agents to proclaim his word, but ultimately God himself removes the veil from unbelieving hearts (2 Cor 3:13-16). So, although the gospel brings life to persons living in animosity towards it, it does this only in so far as God, in his mercy, deigns to awaken hearts to his offer of grace (Rom 9:16-18). We should note this last point so that in our emphasis on the offensiveness of the gospel to the non-Christian world, we do not forget that Paul and others expected some persons to respond positively to the life-giving message of the gospel (1 Cor 9:22; Eph 3:1-13).

THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

If we were to interview a first-century opponent of early Christianity and ask him why he was persecuting Christians, he would likely differ from Paul's "theological evaluation" of the situation. That is, he would not say, "I hate the truth of what God has to say about my idolatrous life and human-based righteousness." Such spiritual realities (while ultimately true, according to Paul) played themselves out in the practicalities of daily life—in the familial, social, and political arenas.¹² Bruce Winter, for example, cites the following reasons for outsiders' opposition to early Christianity: the fact that Christians gathered for weekly meetings (which was against Roman law),¹³ they did not participate in common cultic ceremonies,¹⁴ and their leader was crucified (an offensive idea to Romans and Jews).¹⁵ Besides these real differences from the surrounding pagan culture, Christians also faced rumors inspired by the hatred, jealousy, and fear of their opponents (Rom 3:8). As is clear from post-New Testament writings, outsiders falsely accused Christians of being cannibals, atheists, and incestuous fornicators.¹⁶

Both the broader New Testament witness and early extra-biblical materials confirm the historic-

ity of early Christian suffering. As noted above, the Synoptics, 1 Peter, and Revelation speak of Christians as suffering for their identification with Jesus. First Peter, in particular, is important in this regard because it speaks of Christians being “reviled” or “blasphemed” for their failure to partake in immoral activities they once enjoyed as non-Christians (1 Pet 4:4, 14). Indeed, as a result of social conditions in the first century, Christians quickly differentiated themselves from their pagan surroundings (e.g., 1 Cor 8:1-11:1; 1 Thess 1:9-10).¹⁷ By the Christians’ withdrawal from sinful activities and their prominent new allegiance to Christ, they invited attack.

A variety of evidence in the New Testament and early Christian history indicates not only that early Christians suffered, but that the gospel was advancing through the ministry of ordinary believers. The book of Acts alone is a treasury of the entire church’s active and constant witness.¹⁸ Also, it would appear that the church at Rome was founded by ordinary Christians, as Paul fails to mention any apostle or co-worker who founded it (cf. Col 1:7). Early extra-biblical documents also confirm an active evangelistic role for the entire church, as well as the persecution that the church endured from outsiders.¹⁹

From a sociological and historical perspective, we have an interest in knowing exactly what sorts of suffering the church endured from the hands of their oppressors. It is striking, then, that Paul does not offer specific examples of what this persecution entailed. Likely, such descriptions were superfluous for persons undergoing active opposition. On this point, Ernest Best remarks, “Paul does not describe [early Christians’] sufferings, but other parts of the New Testament supply glimpses of what they may have been: riots (Acts 17:5-9; 19:28-41), false accusations in court (1 Peter 4:15-16), imprisonment (Heb. 13:3), homes and businesses broken up (Heb. 10:32-34).”²⁰

Regardless of what daily activities incited opposition and what tangible forms this opposition took, it is important to note that Paul consis-

tently assumes that non-believing outsiders are aware of Christians’ religious allegiance and that is the main reason that Christians are suffering persecution. The first century context apparently did not allow for the kind of private faith that is often found among modern Western Christians. This fact helps explain why Paul infrequently gives explicit instruction in his letters regarding the churches’ missionary work. There was apparently little need to do so since many Christians were effectively making their presence known. In such a setting, the modern dichotomy between “active” and “passive” witness seems to break down.

Yet, how—one may rightly press the question—did the non-believers learn of their Christian neighbors’ faith? As noted above, Paul assumes this fact rather than explicitly stating it. One must suppose that ordinary Christians were actively announcing their faith, as Paul occasionally mentions (1 Thess 1:8; Phil 1:12-18; 2:16; Eph 6:15) and as confirmed by other biblical and extra-biblical sources. Also, the radically changed behavior of Christians attracted attention because of its implicit rejection of others’ religious views and the dominant cultural and societal structures (1 Thess 1:9-10).

PATTERNS OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING IN THE PAULINE LETTERS

We will now take a brief look at two Pauline passages and two Pauline letters to see if they exhibit the pattern of suffering we have summarized above. Furthermore, we will seek any additional insights on Paul’s understanding of Christian suffering which might be present in the texts.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-15

This passage deals primarily with Paul’s reflections on his apostolic sufferings. The text reads:

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We

are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God (2 Cor 4:7-15).²¹

By his use of "we" in this passage, Paul distinguishes himself from the Corinthians whom he is addressing. This "we" also possibly includes the other apostles generally or at least Paul's apostolic co-workers (e.g., Timothy and Titus). The "we" text on which we are focusing, 2 Corinthians 4:7-15, occurs in the midst of Paul's defense against various criticisms. Some detractors are apparently claiming that Paul is insincere (2:17), that he is trying to commend himself (3:1), that he is incompetent (3:5), that he is not clear in his teaching (4:3), and that his hardships invalidate his claim to be God's approved messenger (1:3-11; 4:7-15; 6:4).²² After reminding the Corinthians of the glorious God-revealing gospel that he preaches (4:6), Paul gives a theological *apologia* for his suffering. The apostle explains that the reason that the gospel (i.e., the "treasure") is found in such a beat-up old pot (i.e., in Paul) is that his weakness and suffering serve to magnify the truth and power of the message.²³ The apostles' trials and hardship show that they cannot be the source of the powerful message they convey and point their audience to God.

Also, from this passage, we discover that Paul

thinks suffering not only accompanies the apostles' proclamation of the gospel, but is a proclamation of the gospel. This fact is made clear by Paul's metaphorical descriptions of his afflictions as "carrying in [his own] body the death of Jesus" (4:10). Paul views his sufferings as picturing, in some sense, Jesus' death. When the apostle suffers in his proclamation of the gospel before potential converts, he puts on a "Passion play" in his own body. The *conveyer* of the message pictures the *content* of the message.²⁴ As a result of this vivid portrayal, through Paul's experience of "death" by repeated suffering, he delivers "the life of Jesus"²⁵ (i.e., salvation) to his addressees (vv. 10-12).

Margaret E. Thrall takes a similar view of 2 Corinthians 4:7-15, commenting:

The apostolate is the earthly manifestation of the gospel, and apostolic suffering plays a part in this: it is the epiphany in somatic form of the Christ who was crucified. The repeated *φανερωθῆ* of vv. 10b, 11b would support this interpretation, as would the general context, which is concerned with the presentation of the gospel (4.2-5, 13).²⁶

Likewise, Victor Paul Furnish notes about this text, "The apostle's sufferings ... are the manifestation of [Christ's] suffering and death and thus a proclamation of the gospel."²⁷

COLOSSIANS 1:24-25

Paul develops ideas similar to those in the text above in Colossians 1:24-25, where he writes:

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known.²⁸

This passage presents us with a puzzling phrase. If Christ's death is sufficient to pay for the sins of the world (Rom 3:23-24; 5:17; Gal 1:4), how could

anything be “lacking” in those afflictions, and in what way could Paul “in [his] flesh,” by his sufferings, supply what is lacking (*ta husterēmata*)?

Several interpretations have been offered for this passage. For example, some scholars contend that Paul here has in mind certain “Messianic woes” that must be fulfilled before the eschaton.²⁹ It should be remembered, however, that the apostle is writing to a Gentile congregation that he has apparently never visited or written to in the past (Col 1:3-8). Although it is possible that Paul is here assuming the congregation’s background knowledge of apocalyptic Judaism, such an assumption is speculative. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in Paul’s frequent references to suffering and hardship he never explicitly speaks of “Messianic woes,” as some Jewish sources arguably do.³⁰

A second interpretation of Colossians 1:24-25 that has been offered is that Paul is speaking here of a “mystical” or “realistic” participation in Christ’s actual sufferings.³¹ This interpretation, however, is unlikely. While Paul does speak of a believer’s participation in Christ’s death, that event is grasped by faith and remains “extrinsic” or “alien” to the Christian (Gal 2:20).

A third way that scholars have understood Colossians 1:24-25 is that the “lack” in verse 24 means that the persons to whom Paul proclaims the gospel lack both a knowledge and an immediate visual portrayal of Christ’s suffering and death (cf. the discussion of 2 Cor 4:7-15 above).³² When Paul suffers in his proclamation of the gospel, his addressees not only learn of Christ’s sacrifice, but are allowed to see a copy (albeit imperfect) of Christ’s suffering on their behalf. Scholars who hold to this view claim that Paul’s sufferings have no atoning significance and should not be understood as manifesting the *actual* sufferings of Christ.³³ Yet, according to this interpretation of Colossians 1:24, Paul’s sufferings do put in the immediate vision of potential converts a persuasive portrayal of suffering in the pattern of the one who died to atone for them.³⁴

This explanation seems reasonable (especially

noting the apparent parallel passage in 2 Cor 4:7-15) until one notices that Paul does not say that his sufferings supply what is lacking in the unevangelized world. No, his sufferings supply what is lacking among the Colossian Christians—an existing church that Paul has never visited (Col 1:4, 9, 24).

How then, does Paul make up for what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions in the Colossian church? He says that he does so by becoming a “servant of the church” according to God’s commission—to make the word of God fully known (Col 1:25). Paul proceeds to speak of his special apostolic task of unveiling the gospel in unevangelized areas (Col 1:26-29).³⁵ It is this pioneer missionizing activity that results in Paul’s suffering on behalf of the church.

In order to understand Paul’s point in Colossians 1:24-25, we must return to the point we made at the beginning of our discussion on suffering—that the fundamental grounding of Christian suffering is Christological. That is, because *all* Christians bear Christ’s presence and word, they face opposition from “the world,” which hates God and his Christ. As we noted at the beginning of this article, where Christ’s word—the gospel—is truly present, it will spread in accordance with its dynamic nature. As the gospel spreads through the church, it will encounter the hostility of the surrounding non-Christian world. This is so because the gospel announces the futility of human religions and human righteousness (Phil 3:7-9), thus arousing the anger of their adherents (Acts 9:4-5). In Colossians 1:24-25, Paul says that he is stepping ahead of the church in uncharted territory to make an initial unveiling of the gospel. In so doing, he bears the brunt of the world’s antagonism towards God and his word. As a servant of the church, he steps before her to take the first blow of the falling sword. Paul can say that such Christ-based suffering is “lacking” in regards to the church because it is the inevitable outworking of the church’s gospel-based existence. Because the word will inevitably go forth, and the world hates that word, active persecu-

tion is also inevitable. Paul willingly and joyfully steps before the church to suffer a more public and extreme persecution.³⁶

PHILIPPIANS

We will now briefly examine Paul's letter to the Philippians to see how the apostle describes the pattern of suffering in the community he addresses. Paul tells the Philippians, "[God] has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (Phil 1:29-30).³⁷ Here we note that (1) suffering is ordained by God,³⁸ (2) suffering is as much a part of the Christian experience as the divine gift of faith, and (3) the church's suffering is explicitly parallel to the "same struggle" that Paul has. In Philippians 1, Paul defines his "struggle" as the persecution and imprisonment he has faced for his proclamation of the gospel (Phil 1:12-13).

Paul assumes that the non-believers surrounding the Philippian Christians are aware of their faith, offended by it, and that is why they face persecution. There are no "secret Christians" in Philippi. As noted in the "social context" section above, the means whereby a Christian's neighbors discovered his or her new-found allegiance is somewhat speculative, but we do know that Paul consistently assumes this to be the case. This fact is probably one of the most significant reasons that we do not find more explicit injunctions to evangelism in Paul's letters. The early churches did not need to *begin* making their faith known so much as they needed to *continue* to adhere to their confession and to confirm it through their holy behavior.³⁹

We should also note that in the Philippian correspondence, Paul reports that his personal suffering has resulted in two auspicious outcomes. (1) More people have heard of the gospel through Paul's suffering, which has brought widespread attention to his message (Phil 1:12-13),⁴⁰ and (2) most of the believers in the letter's city of ori-

gin have been emboldened by Paul's example to declare the gospel fearlessly (Phil 1:14).⁴¹

FIRST AND SECOND THESSALONIANS

Paul's letters to the Thessalonian church demonstrate an understanding of persecution similar to the one we find in Philippians. Paul and his co-workers are facing opposition to their gospel proclamation (1 Thess 2:1-2); the Thessalonians encounter hostility for similar reasons, as demonstrated by 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, where Paul writes:

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so they may be saved.

It is interesting that the Thessalonians are here described as "imitators" of churches that they have never seen. What makes them imitators is their faithful adherence to the same gospel and Lord—which results in parallel opposition from the non-believing world. Paul emphasizes this point earlier in the same letter, where he says the Thessalonians have imitated both him and the Lord by suffering for their faithful adherence to the gospel and their "sounding forth" of that word (1 Thess 1:6-8).

Turning back to 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, we note that Paul's description of the persecution of the Judean churches clarifies that this persecution was "Christ-based." The list of attacks demonstrates that the anger of "the Jews" was consistently directed against adherence to and proclamation of Jesus. These opponents are described as killing Jesus, murdering the prophets, driving out Paul and his co-workers, and hindering Paul and his co-workers from proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. Asserting that the suffering itself was the activity being imitated begs the question. As Jo-Ann Brant rightly observes, "The equation

of ‘imitation’ with suffering affliction ignores the fact that the Thessalonians were engaged in some activity that incurred the opposition of others.”⁴²

This opposition endured by the Thessalonians, however, was not a surprise. Paul reminds the church in 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, “Indeed, you yourselves know that [persecution] is what we are destined for. In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know.”

The Thessalonian Christians did not elicit such persistent persecution by secret adherence to a new religion. Apparently, just as in the Philippian community, a dimension of their Christian faith was publicly known and offensive to non-believers. When persons in Thessalonica believed the gospel, they did not suddenly develop a personal habit that made people want to hurt them; they suffered because people knew they had aligned themselves with a new religion that was offensive to the surrounding culture. The offensive word of God and rejected Messiah was made audible and visible through the Thessalonian church.

Other passages in Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians confirm that the surrounding pagans were aware of the Thessalonians’ faith and actively opposed them. When Paul describes the adversaries of the Thessalonians, the chief characteristic he highlights is their non-acceptance of the gospel. For example, in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul describes them as “those who do not know God” and “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul says that the church’s opponents have “refused to love the truth and so be saved,” and in verse 12, the apostle adds that they “have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness.” In rejecting the Thessalonian church’s offer of life, the surrounding pagan culture did not respond in apathy, but repulsion and a God-hating pagan revelry. The gospel, believed and proclaimed by the Thessalonians, was offensive. Indeed, the suffering of Christians in Thessalonica showed that their opponents were not simply set against a new religious group, but against *God and*

his word. Thus, God’s ultimate condemnation of these opponents is righteous and a cause for celebrating divine victory over his enemies (2 Thess 1:4-10; cf. Phil 1:28).

In summarizing the Pauline passages examined above, we should note that Paul describes both the apostles and the churches as undergoing God-ordained suffering. For the purposes of our study, this suffering is important because it reveals that the offensive, self-diffusive gospel was effectively progressing through the early Christians. As non-believers became aware of Christians’ adherence to and proclamation of the gospel, they opposed the church. Also, our study on suffering has demonstrated the continuity between the apostles’ ministry and the church’s ministry. The apostles suffer in their mission; the church experiences similar suffering.

While Paul speaks of his personal sufferings as a means whereby Christ’s atoning death is made visible to his converts (2 Cor 2:14-17; 4:8-12), he never speaks explicitly of the church’s suffering in this way.⁴³ Nevertheless, Paul does speak of the church’s suffering as directly paralleling his own apostolic missionary suffering (2 Cor 1:6-7; Phil 1:29-30; 1 Thess 2:13-16).⁴⁴ It is likely that Paul would agree that the church’s suffering also had this missiological function.⁴⁵ That is, the church’s suffering was not only evidence that its members were making known the gospel, but also a means of making it known.⁴⁶ If this is indeed Paul’s view, it is in continuity with the gospel traditions which present persecution as an opportunity for Christians to testify to the gospel before non-believers (Mark 13:9; Luke 9:23-27; 12:4-12; 21:12-13).⁴⁷

It should be noted that Paul never says that Christians should actively seek suffering. Christians are, however, to welcome persecution if the alternative is being ashamed of the gospel (2 Tim 1:8). In his remarks on suffering, Paul again presents us with a classic “theological tension.” Although the suffering of Christians is ordained by God in a general sense (Phil 1:29), particular instances of suffering are something that Paul

and others can legitimately seek and pray to avoid (Acts 22:25-29; 2 Cor 1:8-11; Phil 1:19; 1 Tim 2:1-4; cf. Matt 10:23; 24:9, 15-22). The deciding factors as to whether one should embrace suffering or avoid it are (1) God's will (Phil 1:29-30), (2) the effect on others' salvation or sanctification (Phil 1:23-25; Col 1:24-25; 2 Tim 2:8-11), and (3) the glorification of God (2 Cor 4:15). Analogous to Jesus' death on the cross, the suffering of Christians brings about good (i.e., their sanctification and others' salvation) while not excusing or condoning the unjust treatment they receive (Rom 5:3-5; 8:18-19; 2 Thess 1:5-11; cf. Jas 1:2-4; Acts 2:23; 3:18-19; 4:10, 27-28; 5:28).⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

Because both the mission of the apostles and the life of the church are defined by the presence of the dynamic gospel, there is an unmistakable parallel between Paul's description of his own gospel ministry and that of his churches. When all elements of this parallelism (not just overt references to "proclamation") are taken into account, it seems reasonable to conclude that Paul thought of all but the non-repeatable functions of his apostleship as devolving upon the churches. Paul viewed the church as continuing his apostolic mission (minus non-repeatable functions).⁴⁹ We would expect nothing less than such missionary activity from an entity defined by the same self-diffusing gospel as its apostolic founder.

The social ramifications of the gospel's progress become especially evident in Paul's remarks on suffering. Because Christian identity is fundamentally determined by the self-diffusive, offensive gospel and the rejected Christ, all believers can expect to face the same opposition that their Lord did. It is through this suffering, however, that God has chosen to magnify the glory of his word and demonstrate the nature of its object, i.e., the crucified Christ (2 Cor 4:7-15; 6:3-10; 11:23-12:10).

In the end, the consistent pattern of suffering that we find in the early church (which parallels the suffering of the apostles) is a powerful argu-

ment for the church's missionary nature. The unwavering hostility of the outside world towards early Christians demonstrates that the dynamic (and offensive) gospel was progressing effectively through its adherents.

ENDNOTES

¹ See my discussion of these verses in my revised, published dissertation, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 71-96. Much of the following discussion is directly dependent on my earlier study and I appreciate Paternoster's permission to use it.

² See "A Theological Basis for the Church's Mission in Paul," *WTJ* 64 (2002): 253-71.

³ Pobee comments, "Persecutions and sufferings were a *sine qua non* of Paul's apostolic ministry" in John S. Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (JSNTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 106. Hafemann agrees: "The questions of the inevitability and purpose of suffering in the life of Christians in general, and in the life of Paul as an apostle in particular, are recurring themes of great significance throughout Paul's letters" (S. J. Hafemann, "Suffering" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (eds., Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 919. Furnish writes, "Paul regards suffering not just as an occasional experience of apostles but as the essential and continuing characteristic of apostolic service" (Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB, vol. 32A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], 283). See also Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14-3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (WUNT 2.19; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986).

⁴ See 1 Cor 4:9-13; 15:30-32; 16:8-9; 2 Cor 1:3-10; 2:14-17; 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:22-28; Gal 6:17; Phil 1:14, 27-30; 3:10; Col 1:24-25; 4:3; 2 Tim 1:8, 11-12; 2:8-11; 3:10-15.

⁵ Describing the pattern of suffering in Acts, Paul House writes, "Suffering normally follows ministry.

Then quite often suffering provides the opportunity for more ministry. Through trouble the gospel spreads from Jerusalem to Samaria (8:4-24) and finally to Rome (20:17-28:31). Paul and his coworkers seem to know when to move to other places through the opposition they arouse (cf. 13:48-52; 14:5-6; 14:19-20; 16:25-40; 17:10; 17:13-15; etc.). Indeed, it is a rare thing for the first apostles or for Paul to have assurance of safety (e.g. 9:31; 12:1-19; 18:9-11; 19:1-20) (Paul R. House, "Suffering and the Purpose of Acts," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 [1990]: 320-21). Later, House writes, "Clearly suffering is a major force in the gospel's expansion. It is a rare thing for the Way to spread without it. Various summaries in the text point to this conclusion (8:4; 9:16; 14:22; 20:22-24; 21:13; etc.), as does the flow of the book's last nine chapters. Certainly the gospel moves, but never without pain" (ibid., 326). See also Brian Rapske, "Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds., I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998), 235-56.

⁶ Luke confirms that Paul viewed suffering as inherent to normal Christian existence (Acts 14:22). Also note Jesus' comment to his disciples in John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you." Cf. Matt 5:10-12; 10:25; Mark 8:34-35; 13:9; Luke 21:12-19; John 12:25; Heb 13:12-14; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 2:20-23; 3:8-9; 4:1, 12-19. Pobe comments, "Paul interprets the persecutions that were met by the various congregations in consequence of embracing the Christian message as a *sine qua non* of being in Christ" (Pobe, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 107).

⁷ E.g., Rom 10:8-15; 1 Cor 1:23; 2:1; 9:14; 15:12; 2 Cor 1:19; 4:5; 11:4; Phil 1:12-18; Col 1:28; 4:3-4; 1 Thess 2:2.

⁸ The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is used for English Bible citations, unless otherwise noted.

⁹ See Winter's discussion of the "dangers of travel" in the first-century Roman empire (Bruce W. Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties for the Pauline Missions," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mis-*

sion [eds., Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 286-88). See also Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (n.p.: George Allen & Unwin, 1974; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Raymond Chevallier, *Roman Roads* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

¹⁰ See Granville Sharp's canon (*en tē thlipsei kai basileia kai hupomonē*).

¹¹ E.g., Rev 2:2-3, 9-10, 13, 19; 3:8-9.

¹² Adeney discusses the various religious, political, economic, and social motives behind the persecution of Christians—both in New Testament times and throughout church history (David H. Adeney, "The Church and Persecution," in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study* [ed. D. A. Carson; Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 275-302).

¹³ See Pliny *Epistularum* 10.96; Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties," 289-90; O. F. Robinson, *The Criminal Law of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 80.

¹⁴ See *Mart. Pol.* 8.2; Dio Cassius 51.20.6-8; Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties," 292-93; Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West*, vol. 2.1, *Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), esp. 475-590; A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 402-08; Stephen Mitchell, "The Imperial Cult," in *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, vol. 1, *The Celts in Anatolia and the Impact of Roman Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 100-17.

¹⁵ See 1 Cor 1:18; Gal 3:13; Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties," 292.

¹⁶ *Mart. Pol.* 9.2; Athenagoras *Supplicatio pro Christianis* 3 (F. A. March, ed., *Athenagoras*, Douglass Series of Christian Greek and Latin Writers 4 [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1876], 12); Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1.14; cf. Tacitus *Annals* 13.32; 15.44; Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4; Nero 16.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in Its Context* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 5; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Uni-

versity Press, 1993), 1-46; Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 63 n. 234; Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 36-42; Franz Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1909), 503-13. Possibly the most analogous situation in our modern context is the close-quarters and predominantly pagan environment of many universities. Christian students immediately stand out in such contexts—which may partially account for the great effectiveness of collegiate Christian movements.

¹⁸Luke consistently reports a vibrant witness by all persons in the church (e.g., Acts 4:23-31; 6:7; 8:1-4; 11:19-21; 12:24; 13:49; 15:35; 16:5; 19:10, 18-20).

¹⁹E.g., Pliny *Epistularum* 10.96; Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 1.10.2; Tertullian *Apologeticus* 1.7; Origen *Contra Celsum* 3.55; Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.7.1; Athenagoras *Supplicatio pro Christianis* 1; Tacitus *Annals* 13.32; 15.44; Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4; Nero 16; *Mart. Pol.* For additional evidence of early Christian evangelism and the concomitant persecution, see Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (ed. and trans. James Moffatt; 2nd ed.; London: Williams and Norgate; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 2:1-32.

²⁰Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 10.

²¹Some scholars claim that when Paul lists his "catalogues of sufferings" or *Peristasenkataloge* (Rom 8:35; 1 Cor 4:10-13; 2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-29; 12:10; Phil 4:12), he is following a conventional Hellenistic form used to legitimize a sage or leader (e.g., Plutarch *Moralia* 326D-333C; 361E-362A; 1057D-E; Epictetus *Discourses* 2.19.12-28; 4.7.13-26; Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 85.26-27). So Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (FRLANT 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910; reprint, 1984), esp. 15-19; John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBLDS 99; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 203-07. Other scholars have proposed Jewish

apocalypticism or a mixture of Greek and Jewish elements as the background for Paul's lists of sufferings (e.g., Wolfgang Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton: Die Peristasenkataloge als Merkmale paulinischer theologia crucis und Eschatologie," *EvT* 34 [1974]: 141-75; Robert Hodgson, "Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists," *ZNW* 74 [1983]: 59-80; Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 13-46; Susan R. Garrett, "The God of This World and the Affliction of Paul: 2 Cor 4:1-12," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds., David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990, 99-117). More likely, the Old Testament stories of God's suffering prophets, God's "suffering servant," and the gospel traditions provide the background for Paul's reflections (Karl Theodor Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte: Die alttestamentlich-jüdische Tradition vom "leidenden Gerechten" und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus* [WUNT 2.13; Tübingen: Mohr, 1984]; cf. Niels Willert, "The Catalogues of Hardships in the Pauline Correspondence: Background and Function," in *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism* (eds., Peder Borgen and Søren Giversen; Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1995, 217-43).

²²Of course, it is possible that Paul's reflections are given more generally and not in response to criticisms, though the tone of 2 Cor argues against this (e.g., 2:1-11).

²³Hafemann writes, "The power of the gospel is so great and its glory so profound that it must be carried in a 'pot,' lest people put their trust in Paul himself" (Scott Hafemann, "'Because of Weakness' [Galatians 4:13]: The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission* [eds., Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 137).

²⁴Paul possibly makes a similar reference to his suffering as a picture of Christ's death in Gal 3:1; cf. Gal 4:13; 5:11; 6:17.

²⁵Genitive of source.

²⁶Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I-VII*,

(ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 334.

²⁷Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 284. Similar interpretations are espoused by Best, *Second Corinthians*, 43; J. Lambrecht, "The Nekrōsis of Jesus: Ministry and Suffering in 2 Cor 4, 7-15," in *L'Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère* (ed. A. Vanhoye; BETL 73; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 140-41; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Commentary of the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 227-38; Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 184-86; cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 2:14; 12:9-10.

²⁸For a history of interpretation of this debated passage, see Jacob Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt: Eine interpretationsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung zu Kol. 1,24b*. (BBB 12; Bonn: Hanstein, 1956), 5-154; John Reumann, "Colossians 1:24 ('What is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ'): History of Exegesis and Ecumenical Advance," *CurTM* 17 (1990): 454-61.

²⁹E.g., Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 78-81.

³⁰E.g., 1 Enoch 47:1-4; 99:4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 30:1-2; 48:30-37; 70:2; Sib. Or. 2.154-74; see Str-B 4.977-86; cf. Dan 12:1; Zeph 1:14-15; Matt 24:8; Mark 13:5-8; Luke 21:5-11.

³¹E.g., C. Merrill Proudfoot, "Imitation or Realistic Participation: A Study of Paul's Concept of 'Suffering With Christ,'" *Int* 17 (1963): 140-60.

³²Hafemann writes, "Paul completes what is 'lacking' in Christ's afflictions on behalf of the church in the sense that his ministry *extends* the knowledge and reality of the cross of Christ and the power of the Spirit to the Gentile world (Col 1:23; cf. Eph 3:13) (Hafemann, "Suffering," 920). Cf. W. F. Flemington, "On the Interpretation of Colossians 1:24," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar* (eds., William Horbury and Brian McNeil; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 84-90.

³³Contra Erhardt Güttgemanns' understanding of 2

Corinthians 4:7-12 (E. Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr: Studien zur paulinischen Christologie* [FRLANT 90; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966], 94-126). Cf. Gerhard Saß, *Apostelamt und Kirche: Eine theologisch-exegetische Untersuchung des paulinischen Apostelbegriffs* (Munich: Kaiser, 1939), 88-92; Hans Windisch, *Paulus und Christus: Eine biblisch-religionsgeschichtlicher Vergleich* (UNT 24; Leipzig: Heinrich, 1934), 236-52. For the sufficiency of Christ's atoning death, see Rom 3:21-26; 6:9-10; 8:3; 1 Cor 1:18-31; 2 Cor 5:16-21; Gal 1:4; Col 2:13-14.

³⁴John Piper writes, "Christ's afflictions are not lacking in their atoning sufficiency. They are lacking in that they are not known and felt by people who were not at the cross. Paul dedicates himself not only to carry the message of those sufferings to the nations, but also to suffer with Christ and for Christ in such a way that what people see are 'Christ's sufferings.' In this way he follows the pattern of Christ by laying down his life for the life of the church" (Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 94). See Hafemann, "Because of Weakness," 131-46.

³⁵Paul reserves his comments about the revealing of the mystery of the gospel to refer to the initial apostolic promulgation of the gospel (e.g., Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 2:1, 7; Eph 3:8-9; 6:19; Col 4:3-4). While Paul speaks of the churches as having the mystery of the gospel revealed to them (1 Cor 2:1, 7; Eph 1:9-10; 3:8-9; 6:19; Col 1:25-27), and of their safeguarding of that mystery (1 Tim 3:8-9), language about the churches themselves revealing the mystery is noticeably absent.

³⁶David Garrison's comment about modern pioneer missionaries is instructive: "A list of missionaries who have been engaged in Church Planting Movements reads like a catalog of calamity. Many have suffered illness, derision and shame" (D. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* [Richmond, VA: International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1999], 40).

³⁷For a study of suffering in Philippians, see L. Gregory Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philip-*

prians (JSNTSup 78; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). See also Barnabas Mary Ahern, "The Fellowship of His Sufferings (Phil 3,10): A Study of St. Paul's Doctrine of Christian Suffering," *CBQ* 22 (1960):1-32.

³⁸See also 2 Cor 1:9; 2:14; 4:11; 2 Tim 1:11-12.

³⁹So Douwe van Swigchem, *Het missionair karakter van de Christelijke gemeente volgens de brieven van Paulus en Petrus* (Kampen: Kok, 1955), 260.

⁴⁰Indeed, there is no more persuasive means of promoting a cause than putting one's life on the line. Piper comments, "We measure the worth of a hidden treasure by what we will gladly sell to buy it ... Loss and suffering, joyfully accepted for the kingdom of God, show the supremacy of God's worth more clearly in the world than all worship and prayer" (Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, 71). Piper recounts several modern stories which demonstrate that a preacher who suffers in his or her proclamation of the gospel often gains a surprising number of converts (*ibid.*, 71-112). For more modern-day examples and reflections on suffering in mission, see David J. Bosch, "The Vulnerability of Mission," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 76 (1992): 201-16.

⁴¹Bloomquist notes, "The earliest patristic references to the suffering passages of Philippians speak of two goals of martyrdom, namely, (1) to bring about the perfection of the martyr, and (2) to witness to those who observe the martyr" (Bloomquist, *Function of Suffering in Philippians*, 18). E.g., see Ign. Rom. 2.2; 6; 9.2; Ign. Eph. 3:1; 21:2.

⁴²Jo-Ann A. Brant, "The Place of *mimésis* in Paul's Thought," *SR* 22 (1993): 292.

⁴³Paul does speak of the Thessalonians' suffering as "evidence of the righteous judgment of God" (2 Thess 1:5). By this statement, Paul apparently means that because the Thessalonians' opponents are ruthlessly persecuting them, it is clear to all that God is righteous in bring-

ing destruction on those opponents (1:5-9).

⁴⁴Paul viewed the suffering of apostle and church as parallel because of their similar relationship to two entities—the Word of God and the world (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 3:1).

⁴⁵So Lambrecht, "The Nekrósis of Jesus," 143; contra Walter Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 48.

⁴⁶Sloan writes, "Thus, what the church endures by way of suffering in this present evil age is both an evangelistic witness [2 Cor 4:15] and a witness to the world of the coming, righteous judgment of God (2 Thess. 1:4-10)" (Robert B. Sloan, "Images of the Church in Paul," in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church* [eds., Paul Basden and David S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman, 1991], 164).

⁴⁷O'Toole claims that Luke presents Paul's ministry in Acts as a fulfillment of Christ's predictions that believers would testify in their sufferings for the gospel. See especially Acts 25:1-26:32 (Robert F. O'Toole, "Luke's Notion of 'Be Imitators of Me as I am of Christ,' in Acts 25-26," *BTB* 8 [1978]: 155-61).

⁴⁸See a previous edition of this journal that focused on the topic of suffering: *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4:2 (Summer 2000). Also, several of Hafemann's previous studies on suffering are nicely synthesized in Scott Hafemann, "The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul," in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (eds., Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein; Tübingen: Mohr, 2000), 165-84.

⁴⁹Thus, Norbert Schmidt is correct to conclude, "On the pages of the New Testament we do not find an explicit theology of mission, but the implicit commission initially given to the Apostles can be found in many forms with respect to the Church" (Norbert Schmidt, "The Apostolic Band—A Paradigm for Modern Missions?" [Th.M. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1985], 77).

Suffering According to James

Christopher W. Morgan

Christopher W. Morgan is Dean and Professor of Theology, School of Christian Ministries, California Baptist University, Riverside.

He earned his Ph.D. in Theology from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Morgan has authored *Jonathan Edwards and Hell* (Mentor, 2004) and *A Theology of James: Wisdom for God's People* (P&R, 2010), and he has co-edited with Robert A. Peterson numerous works such as *Hell under Fire* (Zondervan, 2004), *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism* (InterVarsity, 2008), *Suffering and the Goodness of God* (Crossway, 2008), *The Glory of God* (Crossway, 2010), *The Deity of Christ* (Crossway, 2011), *The Kingdom of God* (Crossway, 2012), and *Sin* (Crossway, 2013). He is also a teaching pastor at Helendale Community Church in Helendale, CA.

When people experience suffering, they deserve more than platitudes or pat answers from a 2013 version of Job's friends. They need the comforting grace of God and the compassionate people of God. And they need a grounded theological perspective, a vision of God, life, and themselves, that can enable them to see (even if dimly) as they move ahead in what may seem like darkness.

Without such a biblical lamp to guide, they might wonder if they suffer because there is no God. Or they may wonder if this God even knows about their plight, cares, or is able to help. They may suppose that they said, did, or failed to do something that directly resulted in their tragedy or pain. Or maybe they speculate that if they just

believe enough that they can persuade God to act on their behalf. While sound theological insight is never enough to comfort those suffering, if applied at the right time and with a great deal of pastoral wisdom, the biblical truth does play a necessary and critical role in sufferers finding comfort, faith, and hope.

James writes to churches that had considerable experience with suffering. In a pastoral, sagacious, and sometimes prophetic manner, James writes to real-life churches with real-life problems. James, a key leader in the Jerusalem church, writes to help churches largely consisting of Jewish Christians suffering oppression from without and encountering strife from within. Some of them also slip easily into being religious without genuinely following Christ. Throughout his letter, James counters these problems and more as he offers wisdom for consistency in the covenant community, the church. James grounds this pastoral instruction in his theology, largely rooted in the Old Testament, Judaism, and the teachings of Jesus.¹

THE CONTEXT OF THE SUFFERING

The tone, content, and range of teachings given on suffering are normally driven by the historical situation of those suffering as well as the nature of the suffering. Pastoral counsel to a believer suffering a loss of a long-time beloved spouse differs from that offered to someone whose son is killed by a drunk-driver. And those differ from counsel given to someone being tortured for their faith in Christ.

Thus, it is unwise and even dangerous to unpack James's teachings related to suffering without having some background of the churches receiving the epistle. We must ask: to whom was the letter written? What types of suffering did they face?

Although a detailed understanding of the historical situation and audience cannot be found in James, the letter does indicate some information about the audience, sometimes explicitly, but most often implicitly.

The recipients were primarily Jewish Christians. This seems clear from James 1:1 as well as regular references to Jewish institutions and beliefs. These Christians met in a "synagogue" (2:2) with "teachers" (3:1) and "elders" (5:14). They worshiped the one and holy God, the unique Judge and Lawgiver (1:13-15; 2:19; 4:12). Some claimed they had faith but demonstrated little concern for personal holiness (1:22-25; 4:4) and failed to assist the poor (1:26-27; 2:1-13; 2:14-26). The congregations also included others who wanted to be teachers but were unworthy (3:1-12). And these congregations were experiencing significant trials and serious oppression (1:2-12; 2:6; 5:1-11).

Where did these Jewish Christians live? James 1:1 states that the letter was addressed "To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion." I. H. Marshall observes that while this is a Christian letter to Christians, "The writer here takes up the tradition of Jewish leaders writing to Jewish people living in exile from their homeland and exposed to the difficulties and trials of this

situation."² Most scholars view this literally, as referring to Jewish Christians who were scattered among the nations. Others point out that this phrase was used in intertestamental Judaism as a reference to the true people of God in the last days (cf. 1 Pet 1:1). It is possible that these Jewish Christians were located in Palestine and given this label as an encouragement to stand firm through the trials because of the eschatological hope they possessed. But more likely they were Jewish Christians literally scattered among the nations.³

From where would a letter to scattered or exiled Jewish Christians likely come? Richard Bauckham aptly proposes: "A letter to the Diaspora must come from Jerusalem. A Christian letter to the Diaspora could come from no one more appropriately than from James."⁴ He adds that along with Peter and Paul, "James was one of the three most influential leaders in the first generation of the Christian movement."⁵ This is in part because the Jerusalem church functioned for many as the mother church, as central and authoritative. With their heritage of acknowledging Jerusalem and its temple, Jewish Christians may have thought of the Jerusalem church as more lofty than we might imagine. Moreover, the Jerusalem church not only was used to convert many of these scattered Jewish Christians, it also would have sent out many as missionaries and would have received many who came back to Jerusalem every year for the festivals.

From the depiction in 1:1, the letter from James in Jerusalem appears to be an encyclical, that is, one sent to a number of churches.⁶ Marshall captures the tension: "We thus have the paradox that the writer appears to be writing to a very broad audience, the Christians scattered among the nations, and yet seems to have a very specific congregation or congregations in view."⁷ Indeed, even an encyclical is written from a context, to a context, and for a purpose.

What can be made of the socio-economic

level of the recipients? Four distinct groups emerge: (1) the poor (the majority in this believing community); (2) the severely poor (those without decent clothes and often in need of daily food); (3) the merchants (those tempted to be overconfident in their plans); and (4) the wealthy landowners (those exploiting the poor).⁸ The congregations were primarily composed of the first three groups, with the majority being in the first category.

TYPES AND CAUSES OF SUFFERING

What types of suffering did these churches face? James begins his letter by noting their “various” trials (1:2). Suffering in 5:10 is linked to opposition and persecution. Suffering in 5:13 does not seem to refer to any particular form but “simply to the bad or distressing experiences in life.”⁹ In addition, some were seriously ill, nearly to the point of death and possibly in a way related to sin (5:14–16). Those suffering in 5:13 were not in as severe of a condition as those referred to as sick in 5:14–16 because James simply exhorts this first group to pray. The latter group is to call for the elders, receive their prayer, and receive anointing.

There were some powerless, as depicted in the need to care for the widows and orphans (1:26–27). There was also widespread poverty, some of which was extreme, illustrated by the need of food and clothing (2:16). Many were persecuted, prosecuted, oppressed, and exploited by the wealthy (2:5–7; 5:1–11). They had little political, social, or economic clout to address these concerns.

In sum, particular types of suffering James addresses evidently include:

- unspecified various trials (1:2–12)
- powerlessness (1:26–27)
- general poverty (2:1–7, 14–26)
- severe poverty, to the point of lacking food and clothes (2:15–16)

- legal oppression by the rich (2:5–7)
- persecution (2:5–7)
- severe exploitation by wealthy landowners (5:1–6)
- “suffering” (5:10, 13)
- seriously ill, nearing death (5:14–15)
- sick, possibly in a way related to sin (5:15–16)
- eschatological suffering (5:19–20; cf. 5:1–6)
- unspecified various trials (1:2–12)
- powerlessness (1:26–27)
- general poverty (2:1–7, 14–26)
- severe poverty, to the point of lacking food and clothes (2:15–16)
- legal oppression by the rich (2:5–7)
- persecution (2:5–7)
- severe exploitation by wealthy landowners (5:1–6)
- “suffering” (5:10, 13)
- seriously ill, nearing death (5:14–15)
- sick, possibly in a way related to sin (5:15–16)
- eschatological suffering (5:19–20; cf. 5:1–6)

It is often impossible to detect particular causes of suffering. Yet a basic analysis of the types of suffering mentioned above seems to indicate that related causes of each include:

- unspecified causes regarding trials (1:2–12)
- death of spouse or father (1:26–27)
- overall economic situation of culture (2:14–26)
- failure of God’s people to help others (2:14–26)
- sinful greed of the rich (2:1–7)
- corrupt legal system (2:5–7)
- disdain for Christ (2:7)
- fraud (5:1–6)
- unspecified causes regarding suffering (5:13)
- sickness (5:14)
- possibly personal sin (5:15–16)
- personal sin (5:1–6, 19–20)

The causes are manifold: family deaths, economics, failures of the church, corruption of governments, human greed, hatred of Christ, sickness, and personal sin. Sometimes they are particular, sometimes vague. In addition, sometimes the cause of our suffering rests

with us, sometimes with others, sometimes with larger structural realities, and sometimes with a fallen world too often characterized by death and decay.

JAMES'S TEACHINGS CONCERNING SUFFERING

As James applies his pastoral wisdom to suffering, he generally does so in two ways. First, he encourages those suffering. Second, he exhorts the church to respond properly to the sufferers.

In his encouragement of believers who were suffering, James urges that they respond with joy, with the realization that perseverance is doing a divine work in them, and with prayer to God for wisdom. They also should recognize that the wicked rich will be humiliated, the righteous will be exalted, and God will bless those who endure trials with faith and patience (1:2–12). They should not demean themselves by showing partiality to the oppressors (2:5–7) but be patient in the midst of suffering because the Lord knows of it, has not forgotten them, will return to judge, and will ultimately vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked (5:1–11). James later urges those who are suffering to pray (5:13) and those who are sick to call for the elders of the church to pray over them and to confess their sins to each other (5:14–16).

James also exhorts the church to respond appropriately to the suffering of others. The church is not to show favoritism to the rich but should stand with the poor (2:5–7). The church must not accept mere platitudes as a substitute for the important work of showing love to the hurting, feeding the hungry, and clothing the poor (2:15). The church is to be patient in the midst of suffering because the Lord sees the suffering, the church lives in the “already and not yet,” and the Judge will finally set the record straight. In the meantime, the church must persevere and not grumble at one another (5:1–11). Further, the church leaders should pray for the sick and suffering (5:13–16).

In his encouragement of those who are suffering and his appeals to the church to help those who are suffering, James offers much insight:

- Suffering Does Come, in Various Forms, and with Various Causes.
- Suffering Is Not Good but Is Used by God for Our Good (1:2–12).
- Suffering Is Temporary, Linked to the Present Age (1:9–12).
- God Will Bless Those Who Persevere through Suffering (1:9–12).
- Churches Must Care for the Poor and Suffering (1:27; 2:6–7; 2:14–26).
- God Will Judge All Who Oppress His People (5:1–6).
- Sufferers Must Be Patient, Not Grumble, Endure, Pray, and Seek the Church's Ministry (5:7–11, 13–16).

SUFFERING COMES IN VARIOUS FORMS WITH VARIOUS CAUSES

This principle is apparent from the preceding types and causes of suffering. Trials do come to faithful Christians as well as to healthy churches. The proponents of the health and wealth theology need to read afresh passages such as James 1:2–12 and 5:1–8 (as well as Rom 5:1–5; 2 Cor 1:3–7; 1 Pet 1:5–8; and 2 Tim 3:12). Just as the churches receiving James's epistle had been and would continue to suffer, we should not be surprised when we face trials or encounter suffering. In light of James's message, “Why me?” is a valid and perplexing question, but equally valid and perplexing is, “Why not me?”

SUFFERING IS USED BY GOD FOR OUR GOOD (1:2–12)

So what particular pastoral encouragement does James offer these suffering churches? At first glance, James's “encouragement” appears shocking, if not downright offensive. James instructs these troubled believers to consider it all joy when trials come (1:2–3), realize that perseverance is doing a divine

work in them (1:4), ask God for wisdom (1:5–8), remember to view the rich and poor from an eternal perspective (1:9–11), and keep in mind the blessedness that comes from enduring life’s trials (1:12).

James first urges his readers who faced such circumstances to “consider it all joy” (the verb is an imperative). This is the heart of James’s exhortation in 1:2–11. In the Greek text, joy, the object of the verb, is placed first for emphasis.¹⁰

To those familiar with the New Testament this is no surprise. Paul’s teaching on the matter in Romans 5:1–5 is similar:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Peter likewise stresses joy as a suitable response to trials: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested through fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6–7).

Yet sometimes we are so familiar with the biblical teachings related to suffering that we forget to be surprised by their claims: count it all joy when you face various trials. Joy? When suffering comes our way we tend to respond with frustration, or a sense of helplessness, or even fear—but joy? In such times, how is joy a possible response?

To address this important question, it is crucial to understand what is and what is not intended by James’s command here. James is not offering advice in the manner of some self-help guru, or

even the glib answers that too often come from well-intentioned people at funerals. Nor is James saying that suffering is itself good. Some of the believers suffering in 1:2–4 are the same ones being persecuted and exploited by wicked wealthy landowners. As such, some of the trials mentioned here are caused by the sin of the landowners, the corruption of the governmental systems, etc. Such actions are castigated later in James 2:5–7 and 5:1–6. It is not that all things that happen in life are good (exploitation, oppression, and persecution are evil!), but that God works all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28).

So, then, what does James intend? As he does so often in this epistle, James here echoes the teachings of Jesus on suffering and persecution in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:10–12; cf. Luke 6:22–23): “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and falsely utter all kinds of evil against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” When you are persecuted on my behalf, Jesus says, rejoice for you are blessed (cf. 1 Pet 2:19–23). James’s exhortation in 1:2 to consider it all joy, as well as his emphasis in 1:12 on the blessedness of those who persevere through the tests, reiterate Jesus’ encouragement to believers.

Not only does James stress joy because of the future blessing for those who endure, but he also points to the good byproducts of trials. Perseverance, completeness, and blamelessness are worthy effects that come as a result of people having faith in the midst of suffering (1:3–4; cf. Rom 5:1–5, 2 Cor 1:3–7; 1 Pet 1:5–8). James urges rejoicing, “for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (1:3), and thereby associates these trials with the testing of faith. Even though these oppressors’ sins caused the believers’ suffering, James asserts that God is at work using the suffering as a testing of the faith of his people.

What precisely does James mean by the “testing of your faith”? He uses a different word here altogether from “trials” in verse 2. Douglas Moo comments:

“Testing” translates a rare Greek word (*dokimion*), which is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in 1 Pet. 1:7 and in the Septuagint only in Ps. 11:7 and Prov. 27:21. Peter apparently uses the word to denote the result of testing; the NIV translates “genuine.” But the two Old Testament occurrences both denote the process of refining silver or gold, and this is the way James uses the word. The difficulties of life are intended by God to refine our faith: heating it in the crucible of suffering so that impurities might be refined away and so that it might become pure and valuable before the Lord. The “testing of faith” here, then, is not intended to determine whether a person has faith or not; it is intended to purify faith that already exists.¹¹

What does this testing do? It develops perseverance (*hypomonē*). This has been translated perseverance, endurance, steadfastness, fortitude, and patience. Like a muscle that becomes strong when it faces resistance from a weight, Christians develop spiritual strength and stamina through facing trials. It is hard to imagine how perseverance could be developed in any way other than by such resistance, since perseverance presupposes a pressure to endure.¹² So when trials come, James says, consider it joy and recognize that God is developing in us perseverance and other good traits. The development of this perseverance is a gradual, real-life process of encountering trials and responding to them in faith.

Perseverance is not only an end; it is also a means to further ends: “and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” As we view suffering with wisdom and from an eschatological perspective, we discover that suffering in itself is not the end God has in mind; our maturity is.

SUFFERING IS TEMPORARY, LINKED TO THE PRESENT AGE (1:9–12)

James 1:9–11 plays an important role in James’s teaching related to suffering as it clarifies that although the rich oppressors appear to be winning now, in the end, they lose; and although the poor and oppressed seem to be losing now, in the end, they win. As Jesus so often does (e.g., Luke 16:19–31), James points to a future reversal: the rich exploiters will be brought down and destroyed, but the humble believers will be exalted and blessed (1:9–11; cf. 5:1–8).¹³ So despite the fact that the suffering addressed in James 1:2–12 is a result of human evil, believers can rest assured that God providentially guides all history and that they will be faced with no circumstance that he ultimately will not use for their good and his glory (cf. 2 Cor 4:1–18).

GOD WILL BLESS THOSE WHO PERSEVERE THROUGH SUFFERING (1:9–12)

James 1:12 is transitional, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” The persevering ones in 1:12 probably refer to the same people characterized as the poor in 1:9–11. As the poor will receive exaltation, the persevering will receive divine approval, even the promised crown of life. The crown spoken of here is compared with a head wreath or garland that was given as a victor’s prize in the Greek Olympic Games. At times it was given to men whom the community wanted to honor, and it was worn in religious and secular feasts. The persevering ones receive a crown that consists of eternal life versus the fading crown of earthly prosperity and fame (cf. Rev 2:10).

The importance of persevering through trials is striking. Just as James does not teach that suffering is good, he does not assume that trials always produce good, but as Dan McCartney observes: “This chain of life in James 1:12 stands in opposition

to a chain of death in 1:13–15, where trials lead to desires which give birth to sin, which brings forth death. Again, this shows that it is not the trial itself that produces maturity and life, for a trial could result in non-endurance, in the giving in to desire, and in the birthing of sin and death.”¹⁴ As such James 1:12 offers hope to the believer because of the covenant promise of true joy and life, and it also warns those undergoing trials to choose the correct path: covenant faithfulness.

CHURCHES MUST CARE FOR THE POOR AND SUFFERING (1:27; 2:6–7; 2:14–26)

James 1:26–27 is central to James. This is clear not only because of its structural implications for the book, but also because of how many themes of the epistle it contains—consistency, suffering, speech, love and mercy, and the poor. Among other things, it makes plain that God’s people have a special responsibility to care for the poor¹⁵ and oppressed. This is not merely the mark of spiritual elites but of what James calls “pure and undefiled religion before God.”

Scripture instructs us to worship corporately; listen to the reading, teaching, and preaching of Scripture; to give; to pray; to participate in the Lord’s Supper; and so forth. These are important spiritual realities that God has prescribed for us to worship and follow him. But James warns that too often people think that participation in the outward expressions of religion is all that God demands. James stresses that the practice of religion occurs not merely in worship services but also through our very lives. God wants worship through consistent lives. True religion, that which pleases God, means that we reflect God. And part of this Godward and consistent way of life includes showing love to those whom God loves—the poor and oppressed.

James 1:26–27 forcefully contrasts two differing approaches to religion, both of which must have been vying for people’s allegiance. True religion is depicted as “pure,” undefiled,” and that which God accepts. It is concerned with self-control over words, active love for the poor, and moral purity. Some undercurrents are at play here. Notice that James uses

purity language, which would be revered by these Jewish Christians. James calls true religion “pure and undefiled,” and thereby insinuates that the religion embraced by some in these churches is impure and defiled. Their so-called worship is unclean, contaminated, and unsuitable for the holy God. James refers to true religion as keeping oneself “unstained from the world” (1:27), and in so doing charges them with being preoccupied with ritual cleanness without corresponding interest in moral cleanness or godly values. And by stressing that God accepts true religion, he implies that God rejects some of their approaches. That James calls their efforts at worship “worthless” strengthens that effect. It is worthless because it does not demonstrate love for God or love for others. Indeed, it is worthless because it does not demonstrate love for God *through* loving others.

Martin Luther, not known for his affection for James, frequently stressed this very point. Luther complained that believers should not live in monasteries to serve God because there they were actually only serving themselves. Instead, Christians must follow Christ and love and serve their neighbors through their vocations in the world, where their neighbors encounter and need them. Luther argued, “God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.”¹⁶ When we seek to offer our good works to God, we actually display pride before God and neglect to love our neighbor. Luther contends that in so doing we parade ourselves before God and yet fail to do the very thing Jesus commands. In other words, we fail both to love God and love others. Michael Horton ably captures Luther’s point:

God descends to serve humanity through our vocations, so instead of seeing good works as our works for God, they are now to be seen as God’s work for our neighbor, which God performs through us. That is why both orders are upset when we seek to present good works to God as if he needed them. In contrast, when we are overwhelmed by the superabundance of God’s gracious gift, we express our gratitude in horizontal works of love and service to the neighbor.¹⁷

Love is not self-absorbed but genuinely seeks the welfare of others. It is active and outward. Luther is right: religious people often feel noble when they perform external religious acts because they believe they are serving God. But as Solomon Andria suggests: “Rather than serving God, they serve themselves.”¹⁸

Serving others feels far less noble; it often seems only mundane, even insignificant. Yet Jesus washed his disciples’ feet and demands that his followers do the same. Jesus’ command would not be so burdensome if he merely required that we wash his feet; we could find dignity in helping Jesus. But Jesus demands that we wash one another’s feet, which does not seem stately but smelly. It reduces us to feeling like unimportant, humble servants. And that is exactly what James stresses: genuine, humble, dependent, loving followers of Jesus will display their true concern for others through ministering to others, particularly those in desperation.

Some in James’s audience were more concerned about ritual purity than moral purity, and they were content to express empty words without active compassion for the oppressed. Ironically, some in these congregations stressed the ritual purity taught in Leviticus, but failed to notice that Leviticus also stresses moral purity and especially love for the oppressed. It is not by coincidence, in my opinion, that James refers frequently to Leviticus 19 as a basis of his instructions.¹⁹ He takes his audience back to study the very law they claim to be defending.

To such people, James charges that true religion is “to visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (1:27), and thus reiterates the teachings of Exodus 22:22 (“do not take advantage of a widow or orphan”) and Isaiah 1:10–17 (“defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow”), which also makes plain God’s requirements for acceptable religion and worship (cf. Deut 10:16–19; Ps 69:32–33; Zech 7:9–14). Together widows and orphans represented those who were without protec-

tion or provision. James instructs the church to support of the poor, disadvantaged, and oppressed. And in so doing, he again reflects the teachings of Jesus, who articulated that one’s treatment of “the least of these” is linked to future judgment (Matt 25:31–46).

So James is interested in encouraging the believers who encounter painful trials, but he is at least as interested in how God’s people respond to those who are suffering. McCartney observes:

Just as genuine faith endures trials, so a Christian must respond to the suffering of others as a fellow sufferer. Hence he says true religion²⁰ is to care for sufferers (James 1:27). Because real faith (2:14–17) is faith that God will exalt the humble (1:9), the works that proceed from true faith will involve showing mercy to those who suffer. Of particular concern to James are the truly destitute, such as “orphans and widows” (1:27), or the man in filthy garments (2:2), who in that social environment were often the most marginalized and powerless people. The church is the community that anticipates the eschatological reversal by caring for and respecting the poor.

Therefore James has little tolerance for those who show favoritism to the rich. This kind of favoritism is offensive first because it violates the law of love and misrepresents the character of God, who cares about the poor. Note that the context of the law of love in Leviticus 19 specifically condemns partiality (Lev. 19:15).²¹ Second, partiality belies the eschatological nature of the community, which ought to display in advance God’s exaltation of the poor. James 2:1–17 thus teaches us that faithful living does not just pity the poor, it *respects* the poor.²²

Indeed, the church is an eschatological display of God’s good news, and it is a primary means by which God meets the needs of the poor.

GOD WILL JUDGE ALL WHO OPPRESS HIS PEOPLE (5:1–6)

Like an Old Testament prophet, James castigates the rich who have exploited the poor. The oppressors should weep and wail because God's judgment on them will be severe. Misery and suffering are coming their way. The corrosion of their wealth will serve as a witness against them, and the wages they failed to pay their workers will testify against them. By living in luxury and self-indulgence, they increase their punishment at the last judgment. In light of this judgment, the righteous poor are to be patient and not grumble against each other, knowing they too will be judged (5:7–11).

The passage powerfully reveals James's theology of suffering, particularly as it relates to the poor and rich. It puts forward three truths: (1) God hears the cries of the righteous poor; (2) God will punish those who oppress the righteous poor; (3) God will vindicate the righteous poor by punishing the wicked and blessing the righteous who endure. Let's look at each in turn.

James graphically proclaims, "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (5:4). Evidently, the wages of hired laborers were being dishonestly withheld by rich landowners. These day laborers mowed and harvested the fields of absentee landlords. Their earnings were paltry, and they were to be paid every day because they could not afford to miss a paycheck. These defenseless workers toiled daily under a blistering sun only to be swindled by rich, powerful landowners. The landowners methodically held back their wages, defrauding their powerless employees. The practice of paying wages late or legally defrauding the worker of his wage was not unusual. That is why many Old Testament laws and prophetic threats declare God's hatred of the practice (Lev 19:13; Deut 24:14–15; Jer 22:13; Mal 3:5).²³ James dramatically portrays

the shrieking cry of withheld wages', followed by the cry of the harvesters themselves.

Who hears this cry? It is certainly not the wicked landowners who are enjoying luxurious lives, too self-indulgent to care (5:5).²⁴ It is not the corrupt justice system which is currying the favor of the wealthy. Is anyone with power to help listening to these cries? Oh, yes! God himself, the omnipotent Lord of armies, hears these cries.

When God's people utter cries in the Bible they are usually praying for deliverance from danger and seeking justice (cf. Exod 2:23; 1 Sam 9:16; 2 Chron 33:13).²⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson observes, "Here James definitely evokes the experience of Israel in Egypt. At the burning bush Yahweh says to Moses, 'I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt and I have heard their shouts (Exod. 3:7).'"²⁶ Here too the cries of the exploited poor "have reached" the Lord of hosts. This depiction of God as "Lord of hosts" or "Lord of armies" is frequent in the Old Testament, where God is likened to a warrior leading an army of warriors who slay enemies and enforce justice. The Lord of all power will come to the aid of the suffering, not only hearing the cries of the righteous poor but also punishing their oppressors and bringing vindication. As in James 1:9–11, the oppressed believers have reason to hope: there is a day coming where God sets the record straight, where evildoers lose and God's people are vindicated.

SUFFERERS MUST BE PATIENT, ENDURE, PRAY, AND SEEK THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY (5:7–11, 13–16)

In James 5:1–6, James writes as a prophet, denouncing the oppression. In verses 7–11 and 13–16, he speaks as a pastor, heartening and warning the oppressed and sick people of God.

Since the judgment of the wicked remains in the future, those suffering need encouragement on how to live in the meantime. First, those suffering need to live with patience, which is rooted in many things, primarily the coming of the Lord, to which

James refers three times in this section (5:7, 8, 9). James also gives three concrete examples to inspire patience: the farmer (5:7), the prophets (5:10), and Job (5:11). James Adamson reminds: “The farmer awaiting the harvest is a familiar Jewish picture of salvation and the last judgment. Like the farmer the Christian must be patient and depend on God to consummate his purpose.”²⁷ James reiterates the same command with which he began 5:7, “Just like the farmer, you also be patient” (5:8). He then adds another, “establish your hearts” (5:8), which is followed by an explanation: be stable in your faith because of the blessed hope of the Lord’s coming.

James then warns of grumbling, a habit of those who do not practice patience. Recalling the Israelites in the wilderness, James insists, “Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door” (5:9). While grumbling may be occasioned by difficult circumstances, it is rooted in pride, ingratitude, and impatience. Grumbling declares that someone has either not done something that he ought to have done, or that he has done something wrong. When we grumble, therefore, we judge. If, however, we exercise patience and develop Christian stability—with our eyes on the Lord’s return—we appreciate that his return will herald the final judgment. In the meantime, we must leave all judgment to the Judge. Few take grumbling seriously, but God does (cf. Matt 7:1–2).

James then points to the prophets who exhibited patience and faithfulness despite the suffering they endured (cf. Matt 5:11–12; Heb 11). Elijah was hounded and hated (1 Kings 18:10, 17). Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern and threatened with death by starvation (Jer 38:1–13). Amos was falsely accused of raising a conspiracy and was told to go back to where he had come from (Amos 7:10–13).

Third, James urges steadfast endurance in the face of affliction. But the term James uses here is not patience, as in verse 10, but “endurance, steadfastness,” as in 5:11a and 1:3–4. In spite of all his unexplained sufferings, Job is a stellar model of

endurance under tremendous suffering, and under it all he remained devoted to the Lord (Job 1:21; 2:10; 16:9–21; 19:25–27). Endurance is apt in light of the purpose of the Lord, who is compassionate and merciful, faithful to his covenant people (5:11).

Fourth, James advises prayer as an appropriate response to suffering. James urges sufferers to pray; and he urges the cheerful to praise (5:13). “Suffering” here apparently does not refer to a particular type but more generally to the troubles of life. “Cheerfulness” refers to the experience of “God’s goodness in ways that are desirable from a human point of view.”²⁸ No matter the circumstances—when times are tough and when the life is going smoothly—prayer is warranted, prayer for help, and praise with gratitude. So when suffering comes, pray, James insists. This is not some generic comment but a revolutionary declaration of dependence and hope—that God hears, cares, and remains steadfastly faithful to his covenant people. Further, it is not a passive acquiescence but an active, effective, and wise pursuit that God uses to accomplish his purposes for his glory and our good.²⁹ Recall James’s previous assertion, “you have not because you ask not” (4:2). And note his subsequent confident statements about how God answers faithful and appropriate prayer (5:15–18).

Fifth, James offers counsel to the very sick (5:14–16).³⁰ As before, prayer is fitting. But in this case, the person who is ill calls the elders of the church to come and pray over him (5:14). Elders are mature, godly leaders in the church who represent the congregation and would plausibly pray with wisdom, fervency, and faith. Evidently, “they are capable of exercising the faith necessary for the healing but also to discern the mind of the Spirit in such matters.”³¹ The elders come and anoint the sick person with oil, which I cautiously interpret as a symbol of God’s blessing and presence with his people.³² The elders then pray over the person. In James’s example God blesses the believing prayer: the prayer offered in faith will restore the sick one; the Lord will raise him up; and if he has sinned, he will be forgiven (5:15).

JAMES'S THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR SUFFERING

We began by surveying the context of James's teaching about suffering, as well as the various types and causes of suffering he addresses. We then highlighted James's particular teachings about suffering. Along the way, we noticed that James's insightful teachings are not exhaustive (how could they be in five chapters?) but timely pastoral words to the *Diaspora* churches.

The question must now be asked: what theological foundation drives James's teachings about suffering? In general, he uses the doctrines of God, eschatology, and the church both to instruct and exhort.³³ But the bulk of the exhortations related to suffering are grounded in the nature of God. Let's consider a few of the major passages that display the Godward substructure of James's teachings about suffering.

JAMES 1:2-8

James 1:2-8 encourages those facing trials to consider it all joy, to let perseverance finish its work, and then urges those who lack wisdom to ask God for it. On what basis should they do so? The nature of God. James here assumes the Old Testament idea that God is the source of wisdom (Prov 2:6, "The Lord gives wisdom"), echoes Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:7, and stresses that God gives wisdom generously to all without finding fault. We ask God for wisdom in the midst of trials because God generously gives wisdom to those who ask him for it. Even more, our asking should coincide with the way God gives—with singleness, not double-mindedness.³⁴ God responds to our prayers when they reflect our spiritual integrity, a basic consistency of which God himself is our example. Ralph Martin observes: "Hence it is appropriate to stress the character of God. There are three reasons supplied to encourage the approach in prayer. God is good to all who call on him; he gives with an open hand and without reservation; and his giving

is not intended to demean the recipient with feelings that God is reproachful or reluctant to give what is for our good" (cf. Luke 11:5-8).³⁵

JAMES 1:26-27

Religion God accepts as pure and undefiled looks after orphans and widows in their distress and refrains from being polluted by the world. On what basis does James point to this behavior? The nature of God. Here the nature of God is presupposed as these Jewish Christians knew that God was a "father to the fatherless and defender of widows" (Psalm 68:5). Just as God defends and cares for the widows and fatherless, so must his people. Daniel Doriani marvelously captures the idea: "Kindness to the needy is God-like. *We* sustain aliens, widows, and orphans because he sustains aliens, widows, and orphans (Ps. 146:9)."

³⁶Further, James points to our need for holiness as he urges the churches to be "unstained from the world" (1:27). God's own holiness calls us, his covenant people, to holiness, as Leviticus 19:2 reminds, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (cf. 1 Pet 1:15-16).

JAMES 2:1-7

James 2:1-7 urges believers not to show favoritism toward the rich and against the poor. It offers a particular example of a church community giving the red carpet treatment to the rich but disregarding the poor. While there are various reasons put forward for not showing partiality, a primary one is that God chose the poor to be rich in faith and inherit the kingdom. God chose the poor, so why would his people neglect or reject them?

JAMES 5:1-11

James 5:1-11 thunders a warning of the divine judgment coming upon exploitive landowners, who should weep and wail because of the severe and impending judgment. On what basis does James appeal? On the nature of God, who hears the cries of the oppressed and is the

Lord of hosts, the all-knowing warrior who avenges his people. Because God is a warrior, those who oppress his people had better prepare for their just judgment, and his people need to persevere in the midst of these trials.

James continues, stressing the need to be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. This should not lead us to presumption but to carefulness. We must not grumble against one another because we too will be judged. Indeed the Judge is nearby, standing at the threshold! In sum, the nature of God and his eschatological victory and judgment incites us to patience, standing firm, and love for one another, with no room for grumbling.

James then points to the prophets and Job as examples of those blessed through persevering. He then tells them why: "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (5:11). James's teaching recalls Exodus 34:6, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty."

James teaches much about God—his holiness, oneness, love, mercy, covenant sovereignty, wisdom, omniscience, goodness, generosity, integrity, covenant faithfulness, providence, eagerness to hear our prayers, concern for our plight, love for the powerless, role as judge, role as lawgiver, role as warrior, role as savior, and much more. And he teaches much about God to help the churches live with consistency, integrity, covenant faithfulness—even in the face of suffering.

SUMMARY

Because of who God is, James insists, we who suffer should rejoice even in persecution, trust his providential process for maturing us, ask him for wisdom, ask in faith, rejoice in his ultimate vindication, persevere, live in holiness, have confidence that God will ultimately act on our behalf, be patient, resist grumbling, remain

steadfast, pray, and be strengthened by the loving and faithful ministry of the church. And because of who God is, we as the community of Jesus should come alongside those who suffer, pointing to the character and purposes of God, caring for the powerless, helping the poor, praying for the sufferers, and serving them in ways that meet to their needs.

ENDNOTES

¹ I base much of this essay on my previous work in Christopher W. Morgan, *A Theology of James: Wisdom for God's People* (Explorations in Biblical Theology; ed. Robert A. Peterson; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010). See also Christopher W. Morgan and B. Dale Ellenburg, *James: Wisdom for the Community* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2008). For an examination of suffering from biblical, theological, philosophical, and pastoral perspectives, see Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Suffering and the Goodness of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

² I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 628.

³ For more on the twelve tribes of the *Diaspora*, see Robert W. Wall, "James, Letter of," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament* (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 548–51; cf. P. R. Trebilco, "Diaspora Judaism," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament*, 287–300.

⁴ Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999), 16.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 25–28.

⁷ Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 629.

⁸ Morgan, *A Theology of James*, 14–18. More than one hundred years before the writing of James, the Roman general Pompey reduced Judean territory and left many Jewish peasants without land. Later the extreme taxation by Herod the Great drove more small farmers out of business. The result was that in the first century many peasants worked as tenants on large feudal-like estates while others became day

laborers, hoping to find good work and often finding it only around harvest time. Resentment against aristocratic owners was significant and often deserved. See Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 688.

⁹ Dan G. McCartney, *James* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 253.

¹⁰ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 67.

¹¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 54–55.

¹² Patience, longsuffering, forgiveness, bearing with one another, peacemaking—they too are appropriate responses to challenging circumstances or people and can only develop as such problems are encountered.

¹³ This is what I call “the comfort of hell.” Biblical writers often point to hell as an encouragement to and comfort for the persecuted believers. Unlike many in our society, the doctrine of hell does not lead them to raise questions about God’s love but it actually answers their questions about how evil can temporarily appear to win. For the biblical writers, hell demonstrates that justice will prevail and reminds the persecuted believers that they will ultimately be vindicated (cf. 2 Thess 1:5–11; Rev 14:9–11; 20:11–15; and 21:8).

¹⁴ Dan G. McCartney, “Suffering and the Apostles,” in *Suffering and the Goodness of God* (Theology in Community; ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 106; cf. Tracy L. Howard, “Suffering in James 1:2–12,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1:1 (Fall 1986): 71–84.

¹⁵ James stands in the traditions of the Old Testament and Jesus, following their literary use of the “poor” as oppressed and righteous. For James and the other biblical writers, the poor are not righteous because of their socio-economic standing but through faith in God. The identity of the poor also may be linked with the exiled people of God (Isa 26:6; 49:13; 51:21), who hope in God’s ultimate eschatological vindication (Isa 49; 51; 54; 61). This was true for Israel, the

Qumran community, and likely James’s recipients, the Christian covenant communities of the Dispersion. The identity of the poor as the people of God in James is additionally clarified by the identity of the rich, who are not merely people with many possessions, but are characterized as proud (James 1:9–11), receiving an eschatological humiliation (1:9–11), oppressors, defrauders, and persecutors of believers (2:5–7; 5:1–6), blasphemers of Christ (2:7), and as those who will be severely punished by God (5:1–6). Further, there seem to be two categories of the poor in James: the severely poor destitute of even decent clothes and often in need of daily food (2:14–17); and the majority of the people in the churches who evidently had enough to be responsible to help the severely poor. So while the identity of the poor in James is hard to pinpoint precisely, it seems to combine some of the following connotations: financial poor; marginalized; powerless; oppressed; dependent on God; humble; righteous people of God; exiled people of God. James’s reference to the widows and orphans (1:26–27) reflects passages that also necessitate concern for aliens/sojourners (Exod 22:21–22; Lev 19:9–10; Deut 10:18–19; Ps 146:9; Zech 7:9–14). So while James primarily stresses God’s concern for his oppressed covenant people and how the church is to embody that same concern, James 1:26–27 (and Luke 10:25–37; Gal 6:10; and many more) indeed teaches that God’s people are also to reflect God’s love for the poor, including those who are outsiders. And as we do, we display God’s goodness and showcase God’s kingdom.

¹⁶ Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (trans. Carl C. Rasmussen; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957; reprint, Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 2004), 2. I was reminded of Luther’s insights through reading Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 304.

¹⁷ Horton, *People and Place*, 304.

¹⁸ Solomon Andria, “James,” in *Africa Bible Commentary* (ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1514.

¹⁹ Note how James links holiness and love in a way that

is reflective of Leviticus 19. It is striking how Christopher Wright's comments on Leviticus 19 fit James. "We are inclined to think of 'holiness' as a matter of personal piety or, in Old Testament terms, of ritual cleanness, proper sacrifices, clean and unclean foods, and the like. Certainly, the rest of Leviticus 19 includes some of these dimensions of Israel's religious life. But the bulk of the chapter shows us that the kind of holiness that reflects God's own holiness is thoroughly practical. It includes generosity to the poor at harvest time, justice for workers, integrity in judicial processes, considerate behavior to other people (especially the disabled), equality before the law for immigrants, honest trading and other very 'earthy' social matters. And all throughout the chapters runs the refrain 'I am the LORD,' as if to say, 'Your quality of life must reflect the very heart of my character. This is what I require of you because this is what reflects me.'" Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 39.

²⁰McCartney, "Suffering and the Apostles," 107, fn15 reads: "The term used here for 'religion' (*threskeia*) means not one's overall faith commitments, but religious practice, acts of piety, or cultic activity. By 'true religion,' therefore, James does not mean 'the essence of true Christian faith' but 'the essence of true Christian religious activity.'"

²¹Ibid., 107, fn16 reads: "The love command of Lev. 19:18 is shared throughout the New Testament as definitive for Christian life. Its widespread use as the basis of ethics is probably due to the fact that it was promulgated by Jesus himself (Mark 12:29–31 and parallels). James's point is that showing favoritism violates the most basic ethic of God and, hence, violates the whole law."

²²McCartney, "Suffering and the Apostles," 107 (italics in original).

²³Alec Motyer, *The Message of James* (Bible Speaks

Today; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 177. James's teaching again reflects Leviticus 19. See Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101:3 (1982): 391–402.

²⁴Other sins related to money in this passage include greed, hoarding wealth, defrauding others, living in excessive luxury, and self-indulgence.

²⁵Moo, *The Letter of James*, 54.

²⁶Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 302.

²⁷James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 191.

²⁸McCartney, *James*, 253–54.

²⁹Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James* (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 241.

³⁰For a good rationale to view this illness as serious, see Motyer, *The Message of James*, 193–94.

³¹Richard R. Melick, Jr., "Warnings and Instructions," *Mid-America Theological Journal* 10:1 (Spring 1986): 70.

³²For solid treatment of this tricky passage and for a helpful overview of its diverse interpretations, see McCartney, *James*, 250–61.

³³For more on how James's theology functions, see Morgan, *A Theology of James*, 169–85.

³⁴Moo, *James*, 60. John Calvin commented on James 1:8: "[T]here is an implied contrast between the simplicity or liberality of God, mentioned before, and the double-mindedness of man." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of James*, in Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 22 (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 284.

³⁵Ralph P. Martin, *James* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 21.

³⁶Daniel M. Doriani, *James* (Reformed Expository Commentary; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 59 (italics in original).

Suffering in Revelation: The Fulfillment of the Messianic Woes

James M. Hamilton, Jr.

In Revelation, John writes as one in affliction (Rev 1:9), to churches in affliction (e.g., 2:10, 13), about the affliction that will take place before kingdom come (see esp. Rev 11–13). The contention of this essay is that John sees the affliction in which he is

a “brother and fellow partaker” (1:9) as the outworking of the Messianic Woes that must be fulfilled prior to the consummation of all things.¹ To establish this, we will begin with a summary of the indications of end times tribulation, the Messianic Woes, in Daniel, cross-pollinating this discussion with consideration of how various New Testament authors interpreted Daniel, before considering how John interprets these realities in Revelation.² In this essay, I am attempting to do biblical theology by pursuing the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors. As followers of

Jesus, once we understand the perspective he taught his apostles,³ our responsibility is to make their perspective our own.⁴

THE MESSIANIC WOES IN DANIEL AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The idea of the Messianic Woes stems from passages such as Daniel 7:25–27, 8:9–14, 9:24–27, and 11:31–12:3. These paradigmatic Old Testament texts indicate that God’s people will be persecuted and suffer before being vindicated through resurrection to receive the kingdom. There is a four kingdom schema set forth in Daniel 2 and 7, and then Daniel 8 focuses in on the second and third of these four kingdoms.⁵ The parallels between the final kings of the third and fourth kingdoms point to a pattern that Daniel expected to see repeated and fulfilled in the final king from the last kingdom. Daniel does not call him the antichrist, but this final king informs New Testament statements about that figure.⁶ The repetition of these patterns also provides the foundation for the indications that the suffering and persecution will intensify to

James M. Hamilton, Jr. is Associate Professor of Biblical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, where he also earned his Ph.D.

He is the author of numerous articles and books such as *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (B&H, 2006), *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Crossway, 2010), *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Crossway, 2012), *What is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Crossway, 2014). Dr. Hamilton also serves as the Teaching Pastor of Kenwood Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky.

a nearly unbearable level under *the* antichrist (cf. Matt 24:21–25).

The final kings of the third and fourth kingdoms in Daniel 7 and 8 are both described as little horns (Dan 7:8; 8:9), both are arrogantly boastful (7:8, 11, 25; 8:25), both have a roughly three and a half year period in which to do their worst (7:25; 8:14; 9:27; 12:7, 11, 12), and the breaking of the little horn from the third kingdom “by no human hand” (8:25; cf. 11:45)⁷ typifies the sudden destruction of the beast from the fourth kingdom (7:11, 26). The repetition of this pattern of events in the third and fourth kingdoms in Daniel creates an expectation of a pattern of antichrist-style opposition to God and his Messiah, and this pattern will culminate in the rise of *the* antichrist.

This expectation is reflected in 1 John 2:18, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.” Similarly, Mark presents Jesus interpreting Daniel as he spoke of “the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be” (Mark 13:14). Douglas Moo notes, “The fact that Mark uses a masculine participle after the neuter *bdelugma* (‘abomination’) shows that he is thinking of a person.”⁸ Paul’s comments on the “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–10 move in a similar direction, as does the depiction of the two beasts in Revelation 13. Though only John calls this figure “antichrist,” these passages all seem to be working with a common expectation that was apparently taught to the early churches before the apostles referenced it in their letters. Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:5, “Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?” And John writes in 1 John 2:18, “you have heard that antichrist is coming.”

John’s statement that “we know it is the last hour” is based on the fact that “antichrists have come,” culminating in “antichrist” (1 John 2:18). John here states that the presence of those who oppose Christ means it is the last hour. John apparently does not think the last hour will begin, then, after the rapture of the church. The last hour has already begun. What

John says about the antichrists and the antichrist matches Jesus predicting that many would come claiming to be him (Mark 13:6) culminating in the personal “abomination of desolation” (13:14). Similarly, after Paul writes that “the man of lawlessness will be revealed” (2 Thess 2:3), he goes on to say that “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (2:7). These statements reflect a common understanding that now that Christ has come and has inaugurated the fulfillment of God’s purposes, *antichrists* have arisen to oppose him. These antichrists are people in 1 John 2:18–19. In Paul’s reference to “the mystery of lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:7), the powers at work seem to be impersonal, systemic forces of the wicked world system. It would seem, then, that Mark, Paul, and John all expect the church to be opposed throughout her history by personal and impersonal antichrists, and that this opposition and persecution will culminate in the rise of *the* antichrist “whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming” (2 Thess 2:8).

Where did Jesus, Mark, Paul, and John learn these ideas? From the Old Testament: Daniel 9:24–27 sets forth a programmatic revelation of seventy weeks until the consummation of all things. After the first sixty-nine weeks, the Messiah will be cut off. Among other things, John’s interpretation of the seventieth week in the book of Revelation indicates that he understood the cutting off of the Messiah after the sixty-nine weeks to be fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Daniel next relates that after the cutting off of the Messiah, the destroyer of the city and the sanctuary will make a strong covenant with many for the one remaining week (Dan 9:26–27).⁹ Other passages in Daniel, dealing with the third of the four kingdoms, point to a pattern of attack on sacrifice and sanctuary accompanied by the setting up of the abomination of desolation (see 8:12–13; 11:31). This pattern is repeated and fulfilled, presumably by the last king of the fourth kingdom, when Daniel writes of this antichrist figure in 9:27, “for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who

makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” These words communicate that after a three and a half year period the Antichrist will “put an end to sacrifice and offering,” and then for the next three and a half years of the seventieth week, Antichrist, the “one who makes desolate,” is working his “abominations,” until his “decreed end” is “poured out” on him, at which point the “one like a son of man” (7:13) receives everlasting dominion and all his saints reign with him (9:27; 7:14, 25–27).

The halving of the seventieth week in Daniel 9:27 informs the reference to the “time, times, and half a time” during which the little horn from the fourth beast, the antichrist from the fourth kingdom, “shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand” (Dan 7:25). This same three and a half year period of intense suffering is in view in the reference to the “time, times, and half a time” in Daniel 12:7, and that verse goes on to say “that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.”¹⁰

Daniel indicates, then, that after the cutting off of the Messiah, there is one more week until the completion of the seventy weeks. In the middle of this seventieth week, the little horn from the fourth kingdom, the antichrist, will initiate a vicious persecution on God’s people that will shatter their power. At the end of his appointed time, the antichrist will be destroyed, the dead will be raised, and God’s king will reign over God’s people in God’s kingdom.

Because of the way that the little horn from the third kingdom patterns the activity of the little horn from the fourth kingdom, it appears that the time of the end will correspond to earlier times: there will be opposition, affliction, and persecution for the people of God.¹¹ This opposition and persecution will intensify to fever pitch when the little horn from the fourth kingdom arises.

Daniel does not use the phrase “Messianic Woes,” but Daniel does depict the scenario that phrase seeks to capture. Daniel relates how Gabriel revealed to him a period of time, one week, remain-

ing after the cutting off of the Messiah (Dan 9:26–27). Half way through this period of time, the adversary who destroyed city and sanctuary would seek to put an end to sacrifice, which I take to refer to an attempt to stamp out the worship of God.

Mark Dubis writes that “the eschatological ordeal that Jews and Christians expected to characterize the latter days” can be referred to with descriptive phrases that

include ‘the great tribulation’ (θλιψις μεγάλη in Matt 24:21; Rev 2:22, 7:14), ‘the footprints of the Messiah’ (*m. Sota* 9:15), ‘the time of the crucible’ (עת המצר; 4QFlor 1–3 i 19–ii 2; 4QCat^a 5+ i 3; 4QpPs^a 1+ ii 19), ‘the time of distress’ (ערה צח; Dan 12:1), and ‘the hour of trial’ (η ώρα του πειρασμου; Rev 3:10). While these terms and images may vary, they nevertheless point to the same expectation of an eschatological period of suffering and trial.¹²

The Messianic Woes inform Paul’s statement that he is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col 1:24). Going in the same direction are Luke’s presentation of Paul telling the newly planted churches that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), his telling the Thessalonians they were “destined for this” (1 Thess 3:3), and Peter’s similar statement that Christians are “called” to suffer for doing good on behalf of others (1 Pet 2:21). As the New Testament authors present the temporary, “necessary” (cf. 1 Pet 1:6) suffering of Christians, they seem to understand that the sufferings depicted during Daniel’s seventieth week must be fulfilled before the beast can be slain and Christ can receive the Kingdom.

We turn our attention now to John’s presentation of the Messianic Woes in the book of Revelation.

THE MESSIANIC WOES IN REVELATION

How can we be sure that John means to present an interpretation and fulfillment of Daniel in Revelation? I know of no one who rejects the idea

that John's various references to a three and a half year period in Revelation stem from the halving of Daniel's seventieth week in Daniel 9:27. John writes of forty-two months in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5, of 1,260 days in 11:3 and 12:6, and of time, and times, and half a time in 12:14. Each of these designations amounts to three and a half years: 42 months is three and a half years of months ($12 \times 3 = 36$, $36 + 6 = 42$), 42 months of 30 days amounts to 1,260 days ($42 \times 30 = 1,260$), and the nourishing of the woman for 1,260 days in Revelation 12:6 and for "a time, and times, and half a time" in 12:14 establishes that this "time, times, half a time" formula also refers to three and a half years. John is presenting the fulfillment of Daniel's seventieth week.

Some understand that seventieth week to be the literal final seven years of history prior to the second coming of Christ. This view is primarily associated with dispensationalism, whether of the pre- or mid-tribulational rapture variety. On this view, the "great tribulation" of Revelation 7:14 refers to this final seven years of history. The pre-tribulation rapture position holds that the church will be raptured prior to Daniel's seventieth week. The mid-tribulation rapture position holds that the church will be raptured when the beast arises at the mid-point of the seventieth week to initiate his final persecution. While I do not think the church will be raptured prior to or during the seventieth week, I agree with these interpreters that in the book of Revelation John means to present the *whole* of rather than *half* of Daniel's seventieth week. I differ with them, however, by thinking John's treatment of the seventieth week to be figurative rather than literal.

I see no indication in Revelation that John means his audience to understand that the church will be raptured prior to or during the seventieth week.¹³ Rather, in Revelation the people of God are assured that they will be preserved through the persecution of one three and a half year period (Rev 11:2–3; 12:6, 14) then given over to the beast's persecution in the second three and a half year period (13:5–8). John presents the church *enduring* the seventieth week, and, in my view, John presents this seventieth

week as a symbolic depiction of the whole of church history. This is relevant to suffering in Revelation precisely because the book is an Apocalypse,¹⁴ namely, a "revelation." An apocalypse is an unveiling of the world as it really is, and its purpose is to encourage the persecuted people of God to persevere to the end.¹⁵

The rest of this exploration of suffering in Revelation will be concerned with two things: first, we will overview the whole book and its literary structure with an eye to what it says about suffering and how it speaks to those who are suffering or will suffer. Second, we will give more attention to the symbolic timeline John sets forth in Revelation.

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER

In Revelation John describes the vision that he received "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10). God gave the revelation to Jesus, who made it known by sending his angel to his servant John to show to his servants what must soon take place (1:1). John bore witness to all he saw (1:2), pronouncing a blessing on all who hear and keep what is in the prophecy (1:3). Having called the book both an Apocalypse (1:1) and a Prophecy (1:3), John provides an opening that bears the characteristics of New Testament letters in 1:4–8. The book of Revelation is thus an apocalyptic (1:1–2) prophecy (1:3) in the form of a circular letter (1:4–5; 22:21).¹⁶

The content of the book flows out of the appearance of the risen Christ to John (Rev 1:9–20), who dictated to him the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2–3). John was then invited into the heavenly throne room, where he saw the worship of God and the Lamb (Rev 4–5) and the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls issuing from the throne of God (Rev 6–16). John then saw the fall of Babylon (Rev 17–18), the return of King Jesus (Rev 19–10), and the descent of the Bride, the new Jerusalem, from heaven (Rev 21–22).

John tells us that he "was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 1:9).¹⁷ There are other possibilities, but John had probably been exiled

to Patmos because of his ministry, an instance of persecution that fits with the way that throughout the book he is preparing the churches for the difficulties they will face.

We will consider the structure of Revelation from several perspectives because no single attempt to structure the book can exhaust the overlapping ways that John has arranged his material. John has used key phrases to mark turning points of the book, and he also seems to have used a chiastic arrangement of the material (see further below). At points in the outline that follows, the verse numbers of sections will overlap because there are transitional sections of the book that go both with what precedes and with what comes after. Similarly, the groupings of sections on the outline will be slightly different from the groupings of material in the chiastic structure, but I maintain that both capture accurate ways to describe the book's content.

John has tipped us off as to the structure of the book of Revelation by using the phrase "in the Spirit" near the beginning of the major sections of the body of the book (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).¹⁸ Beginning in Revelation 1:9, John recounts the way that Jesus appeared to him in glory (Rev 1:9-20), dictated to him specific letters addressing the seven churches (Rev 2:1-3:22), and called him up into the heavenly throne room to see the worship of God there (4:1-5:14). In the throne room, John sees Jesus take a scroll from the Father, and from what happens when the scroll is opened, we can surmise that the writing on the scroll describes the events that will bring history to its appointed conclusion. Jesus opens the seals on the scroll (6:1-8:1), then seven angels blow seven trumpets (8:2-11:19). In Revelation 10, John sees an angel bring a scroll—apparently the same scroll Jesus took from the Father in Revelation 5 and opened in chapters 6-8. John eats the scroll and prophesies. John describes the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent in cosmic terms in Revelation 12-14. Then the final seven bowls of God's wrath are poured out in Revelation 15-16. All of this gives vital perspective to persecuted, suffering Christians.

Revelation 17-22 describes the harlot, the King, and the bride. The section on the King is in the middle, and John marks off the boundaries of these three sections by using similar language at the beginning and end of the sections on the harlot and the bride. The wording of the beginning of the section on the harlot is matched by the wording of the beginning of the section on the bride.¹⁹

Matching Language Opening the Section on the Harlot and the Bride

Revelation 17:1, 3

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit ..."

Revelation 21:9-10

"Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls . . . and spoke to me saying, 'Come, I will show you . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit ..."

Similarly, the wording of the ending of the section on the harlot is matched by the wording of the ending of the section on the bride.

Matching Language Ending the Sections on the Harlot and the Bride

Revelation 19:9-10

"... And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.' Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.' ..."

Revelation 22:6, 8-9

"And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true...' ... I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.'"

The harlot is a symbol for the world system that is opposed to God. She is called Babylon because in

the Bible Babylon represents settled rebellion and hostility to God and his people. Revelation 17–18 show her debased and destroyed: all her seductive power comes to nothing. By depicting the way that the wicked become like chaff that the wind drives away (Ps 1:4), the way they perish in the way (Ps 2:12), John equips the persecuted to endure. Near is the end of the persecutors.

Then John depicts the hope that sustains the persecuted: the King comes, conquers his enemies (19:11–21), sets up his kingdom (20:1–21:8), and his glorious bride descends from heaven (21:9–22:9). The bride is a symbol of the people of God, the redeemed, those who trust in Jesus. She is called the new Jerusalem because Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God in the Old Testament, the city where the Lord chose to put his name, while in the new covenant God’s *people* are his dwelling place.²⁰

The book of Revelation can be broken down as follows:

- I. 1:1–8, Revelation, Blessing, and Epistolary Opening
- II. 1:9–22:9, John’s Vision on the Lord’s Day
 - A. 1:9–3:22, The Risen Christ to the Seven Churches
 - B. 4:1–16:21, The Throne and the Judgments
 - 1. 4:1–5:14, The Throne Room Vision
 - 2. 6:1–17, Six Seals
 - 3. 7:1–17, The Sealing of the Saints and Their Worship
 - 4. 8:1–5, The Seventh Seal
 - 5. 8:6–9:21, Six Trumpets
 - 6. 10:1–11:14, Prophetic Witness
 - 7. 11:15–19, The Seventh Trumpet
 - 8. 12:1–14:20, Conflict Between the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent
 - 9. 15:1–16:21, Seven Bowls
 - C. 17:1–22:9, The Fall of the Harlot, the Return of the King, and the Descent of the Bride
- III. 22:6–21, Revelation, Blessing, and Epistolary Closing²¹

The announcement that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15) comes in the middle of the book rather than at the end. Why would that announcement be made at the center of the book? The answer to that question seems to be found in the chiastic structure of Revelation. A chiasm can be conceived in terms of a picture frame: outermost is the actual wooden frame, then inside that will perhaps be a mat, and sometimes there are multiple mats of complementary colors, while inside the frame and the mat the picture will be placed. The purpose of the frame and the mat is to highlight the picture. Similarly, the purpose of a chiasm is to highlight what is at the center of the chiasm. At the very center of the chiasm in the book of Revelation is the announcement that Christ is king. Surrounding that are touches and flourishes that depict the church suffering and being rewarded:

The Chiastic Structure of Revelation

- A. 1:1–8, Letter Opening: Revelation of Jesus and the Things that Must Soon Take Place
- B. 1:9–3:22, Letters to the Seven Churches: The Church in the World
- C. 4:1–6:17, Throne Room Vision, Christ Conquers and Opens the Scroll
- D. 7:1–9:21, The Sealing of the Saints and the Trumpets Announcing Plagues
- E. 10:1–11, The Angel and John (True Prophet)
- F. 11:1–14, The Church: Two Witnesses Prophecy for 1,260 Days, then opposition from the beast
- G. 11:15–19, Seventh Trumpet: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” Worship.
- (f’) 12:1–13:10, The Church: The Woman Nourished for 1,260 Days, then opposition from the dragon and the second beast
- (e’) 13:11–18, The Deceiving Beast (False Prophet)

- (d') 14:1–19:10, The Redemption of the Saints
and the Bowls of Wrath
- (c') 19:11–20:15, Return of Christ, He Conquers,
Sets up His 1,000 Year Kingdom, and
Opens the Scrolls
- (b'). 21:1–22:7, New Heavens and New Earth:
The Church in Glory
- (a') 22:8–21, Letter Closing: Jesus Is
Coming Soon

Chiasms set mutually interpretive items across from one another. Thus, Revelation 11:1–14, which describes the two witnesses, should be interpreted in light of Revelation 12:1–13:10, which describes the struggle between the woman who bears the male child (Jesus) and the great red dragon. Read this way, both sections deal with the church's struggle against Satanic opposition, and the other matching sections throughout the book are mutually interpretive.

That John is presenting his apocalyptic prophecy as the culmination of all preceding prophecy is marked in the way he has structured his book. If we were to summarize the overarching message of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve, it would be this: Israel has broken the covenant, so God will judge her by sending her into exile. Through judgment God will save for his glory: God is preparing a magnificent eschatological salvation that will come through judgment after exile. That future salvation is often likened to the exodus from Egypt (e.g., Jer 16:13–16). Thus, the prophets speak of a future mighty act of salvation that will be according to the exodus pattern and that will open the way to a return from exile, putting the people of God back in the promised land. In part this will involve God bringing judgment on those he used to judge Israel (see esp. Nahum and Habakkuk).

What does this have to do with suffering in Revelation? It is widely recognized that the judgments of the trumpets (Rev 8–9) and the bowls (Rev 15–16) are reminiscent of the plagues on Egypt, and as with the plagues on Egypt, the peo-

ple of God are shielded from these visitations of God's wrath on the wicked (e.g., Rev 7:1–3). John presents these final judgments as the new plagues that will liberate the people at the final exodus. Just as Israel was delivered from Egypt through the judgments of the ten plagues, just as the judgment of Babylon restored the people to the land, so also the people of God will be delivered from the wicked powers of this world through the seven trumpet and seven bowl judgments. Little wonder that the culmination of God's judgment is announced with the cry that Babylon has fallen (e.g., Rev 14:8). It was the fall of Babylon in 539 BC that brought Cyrus to power (cf. Isa 44:28–45:1), and it was this Cyrus who decreed the return to the land (e.g., Ezra 1:1–4). Just as Israel entered the promised land after the exodus from Egypt, so also after the fulfillment of the exodus in Revelation the people of God will enter into the fulfillment of the promised land, the millennial kingdom followed by the new heaven and new earth.

As a way of simultaneously unpacking the chiasmic structure of Revelation and structuring these thoughts on suffering in Revelation, what follows will work through the matching sections of the chiasm depicted above.

The opening and closing sections (1:1–8; 22:8–21) stress that the consummation of all things will come soon. This teaching functions to encourage the persecuted and struggling churches to persevere, summoning them to readiness. Such encouragement, again, is a key function of apocalyptic literature.

As John depicts the resurrected Christ dictating authoritative proclamations to the seven churches (1:9–3:22), a section matched by the depiction of the church in glory in the new heavens and new earth (21:1–22:7), the churches are called to fix their minds on the exalted Christ, to abstain from sexual immorality and idolatry, and to live for what Christ has promised them, which John shows being realized in the depiction of the church in glory. These things will soon

take place, and the temptations to sin promise temporary pleasure followed by lasting destruction. Those who hold fast the word of God and the testimony of Jesus will experience temporary persecution rewarded by lasting joy.

John writes to churches in Caesar's realm, but in Revelation 4:1–6:17 those churches see who is really in control. God the Father is seated on his throne in heaven being worshiped as he rightly deserves, and Christ the slain Lamb stands, risen from the dead, reigning and being worshiped right alongside the Father. Christ's conquest enables him to seize the scroll from the Father and open its seals, setting in motion the events that will bring history to its appointed consummation. The throne room scene with the opening of the seals of the scroll in Revelation 4–6 is matched by the return of the conquering Christ, his 1,000 year reign, and the opening of scrolls before the great white throne of judgment in 19:11–20:15. John's readers have God's authority to judge reinforced, and the rainbow around the throne in Revelation 4 also points to the mercy God will show to those whose sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb.

The sealing of the 144,000 saints and the blowing of the trumpets in Revelation 7:1–9:21 is matched by the redemption of the 144,000 saints and the pouring out of the bowls of wrath in Revelation 14:1–19:10. The sealing of the saints tells the churches that God can and will protect them from the wrath he will bring upon the world. The redemption of the saints assures them that neither the trumpet nor the bowl plagues will visit his judgment upon them.

Revelation 10:1–11 enacts a scene in which John eats the scroll Christ took and opened (Rev 5–6), depicting the way that God gave the Revelation to Jesus, who made it known by sending his angel to his servant John to show his servants what must soon take place (Rev 1:1). By eating the scroll, John does exactly what Ezekiel did (Ezek 2:8–3:4), and the action designates him as a true prophet to whom the churches must listen.

The true prophet has a satanic parody in the false beast of Revelation 13:11–18, and the churches should reject the dragon in Lamb's clothing (he looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon, 13:11)—any who urge them to worship Satan's fake christ.

There are matching sections depicting the church's faithful testimony to the gospel in the midst of satanic persecution in Revelation 11:1–14 and 12:1–13:10. This is the time in which the church must resist sexual immorality and idolatry, refusing to worship Satan's false christ, even if it means they can neither buy nor sell because they refuse to receive the mark of the beast (13:16–18), even if it results in them being put to death (11:7//13:7; 13:14–15). The people of God may suffer Satan's wrath, but they will be spared from God's, and after Satan has done his worst God will raise them from the dead and reward their faithfulness.

At the center of the whole book is the blast of the seventh trumpet, when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev 11:15–19). This is the centerpiece of John's teaching: Christ is king. He will come to conquer and judge. The church must endure, persevere, hold fast. Even unto death. And when Christ comes he will establish his kingdom and reward his people.

SYMBOLIC TIMELINE

Interpreters disagree on how Revelation's symbolism is to be understood, when the events described in the book will be fulfilled, and the nature of the relationships between the events in the book (sequential descriptions of events or recapitulatory accounts that repeatedly depict the same set of events?). Are we in the millennium or is it yet future? This discussion will not be the last word on these issues, but interpreting the book of Revelation self-referentially will give us traction on each of these questions. By "self-referentially" I basically mean intra-textually: comparing what we are trying to interpret in

Revelation to other statements within Revelation. This self-referential approach can be usefully supplemented with inter-textual help from other canonical books from the Testaments Old and New (comparing what is in Revelation with what is in these other canonical books).

A self-referential reading of the symbolism in Revelation means reading the symbols in light of one another. Thus we should compare what is symbolized by the likeness of the four living creatures around the throne of God in Revelation 4:6–7 with what is symbolized by the bizarre combinations of the vicious and destructive features of the scorpion-like locusts in Revelation 9:3. Similarly, we should compare Jesus, the seven-horned Lamb standing as though slain in 5:5–6, with the seven-headed ten-horned rapacious beast of 13:1–3. Comparing these symbols helps us begin to sense the difference between God and the dragon, the Lamb and the beast, and the false prophet and the Holy Spirit. The symbols are to draw us to the holy Trinity while repulsing us from Satan's wicked attempt to make himself God in his own false parody of the Trinity. Similar things could be said about the comparison of the harlot in Revelation 17 and the bride in Revelation 21.

A self-referential approach to the question of the nature of the relationship between the seals, trumpets, and bowls, will also help us determine whether these three sets of judgments are meant to represent the same set of events three times or whether they are three different accounts to be taken in succession. Close analysis reveals a high degree of similarity between the trumpets and the bowls, with each judgment affecting the same areas in the same ways, reminding John's audience of the exodus plagues.²² This suggests that the trumpets and bowls are different descriptions of the same judgments. The opening of the seals, by contrast, corresponds more to the sequence of events in the Olivet Discourse²³ (discussed below) and less to the trumpets and the bowls. From this, it seems likely that the opening of the

seals reflects the outworking of the events leading across church history to the consummation of all things, at which time history will culminate in the judgments at the end of history symbolized by the trumpets and bowls.

A self-referential approach to understanding the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 would suggest that while the round numbers of the references to time in Revelation may mean they are symbolic, that does not mean that each different symbolic time refers to the same period of symbolic time. Thus the ten days of persecution and the three and a half years of testifying and the short while of the dragon's wrath may all be symbolic, but that does not lead to the conclusion that they refer to the same symbolic period of time represented by the 1,000 years during which the dragon is bound.

A self-referential approach will also help us arbitrate the question of when the fulfillment of what is depicted in the book will take place. Some see fulfillment of all, or at least most, of what John depicts in Revelation as taking place in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple. This view is termed the "preterist" position because of the way that it views fulfillment in the past. There are certainly things in Revelation that would have resonated with John's audience, things that would have sounded to them like the worship of the emperor spreading across the Empire. Against the preterists, however, the most natural understanding of Jesus coming with the clouds of heaven, every eye seeing him, is not the temple being destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 but the return of Jesus on the clouds, just as he was seen to go (Acts 1:9–11), in fulfillment of Daniel 7:13. Others take an idealist approach to interpreting the symbolism in the book, with the result that, in my judgment, all the symbols are flattened into meaning the same thing. We can grant that the book contains a great deal of symbolism without reducing all the symbols to a least common denominator understanding of them. Still others advocate a futurist approach to

the book, holding that most of what is depicted in Revelation describes what takes place at or during the final seven years of human history. While there are no doubt ways in which Revelation depicts what will take place at the end of history, there are also ways in which what the book depicts corresponds to the events of AD 70, and symbolic ways in which the book resonates with what has taken place across church history.

The most persuasive approach is to maintain the strengths of each position, recognizing that these views are not mutually exclusive. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 can function as a type of the judgment God will visit at the end of history. As noted above, John speaks in 1 John 2:18 of antichrist coming while many antichrists have come. This seems to indicate that there will be a number of installments in the antichrist pattern, culminating in the final antichrist who will arise at the end of history, acknowledging a futurist and idealist fulfillment of the beast persecuting the church.

Finally, the self-referential approach will help us determine how to understand Revelation, and this approach to interpreting Revelation demands a thorough grasp of the whole book, a bringing to bear of everything the book says in the interpretation of its details.

What, then, of the symbolic timeline in Revelation? It can be depicted briefly²⁴ below in Fig. 1:

John does not present these things in chronological order. His presentation, as seen above, is driven by thematic and literary concerns. The order can be pieced together from literary cues in the text. Here is a brief summary and defense in prose, noting the location of these events in Revelation itself.

In the symbolic depiction of the birth of the male child to rule the nations with the rod of iron in Revelation 12:1–5, John depicts the birth and ascension of Jesus, thereby invoking his life, death, and resurrection in collapsed form. On the basis of Christ’s triumph, Michael drives Satan from the heavenly field of battle, casting him down to earth so that he can no longer accuse the brethren. Satan’s accusations have no standing in the heavenly court because of what Christ accomplished, but he has a short time to persecute the church on earth (Rev 12:7–17).

Meanwhile, John has earlier shown the ascended Christ in the heavenly throne room fulfilling Daniel 7:13, presented before the Father, seizing the scroll, taking the reigns of history. As he opens the scroll, the correspondences between what happens when he does that and the Olivet Discourse show that these events are unfolding across church history to the time of the end.

In both the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 deceivers go out. These are people who look like Jesus in some ways, but they are not Jesus. In both the Olivet Discourse and in Revelation 6,

Fig. 1. Symbolic timeline in Revelation

Jesus Ascends	Church Persecuted and Protected	Church Persecuted and Overcome	Trumpets and Bowls	Jesus Returns	Millennium	New Heaven and New Earth
	Opening of the Seals Rev 6–8, 11–13					
	3 1/2 yrs	3 1/2 yrs				

wars are prophesied, and Matthew 24:6 notably says “the end is not yet,” then 24:8 says these events are the beginnings of birth pains. So neither false-christs nor wars are an indication of the end. In both the Olivet Discourse and in Revelation 6, famine, difficulty, and death follow the messianic pretenders and their wars. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus says the gospel has to be proclaimed to the whole world, then the end will come (Matt 24:14).

In Revelation 6:11 the martyrs are told that the full number of appointed martyrs has to be fulfilled before the end. The gospel will go to the ends of the earth through the sacrifices of the martyrs, and the fact that there is an appointed number of martyrs in Revelation 6:11 means that their deaths are not accidental. In both the Olivet Discourse and in Revelation 6, apocalyptic imagery accompanies the coming of Jesus (Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12–17).²⁵

The whole of church history is symbolically presented in Revelation as Daniel’s seventieth week. The three and a half year protection of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:1–6, until “they have finished their testimony” (11:7), matches the indications that the gospel must go to all nations (Matt 24:14) and that the full number of the Gentiles will be brought in (Rom 11:25). Once that has happened, so all appointed martyrs will be slain (Rev 6:11), the beast rises to slay the two witnesses (11:7; cf. 13:7), and for the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week the beast viciously persecutes and almost entirely wipes out the church.

If I am correct that the first half of Daniel’s seventieth week is depicted as the two witnesses prophesy in Revelation 11, that first half also seems to be depicted as the woman is nourished in the wilderness in 12:6 and 12:13–16. At the appointed time, the beast receives his three and a half year period of authority (Rev 13:5), at which point the heat is turned up (13:6–18).

This means that John depicts the whole of church history as a time of persecution, with the end being worse than the beginning. There are some indications of a prophetic foreshortening of the beast’s three and a half year period, indications that the time of intense persecution will not last as long as the time

in which the church was protected to proclaim the gospel. One of these is seen in the three and a half *day* period during which the bodies of the two witnesses lie in the street unburied (Rev 11:8–11). At the end of this three and a half day period of the beast’s triumphant season, the resurrection of Ezekiel 37 is fulfilled as the “breath of life from God” enters the two witnesses and they are raised from the dead (11:11), then the last trumpet sounds and Christ becomes king (11:15–19). Another indication of a prophetic foreshortening of the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week is the reference to the beast enjoying power “for one hour” in Revelation 17:12.

Seeing *both* halves of Daniel’s seventieth week depicted in Revelation matches the details of Revelation itself, where the church is protected through persecution to proclaim the gospel (11:1–6; 12:6, 13–16), then handed over to the beast (11:7; 13:7). It also matches the details of Daniel 9, where in the middle of the seventieth week the enemy seeks to stamp out the worship of God. The protection of the church through persecution for the first half of Daniel’s seventieth week is also depicted in imagery drawn from Daniel, as the trampling of temple courts and holy city in Revelation 11:2 sounds like “the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot” in Daniel 8:13. This depiction in Daniel 8 comes from the third kingdom not the fourth, again indicating that there is a pattern that will be repeated throughout the history of God’s people. The temple itself, representing the people of God in Revelation 11:1–2, is measured and protected through this period of persecution, not slain as the witnesses and saints will be once the midpoint of the seventieth week is reached.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that Revelation describes the entire inter-advental age. Throughout this age the church suffers and is persecuted. Revelation teaches the church precisely what many in the world now experience: that the people of God will suffer *and* see the triumph of the gospel as it makes its long march to the ends of the earth.

John depicts the world as it really is: Christ has conquered. Satan has been driven from the heavenly field of battle, and his accusations have no standing in the heavenly court. He is pursuing his persecution of the church through his deception of the nations (Rev 12:9; 13:14). God shields his own from his wrath, though Satan's wrath may result in their death. God will raise them from the dead. John means to enable the faithful to persevere through persecution, a point that stands whether the interpreter thinks the temple in Revelation 11, for instance, is a literal temple or a symbol of the people of God.

The job of those who would exposit the text of Revelation is to explain to the people of God the relevance of the simple message that though their experience may not seem to reflect it, in reality God is in heaven reigning on his throne, Christ has been raised from the dead, he has taken control of history, while the dragon has a short time in which to pursue his purposes. A day will come soon when Christ will return on a white horse to judge the wicked and reward the repentant who remain faithful to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

ENDNOTES

¹ For a summary of references to the Messianic Woes in the Bible, see Table 6.2, "The Messianic Woes in the Old and New Testaments," in James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 493. For discussion of "Messianic Woes in Early Judaism and Christianity," see Mark Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter: Suffering and Eschatology in 1 Peter 4:12-19* (Studies in Biblical Literature; New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 5–36.

² For my attempt to exposit Revelation, see James M. Hamilton, *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Preaching the Word; Wheaton: Crossway, 2012). For my attempt to explore Daniel's theology, see James M. Hamilton, *A Theology of Daniel* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).

³ For the view that the understanding of the Old Testament reflected in the New is the one that Jesus taught

his followers, see E. Earle Ellis, "Jesus' Use of the Old Testament and the Genesis of New Testament Theology," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 3 (1993): 59–75.

⁴ For the idea that biblical theology is the attempt to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors, see James M. Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014).

⁵ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 534.

⁶ The term "antichrist" only occurs in the Epistles of John (see 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), but what John says about "the antichrist" and "antichrists" in 1 John 2:18 matches what the Synoptic Gospels present Jesus saying about "false christs and false prophets" (e.g., Matt 24:24), what Paul says about the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:1–12), and what Revelation depicts in the two beasts (Rev 13:1–18). Cf. Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 114–15, 267–70.

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, "The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position," in *Three Views on the Rapture* (Counterpoints; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 246 n. 4.

⁹ Pace the interpretation of this passage put forth in Peter J. Gentry, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14:1 (2010): 36–40. Gentry and I disagree on the following points: he holds that the "people of the prince who is to come" who will "destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Dan 9:26) are the Jewish people, the prince being Jesus (38–39). In view of the other instances of attack on the sanctuary and sacrifice in Daniel 8:12–13 and 11:31, I maintain that the prince in view is not "Messiah the prince" from Dan 9:25 but an enemy. Gentry holds that the "strong covenant with many for one week" is the new covenant (38), whereas I would see it as an agreement made not by Jesus but by the enemy, the antichrist. I am not persuaded by Gentry's arguments against the conclusions I hold (40). Aside from these differences in particulars, however, Gentry and I approach the typological significance of

these passages and their relevance for how we understand the end unfolding in very similar ways.

¹⁰In *ibid.*, 40, Gentry objects to the view that the attacks on sanctuary and sacrifice in Daniel 9:26–27 should be interpreted as another instance of the same kind of attack on sanctuary and sacrifice seen in Daniel 8 and 11. As he puts it, “it is problematic to relate 7:8, which belongs to the fourth empire, to 11:31 and 12:11 which belong to the third.” The use of the three and a half year period from Daniel 9:27, however, explains the “time, times, and half a time” formula in both 7:25 and 12:7 (third kingdom, according to Gentry), as well as the roughly three and a half year periods in 8:14 and 12:11–12. The reuse of this three and a half year period is part of the common pattern of events seen in the third and fourth kingdoms, suggesting that Daniel intended them to be interpreted in light of each other, with Daniel 9:26–27 depicting something that is along the same lines as what we find in 8:13–14, 11:31, and 12:7–13.

¹¹I do not hold to the pretribulation rapture, but it is worth observing that Paul D. Feinberg writes, “Pretribulationists agree among themselves ... that the *whole*, not just a part, of the seventieth week is a time of divine wrath” (“The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position,” in *Three Views on the Rapture* [Counterpoints; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 58). I do not hold to the midtribulation rapture, but it is worth noting that Gleason L. Archer writes, “If the Great Tribulation is to be identified with the second half of the final seven years prior to Armageddon, during which the bowls of divine wrath will be poured out upon the earth, then the view we are about to advocate is really a form of pretribulation Rapture. It simply regards the first three and a half years, during which the Antichrist will increase his power and mount his persecution against the church, as a lesser tribulation, not nearly as terrifying or destructive of life as those fearsome plagues that will dominate the last three and a half years” (“The Case for the Mid-Seventieth-Week Rapture Position,” in *Three Views on the Rapture* [Counterpoints; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 139).

¹²Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter*, 3–4.

¹³See the decisive essay by Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture.”

¹⁴The apocalyptic features of Revelation include its focus on the consummation of all things—the end of the world, its heavy use of symbolism, and its depictions of otherworldly intermediaries who reveal mysterious signs to John and interpret them for him. The book of Revelation is not pseudonymous, however, as inter-testamental apocalyptic literature typically is, nor does it present historical reviews in the form of future predictions the way those do.

¹⁵As Revelation 1:3 also indicates, Revelation is an apocalypse *and* a prophecy. Apocalyptic literature often deals more directly with the end of the world, while Prophecy typically addresses the flow of history, encouraging people to repent and mend their ways.

¹⁶Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–2.

¹⁷Irenaeus, who was from Smyrna, one of the other churches addressed in Revelation 2–3, claimed to have heard Polycarp, who had interacted with John son of Zebedee in person. Irenaeus testified that John wrote Revelation “towards the end of Domitian’s reign”—Domitian reigned from 81–96 (*Adv. Haer.* 5.30.3). This date is not the only one to be attested in the ancient world, but it has the earliest and strongest support (cf. Origen on Matt 16:6 and Eus. *H.E.* 3.18).

¹⁸My thoughts on the structure of Revelation have been significantly influenced by Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

¹⁹The following two tables were developed for my book, *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, and can be found on pages 25 and 26 therein.

²⁰For more on this theme, see James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (NAC Studies in Bible and Theology; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006).

²¹Revelation 22:6–9 goes with the section that spans from 17:1–22:9, and this passage also transitions into the concluding section of the book, 22:6–21, so there is no typo in the listing of the verses at this point in the outline.

²²See Table 15.3, “The Trumpets and the Bowls,” Table 19.1, “Revelation’s Trumpets and the Exodus

Plagues,” and Table 19.2, “Revelation’s Bowls and the Exodus Plagues,” in Hamilton, *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, 168, 211.

²³See Table 15.2, “Parallels between Daniel, the Olivet Discourse, and Revelation,” in *ibid.*, 167.

²⁴For a more detailed presentation of Revelation’s Sym-

bolic Timeline, see Table 33.3 in *ibid.*, 371–72.

²⁵So also, independently, Eckhard J. Schnabel, *40 Questions About the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 70. See Table 15.2, referenced above, “Parallels between Daniel, the Olivet Discourse, and Revelation” in Hamilton, *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, 167.

NEW FROM CROSSWAY



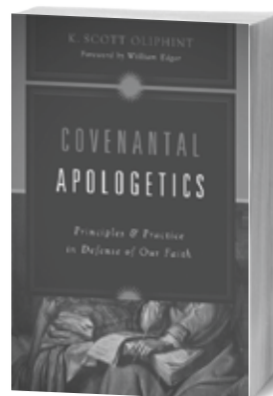
What Is the Meaning of Sex?

Denny Burk

Trade Paperback / 978-1-4335-3609-0 / \$17.99

"This is a readable, enjoyable, practical, encouraging, wholesome, balanced, wise, refreshing, and biblical approach to the ethics of human sexuality. This book is deeply needed in today's confused society. I highly recommend it!"

Wayne Grudem, Research Professor of Bible and Theology, Phoenix Seminary



Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith

K. Scott Oliphint

Trade Paperback / 978-1-4335-2817-0 / \$19.99

"In a day marked by shallow thinking and weak reasoning, Oliphint offers an arsenal of apologetic insight."

—R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



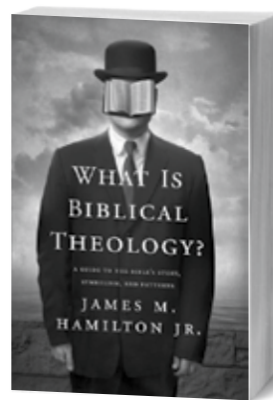
From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective

David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, eds.

Hardcover / 978-1-4335-1276-6 / \$50.00

"This is the definitive study. It is careful, comprehensive, deep, pastoral, and thoroughly persuasive."

David F. Wells, Distinguished Senior Research Professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary



What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns

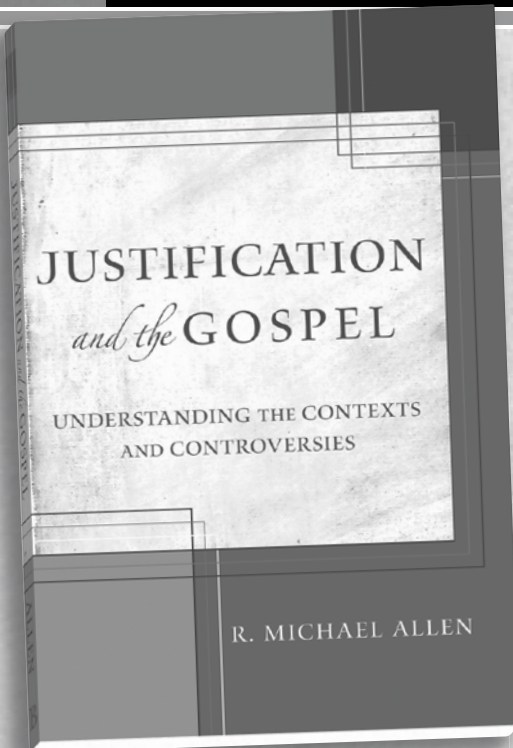
James M. Hamilton Jr.

Trade Paperback / 978-1-4335-3771-4 / \$12.99

"*What Is Biblical Theology?* confirms Hamilton's reputation as a top-shelf thinker and a wickedly good writer."

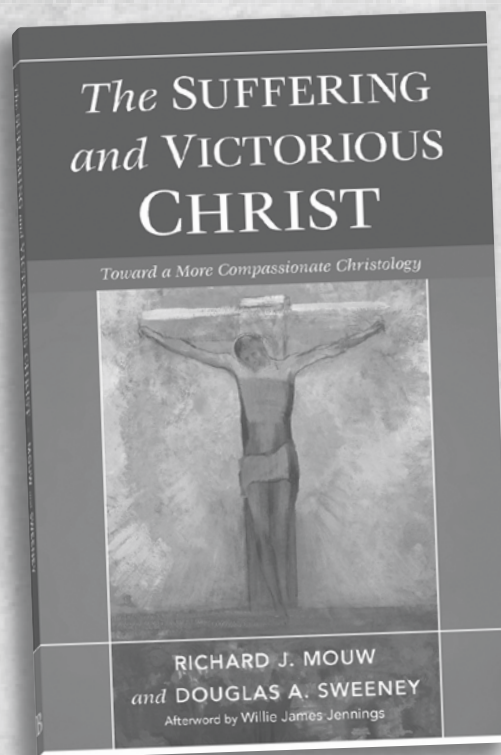
Bruce Riley Ashford, Provost, Dean of Faculty, and Associate Professor of Theology and Culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

New from BAKER ACADEMIC



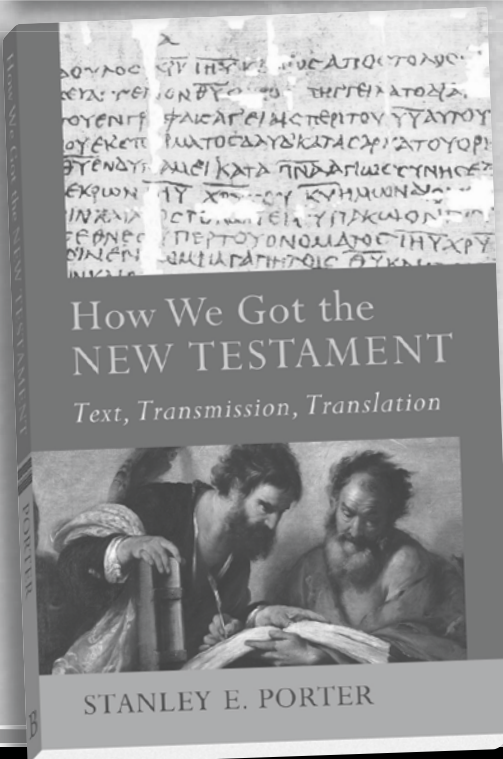
978-0-8010-3986-7 • 208 pp. • \$21.99p

"Michael Allen provides here a first-rate study of the doctrine of justification construed in the context of Christian theology as a whole. His review of contemporary debates and his awareness of biblical and historical sources are alike impressive. This is a book that challenges and provokes as well as informs."—**Timothy George**, Beeson Divinity School



978-0-8010-4844-9
128 pp. • \$19.99p

"Richard Mouw and Douglas Sweeney address the 'divine empathy' of the incarnate Christ who, in the mysteries of the Trinity, not only created his fellow humans but also suffers with them. . . . Their depiction of Christ's suffering as both absolutely unique to himself and necessary to join him completely to suffering humanity will challenge, humble, and inspire."
—**Mark Noll**, University of Notre Dame



978-0-8010-4871-5 • 240 pp. • \$21.99p

"Misinformation abounds among both the general public and even some scholars about how carefully the text of the New Testament has been preserved, copied, and translated. Stanley Porter sets the record straight. . . . Highly recommended."—**Craig Blomberg**, Denver Seminary

BakerAcademic

Available in bookstores or by calling 800.877.2665 | Visit our blog: blog.bakeracademic.com
Subscribe to *E-Notes*, our e-newsletter, at bakeracademic.com



The Book of Job and Suffering: A Sermon

Russell T. Fuller

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Peter tells us, “that the testing (or proof) of your faith, more precious than gold which is perishable, though tested by fire, may be found to the praise and glory and honor in the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7). God tests the faith of his saints. Such testing, when successful, strengthens our faith by working patience in us. And when patience to rely upon God and upon Him alone has its perfect work, we become complete and whole, lacking in nothing (James 1:3-4). Such testing, while difficult, is always profitable. God tested Abraham, for example, in commanding him to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise (Gen 22:1). Abraham relied upon God, stating to Isaac that, “God will

provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (Gen 22:8). Indeed, Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead if necessary (Heb 11:19). Such testing rendered Abraham’s great faith in God even stronger. The same may be said of Joseph as

well. The word of God—that his family would bow down to him—tested him as he lived a slave and prisoner for some twenty years (Ps 105:19). Joseph learned to wait patiently on God.

The book of Job teaches the same lesson that God tests his people that they may learn to rely upon Him, and Him alone for all things. In fact, God designed this book as a pattern to aid us for the testing and strengthening of our faith. Trials and testing will come our way: loss of health, loss of family and friends, and even death itself. But the question is clear—will we live by faith as Job did or will we live by sight like many of the children of Israel did in the wilderness as well as the way the world daily lives? Job shows us how to live by faith.

JOB: HIS PIETY AND PROSPERITY (JOB 1:1-5)

The book introduces Job by his godliness, not by his nationality. Four attributes characterize Job’s piety. The first is “blameless.” Used of animals without blemishes for sacrifice, blameless describes Job’s character as without essential

Russell T. Fuller is Professor of Old Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He earned his Ph.D. from Hebrew Union College, and he is the co-author of *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew: A Beginning Grammar* (Kregel, 2006).

defect, a man of integrity. The second is “upright.” Denoting that which is straight, not twisted or perverted, upright relates Job’s character as conformed to God’s spiritual and moral standards. The third attribute is “a man who fears God.” The fear of God is an understanding of God that affects our thoughts, feelings, and conduct and seeks God’s approval, a profound reverence of His majesty and a dread of His judgments. The “fear of the Lord” is the Biblical designation for a godly, religious man. The fourth attribute is “a man who turns away from evil.” He stayed away from all that was wrong in thought, speech, and behavior. He did not attempt to get as close to sin as possible without sinning. On the contrary, he kept sin far away. In addition to these four attributes, Job nurtured the spiritual welfare of his children by participating in religious services, offering sacrifices on their behalf. Finally, Job’s godliness was not a moderate or nominal piety. Even God testified that Job was the godliest man of his generation (Job 1:8).

In every way, godliness benefits Job as his example indicates, especially in the OT context and given his place in redemptive-history. First, his godliness secured the family structure, the foundation of countless blessings. Furthermore, his godliness attracted many friends. And most prominently in the first chapter, his godliness brought wealth. Individuals and societies that follow God’s word in suppressing sin and in promoting godliness become prosperous, while individuals and societies that suppress godliness and promote sin inevitably become impoverished. Godliness subdues sin allowing for genuine liberty and prosperity, not libertarian licentiousness leading to the slavery and degradation of sin. Ungodliness debases individuals and societies fostering atheism in all its forms, particularly secularism, socialism, and communism. These have always left human misery in their wake. Job’s example and all history demonstrate that godliness brings life and God’s blessings and that ungodliness brings death and God’s curse in this life and in the life to come.

1. JOB: HIS TRIALS

In Job 1:6, God asks Satan,¹ “Have you considered my servant, Job”? Satan, after cynically insinuating that Job’s godliness exists solely because of his prosperity, admits that he never considered Job because God had built a hedge about him. Now God tests Job by taking away the hedge, allowing Satan to try Job in a variety of incredibly difficult ways. But God, always sovereign over all, limits Satan’s authority. He can destroy his prosperity and family, but he cannot touch Job personally.

LOSS OF PROSPERITY AND FAMILY

Satan is anything but inept at his work. He does not attack Job in stages allowing Job time to recover after each attack. Instantaneously, Satan destroyed all that Job and his wife possessed. Their pain was excruciating; their loss, unimaginable.

Yet, Job responds with one of the greatest statements of faith in all Scripture: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21.) Job was not a fatalist, stoic, or tough guy who could take a punch. Although his pain is apparent by the tearing of his garments and by the emotion of his statements, Job did not charge God recklessly. Instead, Job recognizes that God gave him everything and that He was the source of all his blessing. He came into this world with nothing, and he would leave this world with nothing. Anything acquired during his life was by God’s blessing alone. Certainly, he was in great agony. He acknowledged God’s goodness even in tragedy. Job’s thankfulness characterized his trust and reliance upon the Lord.

LOSS OF HEALTH

Job, and apparently his wife, admirably overcame the first trial by relying upon the goodness of God, but now the second trial comes: the loss of health. “Skin or skin,” says the accuser of the brethren, “Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life” (2:4). God allows Satan to take away Job’s health, but again with limits—Satan cannot kill

him. This limit, of course, is unknown to Job or to those around him; only we as the readers know what is going on. Both he and they believe that his death was near. And now even Job's wife, who apparently exercised remarkable faith in the first trial, suffers a setback. As she watches the persistent suffering of her husband scraping himself with a piece of broken pottery time and time again with great intensity to seek relief from the boils, she advises him, in a momentary lapse of faith, to abandon God and to end it all (2:9). Job's gentle rebuke indicates that she was not speaking like herself. He responds with another gem of faith, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (2:10). Job's faith was not a fair-weathered faith. He relied on God in good times and in bad times. His was a faith that endures to the end. Job again did not sin with his lips. Finally, his friends come with the best of intentions to comfort and support Job in his time of need. Unfortunately for Job, Satan will use them as his last tool to increase Job's misery and to drive Job away from his God.

2. JOB: HIS PROBLEM

Persistent suffering affects our mind and body. Though in great pain and believing death imminent, Job vacillates between faith and doubt in the Lord. Having observed persistent suffering at hospital visitations, I have seen this wavering of the mind between faith and doubt. One moment, the afflicted express great faith, the next moment, great doubt. Such suffering changes the emotional state, which in turn, affects the personality. The Job of chapter three seems a different person from the Job of the first two chapters, but not completely so. His great faith returns from time to time, but now Job, his body wasting away and his mind racked by pain and loss, expresses doubt and confusion. And most disturbing, Job, and his friends, all believe that calamities and tragedies were judgments of God because of sin, and that prosperity and blessing were one-for-one rewards because of a person's righteousness. Though hav-

ing many problems, for Job this is the problem.

Knowing his own innocence, Job is tormented with the problem of his suffering. Job, to be sure, denies his own perfection (13:26), but he also knows that he has not sinned to deserve this misery. To make matter worse, Job's friends, who come to comfort him, accuse and condemn him as a sinner. At first, Eliphaz appeals to Job's own example of admonishing and strengthening the weak (4:3-5). Having reminded Job of his fear of God and of his integrity (4:6), he gets to the point: you reap what you sow. "Whoever perished being innocent," states Eliphaz (4:7), "or where were the upright destroyed?" Eliphaz references the universal sinfulness of man, "Can man be pure before his Maker"? (4:17) Why God even charges his angels with error, he then presses home his point, "How much more those who dwell in houses of clay" (4:17-19). Eliphaz now reminds Job that "affliction does not come from the dust" (5:6). In short, your affliction is not happenstance; it comes from sin! Finally, Eliphaz calls on Job to repent, "But as for me, I would seek God." He assures Job that if he repented, God would bring relief and redeem him from all his troubles, so that even nature would be at peace with him, "For your covenant will be with the stones of the field" (5:8-23).

But Job cannot deny his conscience. He knows that he has not done what his friends and others think about him and think he has done before God. This burdens Job with yet another trial—the trial of false accusation and judgment. Job realizes his sinfulness, he even recognizes the rashness of his words (6:3), but he cannot understand what God is doing and why He is doing it to him. As the positions harden between Job and his friends, and as his friends continue to insist that God's ways against sinners are easily verifiable, Job words become more rash. In weak moments, he questions the providence of God. It seems that God destroys the wicked and the righteous (9:22). Indeed, the wicked at times do prosper (21:7-34). And though God knows of Job's innocence, God's hand is still heavy on Job (10:7). Job feels as if God has wronged him (19:6).

Job's words are only more evidence of guilt to his friends. "Your own iniquity teaches your mouth," declares Eliphaz, "and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth declares you guilty, and not I. Your own lips answer against you" (15:5-6). As Job spoke in his weakened condition, his friends showed no compassion or understanding to their suffering friend (6:14). They continue to press for his confession and repentance. The frustration and anger between Job and his friends increases. But Job will not relent.

The anger reaches a climax as the friends take their argument to its logical conclusion. If Job is suffering for his sin, and if he is suffering like no other man, then his sin or sins must be most heinous. And if Job still refuses to confess, his friends will inform him of his sins. Based solely on his own deductions from Job's sufferings, Eliphaz catalogues Job's endless sins: a taker of pledges from the poor, a withholder of food and water from the dying, an oppressor of the widow and orphan (22:5-11). He drinks up iniquity like water (15:16). This is libel. When the young man Elihu speaks later, he piles on more accusations of Job walking in the company of the wicked and of Job drinking up mockery (of God) like water (34:7-8). Job is insulted and hurt (19:2-3). His friends have brought only further trial and torment. Job returns the insults, calling them sorry comforters (16:2). He sarcastically claims that wisdom will die when they die (12:2). The situation has become personal. He compares their comfort to a wadi whose waters are gone in a moment, disappointing those who hope for waters (6:15). Neither side will yield. Job's problem remains.

3. JOB: HIS FAITH

But Job's faith also remains. Like a ship beaten and tossed about in the storm, Job's faith is holding against all odds and against all adversaries: the flesh, the Devil, the world, and his friends. God, having begun a good work in Job, will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Though many have forsaken God because of their troubles,

Job's faith is saving faith, the faith that overcomes all—including problems our minds cannot solve. Job takes consolation that he has not denied the word of the Holy One and that he has not forsaken the fear of the Almighty (6:10, 14). Job's faith in God will remain though he loses his life, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him" (13:15). Job knows that there is only One who can testify to his integrity, "Behold, my witness is in heaven, and my advocate is on high" (16:19). Job also knows that he has walked in God's ways, and he knows that when testing is over, whether in this life or in the next life, he will come forth as gold (23:10). Though his faith waxes and wanes and though his problem remains, his faith is the victory.

Job achieves this victory of faith in chapter 19, his lowest point. All sources of comfort and support are gone for him. His wife loathes his breath. His brothers are removed from him. His old servants treat him as a stranger. The children in the streets despise him. His friends have abandoned him (19:13-19). He even feels abandoned by God. "He breaks me down on every side," complains Job, "and I am gone, and He has uprooted my hope like a tree" (19:10). He appears hopeless. But Job, who against hope believed in hope, turns to his God. As if his mind switches again from doubt to faith, Job now expresses another great statement of faith. "As for me," declares Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25). But this is no ordinary relative who can "buy back" Job from some financial or personal difficulty. On the contrary, "And at the end He will take His stand on the earth," exclaims Job, "Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God, whom I myself shall behold" (19:25-27). Job recognizes that God may not vindicate him in this life, but God will vindicate him yet. Even if it comes at the resurrection, his own eye will see his Redeemer, his Vindicator. Job has faith, not an inane, vague notion of positive thinking—a faith in faith. Like all saving faith, Job's faith has an object upon which it relies. Job's faith, trust, and reliance focuses *upon God*, his Redeemer (and, of course, the only Redeemer of the Lord's people is the Lord

Jesus Christ). He believes, against all odds, that whether in this life or in the life to come, His divine Redeemer lives and that He will vindicate him. This is the victory that overcomes the world.

4. JOB: HIS GOD

After Elihu speaks of the storm coming in the distance, God appears in that storm. Speaking out of the whirlwind, God begins to interrogate Job. Job wanted his day in court, and now he is getting it with God beginning the questioning. Does Job, asks God, understand any of My ways in creation? Well, if not that subject, how about nature in general? And if not that, pick your topic—the seas, light or darkness, the rain cycle, constellations, the animal kingdom, or anything else? God concludes, “Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it.” Although Job now has his chance he wanted, he has no questions and no answers. “Behold,” says Job, “I am insignificant; what can I reply to you”? (40:2-4) Now Job, who was previously self-confident in his complaint and arguments against God’s treatment of him, abandons his self-dependence. Job now completely trusts in God and God alone. But God is not finished working in Job’s heart, He resumes the questioning, asking about the Behemoth and Leviathan, awe-inspiring creatures. Job again remains silence. This time, however, he repents in dust and ashes.

But why repent? If we were questioned about nature and missed the answer, we would not repent. This is something far greater than a history lesson. God is revealing His infinite perfections and character to Job, in particular, His infinite wisdom and power. As God, or more precisely as Christ, appears to Job in the whirlwind and talks to Job, Job perceives the divine perfections. Job sees God, not with the physical eye (the invisible God is in the whirlwind), but with the eye of the soul or with the eye of faith. “I have heard of you,” now asserts Job, “by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (42:5). It is as if formerly Job merely *knew of or about* God, but now he *knows* him. Certainly, Job had known God formerly, but

his recent experience—both in his suffering and in his seeing God—led Job into a far greater knowledge of and relationship with God that seemed to make the former experience a mere hearing about Him. It is the difference between hearing about someone and having a close personal relationship with someone, the difference between knowing something merely with the head and knowing something with the heart. It is theoretical knowledge versus experiential knowledge.

Repentance was inevitable. He now understood that God is perfect in all His ways. His wisdom is infinitely perfect; therefore, His plan for Job (and for us) is infinitely perfect. Job’s understanding of God and his faith in God, though excellent in so many ways, was too small, too limited. Since his mind could not understand God’s ways from beginning to end, Job’s faith faltered. But now Job *knew* God. And although he still could not comprehend God’s ways with him, he could trust Him and His infinite wisdom in spite of his own finite understanding and knowledge. Job now wondered how he could have thought about God as he did. “Therefore,” says Job, “I have declared that which I did not understand. Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (42:3).

Now God’s work was complete in the great man of faith. God had refined and increased Job’s faith, though he was the most faithful man of his day. God had expanded Job’s knowledge of Himself, their personal relationship was now far deeper, though he was closer to God than any man of his day. And finally, God made Job an example for all who come after him, though he was already God’s example in his own day. We will never arrive at perfection in this life. If Job, as the most godly man, could advance in faith by relying upon the Lord alone, so can we. Job lived by faith and not by sight. He relied upon God—not his friends, not his family, not his relatives, and especially, not himself. So must we if we are to live like Christians and not like the world.

If we are to advance in faith, we need the same vision of God that Job experienced. While God

probably will never speak to us out of a whirlwind, we have a more sure word: the Bible. As read and mediated upon with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, the Bible increases our faith to rely upon God. From His word, we need to see Him and His infinite perfections, so that when the difficult day comes—and it will—we might follow in the steps of that great trailblazer of the faith: Job.

CONCLUSION

The Apostle James tells us, “Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2). We do not usually think this way. We usually attempt to avoid trials at all costs. But those who live by faith understand that such trials provide the opportunity to rely upon God and to exercise and strengthen their faith. Such trials can bring certainty to our faith in God as He answers our prayers, as He guides us in life, and as He sup-

plies our needs and requests to Him. Indeed, as we live by faith, God becomes the *Living* God by demonstrating His presence in our lives. May we look to the perfect One, whose word is life, whose way is sure and just, and whose redemption in Jesus Christ is our only hope.

ENDNOTE

¹Some modern interpreters of the book of Job deny that the Satan of Job is the Satan of the New Testament. The Satan of Job, however, demonstrates the same character of the Satan of the New Testament: a liar and slanderer, a tempter of the godly, the destroyer, and the great adversary of the saints. Moreover, Peter’s allusion (1 Pet 5:8) to the book of Job (Job 1:7) when referring to Satan, “Your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion *walks about seeking* someone to *devour*,” settles the issue. This Satan is best viewed as the Satan of the New Testament.

Navigating Life in a World that has Been Scarred by the Fall: Reflections on Ecclesiastes 9:7–10 and Living in a World of Suffering

Robert V. McCabe

Qohelet's¹ world, like ours, is marred by the curse and suffering. As he takes us on a journey to discover meaning and purpose in life, he observes many results of the Fall, such as suffering, tragedy, and death. In 4:1 he notes an example of suffering: "Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them."² This situation is so gripping that Qohelet responds to it by extolling the dead who

had already died as "more fortunate than the living who are still alive" (4:2). Another result of the curse is the tragic situations that weigh heavily on Qohelet. He observes, in 7:15 and 8:14, that sometimes the righteous receive what the wicked deserve and vice versa. Further, death entered the created realm with the curse in Genesis 3. This prominent intruder has a major impact on Qohelet's worldview. In

a different context than 4:2, Qohelet pictures this invader in 9:4 like this: "he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion" (also see 2:14–17; 6:6; 8:8; 9:2–3, 5–6; 12:1–7).³ While everyone faces suffering and tragedy in varying degrees, all encounter death.

With the dialectical design of Ecclesiastes serving as a reflection of the nature of this world, suffering and death are contrasted with life. With Qohelet's poem on time in 3:1–8, the contrast between life and death is highlighted as the first of fourteen polarized subjects: "a time to be born, and a time to die" (v. 2). This contrast between life and death is also seen in 6:3–5 where the stillborn are better off than the living since they do not experience the misfortunes of life. The death and life motifs are key aspects of Qohelet's overall tension between a negative and a positive view of life. This pessimistic aspect of Ecclesiastes is tied to Qohelet's overall theme found in 1:2: "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity." The optimistic facet, however, is linked to the *carpe diem*, or enjoyment-of-life, passages ("there is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in

Robert V. McCabe is Professor of Old Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, Michigan where he has served since 1983.

He received his Th.D. from Grace Theological Seminary in 1985. Dr. McCabe has regularly contributed academic articles and book reviews to the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*. He is also the author of a chapter in *Coming to Grips with Genesis* (New Leaf Publishing Group, 2008).

his toil,” 2:24a).⁴ On the surface, Qohelet’s negative conclusions about life seem to contradict his positive ones and vice versa. Is Qohelet confused or is there a deeper unity in his thought that allows us to reconcile these seemingly antithetical conclusions? And if so, then what does he have to teach us about living in a world marred by the Fall, sin, suffering and death?

The conclusion one reaches regarding Qohelet’s overall message has significant ramifications for Ecclesiastes’s place in biblical theology. That is, if the substance of the book is negative, as the *hebel* (“vanity”) refrain may connote, this indicates that Ecclesiastes should be viewed as a foil to the other books in the canon.⁵ If a celebratory note controls the book’s basic message, however, as the *carpe diem* passages may suggest, this indicates that Ecclesiastes has normative value for God’s people with an impact on how to live.⁶ Because Ecclesiastes 9:7–10 develops the *carpe diem* motif in connection with the *hebel* theme of death, the purpose of this article is to examine this passage and to explain how these verses relate to the message of Ecclesiastes as we draw lessons on how to live as God’s people “under the sun.”

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

Ecclesiastes 9:7–10 occurs in a section of the book that extends from 9:1 to 11:6. This section emphasizes man’s inability to understand God’s providence.⁷ The book’s sixth use of the enjoyment-of-life motif⁸ is the focal point of the unit contained in 9:1–12. The use of “man does not know” (*‘en yodhea’ ha’dham*) in 9:1 and again, with a minor variation in the Hebrew text, “man does not know” (*lo’yedha’ ha’dham*) in 9:12 forms an *inclusio*, an envelope construction. The utilization of *miqreh* (“[everyone shares the same] fate”) in 9:2 and its cognate verb *yiqreh* (“[time and chance] happen [to all of them]”) in 9:11 further demonstrates the tight construction of 9:1–12.⁹ This pericope further subdivides into three subsections: vv. 1–6, 7–10, and 11–12. “Whether love or hate” (*gam’ahavah gam-sin’ah*) in v. 1 and a slightly modified repetition of it in v. 6, “their love, their hate” (*gam’ahavatham gam-sin’atham*), reveal the closely

bound nature of vv. 1–6. The subject of the first six verses is the inevitability of death for all men.¹⁰ Qohelet responds to the inevitability of death with a series of commands in vv. 7–10 that develop his most comprehensive statement on celebrating life. The imperative nature of these four verses sets them apart from vv. 1–6 and vv. 11–12. Further, while the content of vv. 11–12 is different than vv. 7–10, its textual connections with vv. 1–2 bind it to the unit as a whole. As with the emphasis in vv. 1–6 on death, vv. 11–12 return to the same subject. Verses 11–12 vary the emphasis of vv. 1–6 with an accent on the unpredictability of death. Verses 7–10 are infixed between the two set of verses and serve as a focal point of vv. 1–12. This unit reflects the following chiastic arrangement.

- A The inevitability of death, vv. 1–6
- B Enjoying life as a response to death’s certainty, vv. 7–10
- A1 The unpredictability of death, vv. 11–12

As the above chiastic arrangement illustrates, vv. 7–10 are the core of the pericope. In addition, these verses, like the other six *carpe diem* passages, commend the celebration of life, despite living in a fallen world. In the previous five passages, Qohelet presents his recommendation with comparative statements.¹¹ In this text he strengthens his strategy by using a series of imperatives to urge the enjoyment of life. Further, this four-verse unit reflects a threefold structure. Each unit contains one or more imperatives followed by a *ki* (“for,” “because”) clause. The verse breakdown looks like this.

- V. 7: Three commands (“go,” “eat,” “drink”) + *ki* clause (“for God...”)
- Vv. 8–9: Three commands (“let ... be white,” “let not oil,” “enjoy life”) + *ki* clause (“because that is...”)
- V. 10: One command (“do it”) + *ki* clause (“for there is no...”)¹²

This structure provides the framework for my discussion of the text.

V. 7: ENJOYING FOOD AND DRINK

“Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.”

Looking past the interjectory use of the imperative “go,” Qohelet uses two commands for eating and drinking. Finding satisfaction in what one eats and drinks was previously commended in four earlier passages: 2:24, 3:13, 5:18–19 (Heb. vv. 17–18), and 8:15. In this context two objects are added, namely, “bread,” (*lehem*), and “wine,” (*yayin*). The Hebrew noun *lehem* refers to grain used to make bread. *Yayin* was used at meals by both laborer (2 Chr 29:10, 15 [Heb. vv. 9, 14]) and governor (Neh 5:15, 18). Bread and wine are positively used together in other Old Testament passages. For example, Melchizedek brought both to the victorious Abram in Genesis 14:18. Jesse sent his son David to Saul with a donkey carrying bread and a skin of wine (1 Sam 16:2). To appease David’s wrath against her husband, Abigail sent David bread and skins of wine in 1 Samuel 25:18.¹³ In Psalm 104:15 bread and wine are used to fortify and bring joy to man’s heart. In our immediate text, the prepositional phrases that qualify the command to eat bread and to drink wine, “with joy” and “with a merry heart,” reflect the celebratory nature of both commands.

The *ki*, “for,” clause provides a basis for the preceding commands. The verb translated as “approved,” *rasah*, indicates that God has taken pleasure in “what you do.” The LORD is the subject of *rasah*, to “take pleasure in,” in the Qal stem some 28 times in the OT.¹⁴ At times, he takes pleasure in people (Ps 44:3 [Heb. v. 4]), with Zerubbabel’s Temple (Hag 1:8), and the deeds of men (Deut 33:11), and, in this text, with “what you do.” On the surface, this seemingly sounds like God takes pleasure in anything people may do.¹⁵ However, if we interpret v. 7b in its overall context, that cannot be the meaning.¹⁶ To clarify the contextual meaning of v. 7b, four observations are helpful. First, as with the other enjoyment-of-life passages, this one has a strong theocentric perspective, with God as

the subject of this clause. Each of the exhortations commending the celebration of life not only has a focus on enjoying life but also on God. In 2:24, 3:13, and 8:15 God bestows the gifts of satisfaction in food, drink, and labor. In 3:22, man’s satisfaction with his work is a God-ordained allotment in life. In 5:18–20 God enables man to enjoy his wealth and possessions. While Qohelet, in 11:9, exhorts young people to enjoy their youth, he balances this exhortation by the reality that “for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” In short, God’s sovereignty over this fallen world is not only a controlling factor in our immediate passage, but also in the other enjoyment-of-life passages.

Second, the adverb “already” (*kevar*) qualifies “has approved.” This adverb, used nine times in Ecclesiastes, reflects that God has previously approved “what you do.”¹⁷ From the specific context of vv. 7–10, this phrase refers to the divine gifts. Because this passage is similar to 5:18 (Heb. v. 17) with its focus on one enjoying God’s gifts, “already” may refer to what “God has decreed from the beginning.”¹⁸ This is to say, one is able to enjoy these gifts because God has ordained this enjoyment.

Third, “you” in “what you do” (*ma’aseyka*), a second masculine singular pronominal suffix, agrees with the three previous imperatives in this verse. The referents of the personal pronoun are those who savingly fear God, the people of God. In Ecclesiastes, they are more explicitly referred to as those who are pleasing in his sight (2:26; 7:26), who fear him (8:12; 12:13), “the righteous,” “the wise,” “the clean,” and “the good” (9:1, 2). These are the ones who temper their enjoyment of life with the knowledge that God holds them accountable for their deeds in his future judgment (11:9). The people of God can judiciously enjoy life as God has enabled them (5:19 [Heb. 5:18]; 6:2).¹⁹

Fourth, “what you do” has been interpreted in two different ways. Initially, this phrase may be taken as a reference to God’s delight in the righteous activities of the godly. Because of their righteousness, God guides them to the enjoyment of his gifts.²⁰ This fits the overall context of 9:1–10

since the righteous and their deeds were introduced in v. 1. As mentioned in earlier enjoyment-of-life passages, God grants his gifts to those who are “good in his sight” with similar statements in 2:24; 3:12; 7:26.²¹ Another interpretation of “what you do” is that it refers to God’s will being explicitly located in enjoying his largesse rather than in whatever we want.²² It is likely that Qohelet’s argument, as Martin Shields rightly notes, “is that, if life is enjoyable, it is only because God has allowed it to be so, and if God has so permitted it then presumably God is favorably disposed toward those who can enjoy life.”²³ While both views make contextual sense of 9:1–10, the latter view fits the immediate context of v. 7.

If this pericope stopped with v. 7, it would be an exhortation to enjoy the routine gifts of eating and drinking, like the preceding enjoyment-of-life passages. However, Qohelet adds some additional gifts in vv. 8–9.

VV. 8-9: NICE CLOTHES, OIL, AND ONE’S WIFE

“Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.⁹ Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.”

Qohelet gives three commands in vv. 8–9: “let [your garments] be white,” “let [not oil] be lacking,” and “enjoy.” While the third command is an imperative, the first two are jussive forms used as commands. Each of these commands extols the enjoyment of new elements in Ecclesiastes: garments being white, no deficiency of oil, and enjoying life with one’s wife. The first exhorts one to always wear garments that are “white,” *levanim*, with this adjective denoting brightness.²⁴ “The white garments,” according to Delitzsch, “are in contrast to the black robes of mourning, and thus are an expression of festal joy, of a happy mood.”²⁵ The significance of the adverb “always,” *bekol-’eth*, is that whenever possible a believer should wear

clothes expressive of a joyful mood.²⁶ The second command focuses on regularly anointing one’s head with oil. While oil was used in the ancient Near East to fight the injurious consequences of the scorching heat,²⁷ it was also associated with joy in Psalm 45:7, as here. The commands in this verse about white clothing and oil, like other *carpe diem* passages in Ecclesiastes, presuppose that Qohelet derives his theology from the early chapters of Genesis. “Ecclesiastes and Genesis,” as Johnston writes, “exhibit substantial agreement as to the central point of the creation motif—that life is to be celebrated as a ‘good’ creation of God.”²⁸

The final command in v. 9a is to enjoy life with one’s beloved wife. Three aspects of this command require more explanation. To start with, the antecedent of “he” in the subordinate clause, “he has given you,” is God, just as he was in the *ki* clause of v. 7. Again, this asserts a strong theocentric perspective. In his sovereign control God grants man a “wife” (Gen 2:24).

Second, “wife,” *’ishshah*, could also be translated as “woman.” An argument supporting this rendering is drawn from “woman” being anarthrous.²⁹ However, there are verses in the Old Testament where the anarthrous use of *’ishshah* refers to a wife: Genesis 21:21; 24:3; 30:4, 7; and Leviticus 20:14.³⁰ Because Qohelet’s argument is based on a theology of creation, this provides solid support for taking this as a reference to one’s wife. As Bartholomew states, “Once we realize that the *carpe diem* vision is rooted in a theology of creation, then the case for this woman being one’s wife is compelling. Thus v. 9a is a positive affirmation of marriage that is to be fully enjoyed in all its dimensions.”³¹

Finally, the precision of the ESV’s translation of *hebel* as “vain” (“all the days of your vain life”) requires further examination.³² Some English versions, such as the KJV, NKJV, RSV, and NRSV, translate *hebel* in Ecclesiastes 9:9 the same way as the ESV. In distinction from the translation of “vain,” the NIV and NLT render this word as “meaningless.” And the NASB, CEV, NET, and HCSB take it as “fleeting,” though each version adopts a basic

meaning for this term as “vanity,” “nonsense” (or an equivalent), or “futility.”³³ In distinction from these English versions, Ogden and Bartholomew have argued that a core meaning for *hebel* in Ecclesiastes, including 9:9, is something along the lines of “enigmatic” or “mysterious.”³⁴ Though I am not convinced that any one word in English precisely corresponds to *hebel*, I concur with the translation of this term as “enigmatic,” or a similar expression, since in Ecclesiastes it most closely approximates the required sense of this Hebrew word in its overall context. This understanding requires clarification by providing an overview of the Hebrew noun *hebel* and then integrating it into my interpretation of its use in 9:9.³⁵

First, *hebel*’s placement in Ecclesiastes indicates that it is the subject of this book. After an introduction in 1:1, Qohelet provides a sweeping generalization in 1:2, “*Hebel* of *hebels*, says Qohelet, *hebel* of *hebels*, all is *hebel*.” Qohelet’s placement of this term at the inception of the book is where we might expect an author to place his subject. His catchword *hebel* is used five times in this verse. That this is the subject is further confirmed by the fact that Qohelet concludes his work with three uses of *hebel* in 12:8, with twenty-nine or thirty other uses.³⁶ The noun *hebel* is used in the Hebrew Bible seventy-three times with thirty-seven or thirty-eight of these occurrences in Ecclesiastes. The literal meaning of *hebel* is “vapor, breath.” It also has a metaphorical use denoting what is “evanescent, unsubstantial, worthless, vanity.”³⁷ Beyond Ecclesiastes the employment of *hebel* as a metaphor often denotes something that is vain or has no value.³⁸

The metaphorical rendering of *hebel*, however, is not limited to something having no value. This is illustrated by the Septuagint’s translation of Ecclesiastes with its rendering of this word as *mataiotes*, “emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness.”³⁹ Since the Greek term includes the nuance of “transitoriness,” it allows for a broader use than a strictly pessimistic sense.⁴⁰ However, the dominance of the derogatory sense of *hebel* goes back

to Jerome, who translated it with *vanitas*, “unsubstantial or illusory quality, emptiness, falsity, and untruthfulness.”⁴¹ Since Jerome’s day the majority of translations have rendered *hebel* with “vanity.” Currently, “vanity,” as well as similar pejorative renderings, is found in many English translations.

However, a few versions, such as NASB, CEV, HCSB, and NET, use multiple renderings of *hebel*, ranging from “vanity” to “futility” as a primary use, while employing “fleeting” in a few contexts like 9:9. With the multiple-word approach, “fleeting,” or another equivalent term, has some appeal. However, the multiple renditions of *hebel* as found in a few versions are a problem. More specifically, it is a problem in the contexts where *hebel* is defined as part of the “all is *hebel*” assessment of 1:2 and 12:8. If Qohelet announces in 1:2 and 12:8 that “all is *hebel*” and then describes the specifics of the “all” and evaluates these as *hebel*, then it must have a common nuance throughout Ecclesiastes.⁴² This has also been noted by Fredericks, who has perceptively observed that it is an error “to see distinct spheres of meaning for the word and to select the correct one for each context, ending in a multifarious description of reality that is contrary to a significant purpose for the unifying and generalizing agenda of Qoheleth—‘everything is breath.’”⁴³

As noted above, I am persuaded that a case can be made for rendering *hebel* as “enigmatic” or an equivalent expression. I will briefly present three arguments that support this understanding. (1) The phrase “striving after wind,” *re’uth ruah*, serves as a qualifier of *hebel*. This is seen in Ecclesiastes 1:14: “All is vanity and a striving after wind.” The phrase also occurs in Ecclesiastes 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9. “Striving after wind” could also be rendered as “shepherding the wind.” Either phrase pictures an attempt to do the impossible: control the wind.⁴⁴ “A man may determine or make up his mind,” as H. Carl Shanks maintains, “to accomplish something eternally significant in a creation subjected to vanity, yet no matter how hard he tries Qoheleth tells him it will be a fruitless endeavor. A man in his toil ‘under the sun’ grasps after the

wind and attains precious little for all his labor.”⁴⁵ In short, this qualifying phrase lends support for taking *hebel* as “enigmatic.”

(2) Specific contexts evaluated as *hebel* also support taking this word as “enigmatic.” Though other contexts could be added,⁴⁶ I will make note of two such scenarios: 3:16–19 and 8:14. In 3:16–19 Qohelet, expecting to find justice finds wickedness instead: “I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness (3:16).” We should note that the legal setting is emphasized by parallel nature of “the place of justice” and “the place of righteousness.” Further, his disappointment and vexation are expressed by the repetition of “there was wickedness.” If wickedness is found in the very place that God has set up to execute justice, evil must pervade all the other places of life in this sin-cursed world. The repetition of “I said in my heart” at the beginning of v. 17 and v. 18 reflects a twofold response to this vexing situation. First, Qohelet initially provides an orthodox response in v. 17. Though not in this life, God will ultimately judge people according to their righteousness or wickedness.⁴⁷ Second, he provides a perplexing response in vv. 18–19. God uses the pervasiveness of evil to demonstrate to people that they have a common mortality with beasts and will die just like them. Though eventually all die, this second response often leaves the issue of injustice unresolved for those living “under the sun.”⁴⁸ In v. 19 Qohelet evaluates this frustrating situation as *hebel*. As Qohelet states earlier in this chapter, God has given people a sense of eternity in their hearts, yet they “cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (3:11). In this context the noun *hebel* “is the vehicle,” according to Ogden, “chosen to draw attention to an enigmatic situation, a theological conundrum.”⁴⁹ In 8:14 Qohelet describes a setting where a righteous person receives what the wicked should get; and the wicked what the righteous should receive. This situation conflicts with the common understanding of retribution dogma

stressing that righteous people are rewarded for their virtuous lifestyles and the wicked are judged for their evil lifestyles. Because our author cannot comprehend this situation, he is vexed and also assesses it as *hebel*.

Both 3:16–19 and 8:14 have a theocentric perspective. And, each passage is in a context that also contains a *carpe diem* text (3:22; 8:15). As a result, the *hebel* assessment in each text does not have a strictly negative sense such as “vanity.” Further, the issues described in both passages, the pervasiveness of wickedness (3:16–19) and the reversal of the retribution doctrine, are not temporary. Qohelet, in both contexts, affirms that God providentially controls all aspects of life with their appointed times, but recognizes that divine providence is veiled. Since the righteous and the wicked are under God’s control and his providence is shrouded, no one can comprehend the activity done “under the sun” (8:17). These texts provide further support for interpreting *hebel* as “enigmatic.”

(3) In Ecclesiastes Qohelet recounts his search for meaning and purpose in life. His pursuit was to gain insight into life’s meaning. When he recounts in 1:13 that he applied his heart to explore with wisdom everything done “under the sun,” he reflects the epistemological nature of his search. Further, his exploration was not random but a comprehensive quest that examined all the facets of life occurring “under the sun,” “under heaven,” or “on earth.”⁵⁰ A few examples stress the cognitive dimension of his rigorous quest. He observes “everything that is done under the sun” (1:14); wisdom and understanding (1:16); madness and folly (2:12); labor produced by rivalry (4:4); riches hurting the one who possesses them (5:13); injustice in the halls of justice (3:16); one whom God has not enabled to enjoy his wealth (6:1–2); and, retribution violating a strict cause and effect relationship (7:15). These are various aspects of “all is *hebel*” (1:2; 12:8).

In his search for the meaning of life, Qohelet is also perplexed because he sees the disparities of divine providence and cannot figure them out. In

addition, because he is unable to comprehend the work of God (3:11; 7:14; 8:17), he often communicates his vexation, adding an emotive element to his search. As he diligently uses his wisdom to study everything done under heaven, he states that it was an “unhappy business” (1:13). When evaluating, in 2:11, what he achieved with the pleasure-seeking experiment brought him no gain. Qohelet hates life in 2:17 because the work done “under the sun” was a grief to him. In 4:7–8 Qohelet observes how work was unsatisfying when a man has no one to share it with. He specifically identifies all these scenarios as *hebel* (1:14; 2:11, 17; 4:7, 8). It is these types of situations that reflect the incomprehensible nature of life.

With his investigation, Qohelet saw the unresolved tensions of a world that had been cursed by the Fall and which results in plenty of suffering. Nevertheless, even in the midst of this kind of world, he could also commend the enjoyment of life because God in common grace upheld aspects of his creational design. Qohelet’s tension arises from the perplexing conflicts between both aspects of creation. As a godly sage, Qohelet “could affirm,” as Caneday states, “both the aimlessness of life ‘under the sun’ and the enjoyment of life precisely because he believed in the God who cursed his creation on account of man’s rebellion, but who was in the process, throughout earth’s history, of redeeming man and creation.”⁵¹ All of this suggests that the use of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes relates to the issue of man’s inability to comprehend the activities done “under the sun.”⁵²

As this relates to Ecclesiastes 9:9, Qohelet’s use of *hebel* reinforces the book’s focus on the puzzling nature of life. As such, he exhorts his male audience to enjoy life with their beloved wives during their perplexing days on earth.⁵³

The *ki*, “because,” clause gives a reason for vv. 8–9a. The antecedent of the subject, “it” (*hu’*), is the preceding advantages: garments being white, no deficiency of oil, and enjoying life with one’s wife. The predicate nominative for the subject is *heleq*, “portion.” *Heleq* appears in the Old Testa-

ment sixty-nine times, with eight of its uses in Ecclesiastes. Outside of this book, *heleq* may refer to a portion of plunder (Gen 14:24), an inheritance (Gen 31:14), and a plot of land (Num 18:20).⁵⁴ In Ecclesiastes, it is used to describe satisfaction from the benefits of one’s labor and from the divine gifts (2:10, 21; 3:22; 5:18, 19 [Heb. vv. 17, 18]; 9:9; 11:2). In contrast to 9:6, where the dead no longer have any “portion,” *heleq*, in what is done “under the sun,” *heleq*, in 9:9, is used in reference to one’s life and labor prior to death: “in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.” This is to say, Qohelet contrasts his positive portion in v. 9 with the enigmatic nature of the lack of a “portion” in death (v. 6).

With Qohelet’s theology being derived from the early chapters of Genesis he has provided specifics for enjoying life in vv. 7–9, even though he is fully aware of the difficulties of living in a fallen world. Based on this theology, he makes a more general appeal in the following verse.

V. 10: LIVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”

Unlike the units in v. 7 and vv. 8–9, v. 10 has only one command: “do.” This command is to accomplish “whatever your hand finds to do.” Further, this task should be pursued “with your might.” This is to say, one should wholeheartedly pursue the divinely approved activities of this life. The phrase “whatever your hand finds to do” might be viewed as a reference to engaging in anything one desires.⁵⁵ However, the context of v. 10 prohibits this type of interpretation, as we saw in v. 7. In the phrase “whatever your hand finds to do,” the “hand,” *yadh*, and “finding,” *matsa’*, picture someone having the sufficiency or ability to accomplish something.⁵⁶ In the context of Ecclesiastes it means that, as God enables people (6:2), they should pursue the specifics of what is detailed in the *carpe diem* passages (eating, drinking, working along with the benefits from it, and wisdom).⁵⁷ As

the last half of v. 10 implies, one should diligently pursue life with intelligence and wisdom. Though Qohelet lived in a world that had been cursed by the Fall, and in which we all experience trials and difficulties, he also could commend enthusiastic activity because he understood that God was also preserving an aspect of his creational design. As such, v. 10a does not imply a cynicism towards life. However, Qohelet has more to say with the *ki* clause in v. 10b.

The *ki*, “for,” clause provides motivation for enthusiastic living: death will bring life to an end. Four aspects of earthly life are lost at death: “work,” “thought,” “knowledge,” and “wisdom.” While the living have capacities to enjoy life, prospects for rewards, and opportunities for planning, the dead can no longer experience these earthly benefits. Qohelet was not explaining, in the words of Glenn, “what the state of the dead *is*; he was stating what it is *not*. He did this to emphasize the lost opportunities of the present life, opportunities for serving God and enjoying His gifts.”⁵⁸

Highlighting the state of the dead as a motivation for living wholeheartedly, we should note that the concept of death in v. 10b is related to *Sheol*. According to this verse, Qohelet’s audience was destined for *Sheol*, perhaps the underworld. While the ESV, along with the NKJV, NASB, NRSV, and NET, transliterates the Hebrew word, other versions render it as “grave” (so KJV, NIV, and NLT). Arguments can be made to support either translation.⁵⁹ In either case, Qohelet’s motivation for celebrating life is clear: death is the terminus for life “under the sun.”⁶⁰

Ecclesiastes 9:7–10, then, provide an exhortation to its audience to enjoy the divine benefits and to affirm a God-centered approach to life. However, even in an encouraging passage like this, the influence of the curse is still present with the allusion to death in v. 10b. The state of the dead links the verse with the larger context of 9:1–12 and has implications that relate to the whole book. While the author has previously established in 2:14 and 3:19–20, as well as 9:10b, that the same

fate of death awaits every person, he devotes more space to the discussion of death in 9:1–6, 11–12. Though a sage cannot know his future, he knows one truth about his future: the inescapability of death. When vv. 7–10 are set in their immediate context of 9:1–12, this passage reflects the contrast between life and death. How does this antithesis integrate with the book as a whole?

THE ANTITHETICAL NATURE OF ECCLESIASTES

The tension between life and death is reflective of Qohelet’s overall dialectical design in Ecclesiastes.⁶¹ The author recounts how he lives in a paradoxical world that was cursed with unsolvable conflicts and disjointedness, yet he also affirmed that God is renewing creation and man. Because of this mixed fabric of life “under the sun,” he did not craft Ecclesiastes with a logical progression of ideas. Rather his literary masterpiece has a cyclical structure: “The author returns again and again to the same point and often concludes his discussion with the same recurring formulae.”⁶² Qohelet’s cyclical pattern mingles negative and positive themes to mirror the perplexing nature of life. His *modus operandi* is initially to develop a negative subject and then follow it by another with a celebratory note. Why did he mix the two perspectives? Ryken explains:

His mingling of negative and positive is realistic and faithful to the mixed nature of human experience. The technique keeps the reader alert. It also creates the vigor of plot conflict for this collection of proverbs, as the writer lets the two viewpoints clash. The dialectical pattern of opposites is a strategy of highlighting: the glory of a God-centered life stands out all the more brightly for having been contrasted to its gloomy opposite.⁶³

With Qohelet’s dialectical approach, the *hebel* and *carpe diem* passages are the dominant polarizing subjects in the book. Other subjects include the contrast between an enduring cosmos and the

temporal nature of man in 1:4–11, a list of antithetical subjects in 3:1–8, work as an infuriating enigma in 2:11 but in 2:24 it is something to be enjoyed, and justice not being found in the halls of justice in 3:16.

What is specifically pertinent in this paper is Qohelet's struggle with the antithetical nature of life and death in 9:1–12. From a theological perspective, this polarizing nature of life was divinely imposed on the created realm when God judged it with death and destruction. It is this struggle that impacts 9:1–12. However, the author has more to say about this issue. For example, he states that the day of death is better than the day of birth (7:1); however, he also explains that anyone who is living has hope and that a living dog is better than a dead lion (9:4–6). He hates life in 2:17, yet recommends its enjoyment in 2:24–26. In addition, death is no respecter of animate beings. Both man and animals die (3:18–21). Someone may vigorously work to acquire wealth during his lifetime, but he will die like the fool. At death he must leave the benefits from his work, "Just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind" (5:16 [Heb. 5:15]). Like the rest of humanity, the wise man has no power over the timing of his death (8:2–8). Returning to 9:7–10, these verses are antithetical to vv. 1–6 and 11–12. In response to the ever-present nature of death, Qohelet uses a series of imperatives in vv. 7–10, to make a strong case for celebrating life.

As the book of Ecclesiastes recounts the author's consuming pursuit to find meaning and purpose in life, it starts and concludes with "all is enigmatic" (1:2; 12:8). In Ecclesiastes Qohelet recounts his consuming pursuit to find meaning and purpose in life, and he begins and concludes his work with "all is enigmatic" (1:2; 12:8). This search involved his use of experimentation and empirical observations. But Qohelet's interpretation of this data is predicated on his commitment to Israel's wisdom tradition. This tradition explains why Ecclesiastes is permeated with connections to the early chapters of Genesis: creation,

Fall, and redemption. Because of man's finiteness and depravity, the sage's attempt to fully fathom life was marked by one exacerbating turn after another, each ending at an impasse. Qohelet became fully aware that he could not grasp God's work. Yet, as a sage, he embraced his sovereign God who disperses his gifts according to his own good pleasure. In brief, Qohelet designed his book to follow a dialectical pattern showing the many distortions and conflicts in life and the beauty of a God-centered worldview along with his many gifts. Therefore, in its immediate context, 9:7–10 provides a glimpse of the book's overall message for realistically navigating life in a world marred by the curse.

Having looked at the antithetical nature of Ecclesiastes and its connection with 9:7–10, we are in a position to look at this text's function in Ecclesiastes.

THE FUNCTION OF 9:7-10 IN ECCLESIASTES

The function of 9:7–10 and the other enjoyment-of-life passages in Ecclesiastes are an issue of some debate.⁶⁴ Is 9:7–10 an emotional outburst of "wishful thinking," as Anderson contends?⁶⁵ Or is this passage, as well as the other enjoyment-of-life texts, "a concession to human nature"?⁶⁶ Both of these questions reflect a pessimistic view of Ecclesiastes. However, this is not the only way to interpret this text. What role does this passage have in Ecclesiastes? Three explanations of it will be evaluated. Before this evaluation, however, I will briefly summarize the argument of Ecclesiastes.

The subject of Ecclesiastes is found in 1:2 and 12:8: "All is enigmatic." This is to say, Qohelet's message focuses on his inability to comprehend the significance of the activities in this life. His failure is put on display in Ecclesiastes with his perplexing search for meaning and purpose in life. To focus his search, he poses a programmatic question in 1:3: "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" With this question, his topic is exemplified in the issue of labor. This

question simply frames his subject in terms of the dominion mandate of Genesis 1 and 2 where God appointed Adam as a vice-regent to subdue the earth. When Adam disobeyed by eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God judged the first couple and the world over which they presided. With the divinely imposed curse on the land, man's labor became strenuous and frustrating (Gen 3:17–19; cf. Eccl 2:22–23). The noun translated as “gain,” *yitrôn*, is used ten times in Ecclesiastes⁶⁷ and refers to gaining an advantage in life.⁶⁸ As a sage, Qohelet shows how he evaluated wisdom. For instance, in 2:13 he states “there is more gain (*yitrôn*) in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain (*yitrôn*) in light than in darkness.” However, this gain, in 2:14–16, is relative since both the sage and fool die. Wisdom has some advantage in this life but it does not provide an answer to the enigmas of life.

With his search Qohelet portrays how life reflects the curse. He saw how all creation had become twisted by the Fall (Eccl 1:15; 7:13). Yet, in the midst of a disjointed and inexplicable world, Qohelet, as a godly sage, could also see how God began a process of bringing blessing to his creation (see Gen 1:28; 3:15; 9:1, 26–27; 12:2–3). Because he has not rescinded his creational design, the *carpe diem* passages affirm God's presence and extol his gifts. Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 should also be integrated with these texts: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” While the fear of God and keeping his commandment are not explicitly linked in other sections of Ecclesiastes as they are here, both concepts appear in this book. For example, fearing God has been referenced at other places (3:14; 5:7 [Heb. v. 6]; 7:18; 8:12, 13). In addition, true obedience to the Law has also been mentioned (5:1–7 [Heb. 4:17–5:6]; 8:2; 9:2; 12:1) and building one's life on the wisdom outlined in Ecclesiastes.⁶⁹ Factoring in the positive passages with the negative ones, the book's message

may be summarized. In spite of life being filled with unsolvable enigmas and injustices, “life,” as Glenn states, “should not be abandoned or filled with despair. Rather, life should be lived in complete trust in God, be received and enjoyed as a gift from His good hand, and be lived in the light of His future judgment.”⁷⁰

Having summarized the book's argument, a perspective is established to examine the function of 9:7–10 in Ecclesiastes. Though there are a number of options, we will look at a representative for three options that appear in evangelical commentaries.⁷¹

The first view is a resignation to the meaninglessness of life. Since 9:1–12 is dealing with death that has nothing beyond the grave, this implies that life makes no sense.⁷² Death's darkness indicates that life is pointless. As a result, the pleasures of vv. 7–10 are only a concession to this darkness. Longman maintains that,

life is full of trouble and then you die. Some interpreters attempt to mitigate this hard message by appealing to six passages that they interpret as offering a positive view toward life (2:24–26; 3:13–14; 3:22; 5:17–19 [English 5:18–20]; 8:15; 9:7–10). One must admit, however, that Qohelet only suggested a limited type of joy in these passages. Only three areas are specified—eating, drinking, and work. In addition, Qohelet's introduction to pleasure was hardly enthusiastic In the commentary section we will argue that here Qohelet expresses resignation rather than affirmation. Then further, he believed God was the only one who could allow people to experience enjoyment, a situation that brought him no ultimate satisfaction It is more in keeping with the book as a whole to understand these passages as they have been taken through much of the history of interpretation, that is, a call to seize the day (*carpe diem*). In the darkness of a life that has no ultimate meaning, enjoy the temporal pleasures that lighten the burden.⁷³

As Longman's states, 9:7–10 is a *resignation* to the vexing nature of life. In describing 9:1–10, he maintains that these are "among the most clearly pessimistic of the entire book, though its thought has already been encountered ... The only recourse for beings is to eke out whatever enjoyment life offers (vv. 7–10), because there is nothing beyond the grave."⁷⁴

The second view is a celebration of life as a gift from God. According to this view, Qohelet's response to the antithetical nature of life and death is to enjoy God's gifts. One of the leading proponents of this view, Ogden summarizes this reading.

It will be argued in this the commentary to follow that although the *hebel*-phrase occurs in many concluding statements, these are points at which the author answers his own programmatic question. They are not the point at which he offers his advice on how to live in a world plagued by so many enigmas. That advice comes in the reiterated calls to enjoyment in 2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:17 (18); 8:15, as well as 9:7–10. We shall be looking not to a secondary element in the book's framework, but to the climactic statement, the call to enjoyment, as that which puts the thesis of the book. Thus the structure assists in our answering the question of the book's thesis. Its thesis, then, is that life under God must be taken and enjoyed in all its mystery.⁷⁵

In contrast to Longman's view, Ogden maintains that the use of imperatives in 9:7–10 "gives the enjoyment theme in this case a more authoritative cast." He further states, "The pursuit of pleasure, as Qoheleth defines it, is enjoined for the reason that it is a divine gift."⁷⁶

The final view is a celebration of life as the culmination to Ecclesiastes. Recently, Bartholomew has proposed this interpretation. In his commentary he attempts to resolve the conflict between the pessimistic evaluation of the *hebel* passages and the sanguinity of the celebration-of-life texts with the positive resolution prevailing in the last

part of Ecclesiastes. Because his view is of recent vintage, it requires a brief explanation.

Having been influenced by third century BC Greek philosophy, Qohelet's *hebel* conclusions are a result of his autonomous epistemology. These conclusions are in juxtaposition with the joy passages—a reflection of Israelite tradition. The deliberate juxtaposition of both motifs creates gaps for the reader. Ecclesiastes describes Qohelet's journey to resolve these gaps. His trip ends when the deliberately juxtaposed gaps are resolved in 11:8–10 and 12:1–7.⁷⁷ Through most of the first eleven chapters in Ecclesiastes, the author's pattern is to initially draw a *hebel* conclusion with an enjoyment-of-life text immediately following. However, the order is reversed when the enjoyment-of-life passage comes first in 11:8–10 and 12:1–7. Rather than responding to life with an autonomous epistemology, the reversal of both motifs ostensibly fills the gaps by providing the solution to life in an enigmatic world. With this reversal the emphasis of the joy passage on rejoicing and remembering one's Creator answers the *hebel* passages with their emphasis on the lack of meaning in life.⁷⁸ In reference to 9:7–10, Bartholomew maintains both motifs threaten,

to pull each other apart. As the advice to seize the day becomes imperative, so the enigma of life pulls in the opposite direction, and we see here the imminent explosion of Qohelet's attempt to hold on to both. Once again the exhortation to enjoyment should therefore not just be seen as the answer to the problem of the universality of death. The contradiction remains unresolved.⁷⁹

In briefly evaluating the three approaches, Longman's resignation view is tethered to his pessimistic view of Qohelet's words. In his view, the *hebel* passages are the controlling mood of Qohelet. As such, he describes 9:7–10 as having no ultimate meaning.⁸⁰ Since Qohelet's words are those of one who is unorthodox and cynical,⁸¹ normative theology will not be found in passages like 9:7–10

or in any of Qohelet's words. With this view the only value the words of Qohelet have relates to his supposed function as a foil to the other books in the canon. In the final analysis, normative theology will only be derived from the "frame narrator" in 12:8–14.⁸²

The value of Bartholomew's overall view of Ecclesiastes is that it is not a foil to the other books of the canon. Again, Bartholomew's conclusion about celebrating life in 11:8–10 and 12:1–7 is helpful, though his contention that the contradictions in 9:7–10 are not resolved gives me pause. In 9:1–12 Qohelet's autonomous epistemology (the enigmatic nature of death in vv. 1–6, 11–12), collides with Israel's wisdom tradition (the celebration of life in vv. 7–10).⁸³ My reservations relate to Qohelet's autonomous epistemology. While Bartholomew has Qohelet's epistemology based on Greek philosophy, with a return to Israelite wisdom only in the conclusion of the book, it is preferable to say that Qohelet's epistemology throughout the book, including 9:7–10, is based on the wisdom tradition of Israel.

Ogden's preferable explanation of 9:7–10 works with the patent meaning of this text and is not given to exegetical inference. In brief, as a response to all sharing the same inevitable fate of death, the people of God are urged to celebrate life's gifts as coming from the sovereign God. Our exegesis of 9:7–10 is consistent with Ogden's explanation of this text's function in the context. This type of approach takes into account not only the exegesis of this text, but also the overall theology of Ecclesiastes, and, as such, provides wisdom for living in a sin-cursed world which is characterized by suffering, death, and judgment.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article's objective has been to examine a passage, Ecclesiastes 9:7–10, containing the *carpe diem* motif in connection with the *hebel* theme of death and to explain how this text links to the message of Ecclesiastes, and thus teaches us how to live realistically "under the sun." Initially, this

study analyzed 9:7–10. The development of this text reflected three units: verse 7 with its focus on enjoying food and drink, verses 8–9 emphasizing nice clothes, oil, and enjoying life with one's wife, and verse 10 with its attention to living wholeheartedly. In addition, 9:7–10 was placed in the overall context of Ecclesiastes, including an examination of the antithetical nature of Ecclesiastes. The sage designed his work to reflect the paradoxes of life in a sin-cursed and fallen world. The nature of life "under the sun" hindered his search for meaning and purpose. Another facet of this placement focused on how 9:7–10 functions in Ecclesiastes. After a brief synopsis of Qohelet's message, three explanations of this passage's function were summarized: the resignation, the celebration-of-life, and the culmination-in-celebrating-life views. Ogden offers the best explanation since he shows how death in 9:1–12 provides a motivation for God's people to celebrate life as a gift of God.

Like Qohelet we live in a world that is cursed by the Fall. Further, as creatures in Qohelet's day and ours, none can comprehend the mysterious and paradoxical nature of divine providence. People are unable to predict whether good or evil lie in their future. God has made all the facets of life in such a way that humanity "may not find out anything that will be after him" (7:14). In short, like Qohelet we live in a perplexing world, yet certainly in light of Christ we have greater understanding than he had. In the midst of this sin-cursed world, the sage's advice, from 9:7–10, for navigating life is to fear our sovereign God and enjoy his good gifts. In light of the coming of Christ and the greater realities he has ushered in, Paul has a similar thought when he says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Living in a fallen and suffering world is inevitable until Christ comes again, but in the meantime, we are called to live life to its full in joy, faith, and confidence in our sovereign God who is bringing all of his purposes to pass in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The Hebrew text of Eccl 1:1 identifies its author as Qohelet (“preacher,” “teacher,” etc.). Until the nineteenth century with the development of historical criticism, the majority of Christian scholars identified Solomon as Qohelet (see Craig Bartholomew, “Qoheleth in the Canon? Current Trends in the Interpretation of Ecclesiastes,” *Themelios* 24 [1999]: 4–7). Since that time many evangelical scholars no longer accept this understanding (Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* [New International Commentary on the Old Testament; ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 4). Though a number of evangelicals no longer entertain the possibility of Solomonic authorship, I am convinced that a case can be made for Solomonic authorship: see Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 528–37; Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 257–66; Daniel C. Fredericks, “Ecclesiastes,” in *Ecclesiastes & the Song of Songs* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary; eds., Daniel C. Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 31–36; James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 314; and Mark F. Rooker, “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” in *The World and the Word* (Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti; Nashville: B&H, 2011), 540.
- ² All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the 2001 ESV.
- ³ Shannon Burkes argues that death is the focus of Qohelet’s message (*Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* [SBL Dissertation Series, no. 170; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999], 48–80). Also see Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes* (The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary; eds., J. Gordon McConville and Craig Bartholomew; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 130–31.
- ⁴ The *carpe diem* passages appear in 2:24–26; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20 [Heb. 5:17–19]; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:9–12:1.
- ⁵ See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding*

the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 212–15. Along this line other authors make a distinction between the words of Qohelet in Eccl 1:12–12:7 and a narrator in 1:1–11 and 12:8–14. In this case, the speech of Qohelet is viewed as a foil to the remaining books of the OT (so Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 38).

⁶ For example, Graham S. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (2nd ed.; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 17; and Fredericks, “Ecclesiastes,” 36–41.

⁷ The unit of 9:1–11:6 begins with “no one knows” (9:1) and concludes with a threefold repetition of the same expression in the second person: “you do not know” (11:5–6). The same type of expression is found throughout 9:1–11:6 (9:5, 10, 12; 10:10, 15; 11:2, 5, 6). See Addison G. Wright, “The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968): 323.

⁸ For a listing of the seven *carpe diem* passages, see n. 4.

⁹ Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word Books, 1992), 89.

¹⁰ The same motif of death’s certainty is developed earlier in 2:14; 3:19–20.

¹¹ For a discussion of Qohelet’s use of the comparative proverb in Ecclesiastes, see Graham S. Ogden, “The ‘Better’-Proverb (Tôb-Spruch), Rhetorical Criticism, and Qoheleth,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 489–505.

¹² Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 164.

¹³ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. “Yayin,” by W. Dommershausen, 6:62.

¹⁴ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (5 vols., rev. W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm; Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 2:1280–81 (hereafter cited as HALOT).

¹⁵ Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 229.

¹⁶ So Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 359–60.

¹⁷ *Kevar* is used in 1:10; 2:12, 16; 3:15 (twice); 4:2; 6:10; 9:6, 7.

¹⁸ R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 92. See also Dominic Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Journal for the Study of the Old Tes-

tament Supplement Series, 316; Sheffield, England: JSOT, 2001), 138.

¹⁹Donald R. Glenn, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (eds., John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck; Wheaton: SP Publications, Victor Books, 1985), 977.

²⁰So Fredericks ("Ecclesiastes," 209), Moses Stuart (*A Commentary on Ecclesiastes* [reprint of Warren F. Draper, 1864; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005], 293), and H. C. Leupold (*Exposition of Ecclesiastes* [reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952], 213).

²¹Fredericks, "Ecclesiastes," 209.

²²Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 164.

²³*The End of Wisdom* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 203; also see Robert Gordis (*Koheleth—The Man and His World* [3rd ed.; New York: Schocken Books, 1968], 306) and Murphy (*Ecclesiastes*, 92).

²⁴See Athalya Brenner, *Color Terms in the Old Testament* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 21; Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1982), 81–91.

²⁵*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (3 vols. in 1; trans. M. G. Easton, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 6; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:363.

²⁶HALOT, 2:900; see also Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth* (trans. O. C. Dean, Jr.; Hermenia; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 171–72.

²⁷J. L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 162.

²⁸"Confessions of a Workaholic: A Reappraisal of Qoheleth," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976): 22.

²⁹Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—The Man and His World* (3rd ed.; New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 306. Longman recognizes that 'ishshah could refer to either "woman" or "wife" (*Ecclesiastes*, 230–31). So also Jerry E. Shepherd, "Ecclesiastes," in vol. 6 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (eds., Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 336–37.

³⁰See Charles F. Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 80.

³¹Craig Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 304–5.

³²In Eccl 9:9 the Leningrad Codex, the base text for *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, has a virtual repetition of the line "all the days of your vain life" (*kol-yemey hayyey hebleka*) with the subsequent "all your vain days" (*kola hayyey hebleka*), which omits one word, "life" (*yemey*). Following the Leningrad Codex, the text could read: "all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun—all your vain days." I should note, however, that there is textual evidence supporting the ESV's omission of this repetition. This evidence includes a few Hebrew manuscripts, Alexandrinus, and the Targums. The basic repetition of this phrase in Leningrad's textual tradition is an example of dittography—a repetition of words.

³³To this list of negative rendering found in the various versions, Michael V. Fox's translation of *hebel* as "absurd" could be added ("The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 [September 1986]: 409–27; and *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 71; eds., David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 29–51). This rendering is also followed by Enns (*Ecclesiastes*, 25, 31–32).

³⁴Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 21–26; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 105–7. Ogden's discussion is taken from his earlier article "Vanity It Certainly Is Not," *The Bible Translator* 38 (1987): 301–7. Following the lead of Ogden, I made a similar argument that has an influence on this current article: "The Message of Ecclesiastes," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (1996): 88–94. However, there is one aspect of my argument about *hebel* that I would modify. Rather than taking *hebel*'s core meaning in Ecclesiastes as "frustratingly enigmatic," it is preferable to take the word as I have argued in this paper.

³⁵For a constructive discussion of the various uses of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes being bound together by the nuance of "enigmatic," see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Shepherding Wind and One Wise Shepherd: Grasping for Breath in Ecclesiastes," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15 (Fall 2011): 4–16. Another intriguing article discussing the many uses of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes is Ardel B. Caneday's "'Everything is Vapor': Grasping for Meaning Under the Sun," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15 (Fall 2011):

- 26–40. Following the lead of Douglas B. Miller (“Qohelet’s Symbolic Use of *הָבֵל*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 [Fall 1998]: 437–54), Caneday argues that “vapor” functions “as a single imagery or symbol that embodies a multivalency (layers of meaning) with various referents that he [Qohelet] teases out throughout his book including insubstantiality, transitoriness, and foulness” (“Everything is Vapor,” 34).
- ³⁶Whether one sees 37 or 38 appearances of *hebel* depends on how the repetition in v. 9 is handled; see above, n. 32.
- ³⁷Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press), 210.
- ³⁸See Doug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 105–7.
- ³⁹Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed. revised and edited by Frederick W. Danker; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 621.
- ⁴⁰See Fredericks, “Ecclesiastes,” 48.
- ⁴¹P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 2010.
- ⁴²Fredericks argues for *hebel* to have a core meaning related to time such as temporary or fleeting (“Ecclesiastes,” 46–54). A similar argument is made by Ethan Dor-Shav, “Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless: Part I,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 36 (2008): 211–21; and “Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless: Part II,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 37 (2009): 17–23; and Russell L. Meek, “The Meaning of *הָבֵל* in Qohelet: An Intertextual Suggestion,” in *The Words of the Wise Are Like Goats: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century* (eds., Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 241–56.
- ⁴³*Coping with Transience* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 23–24. Similarly Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & a Time to Build Up* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 35–36; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 106–7; and DeRouchie, “Shepherding Wind,” 6.
- ⁴⁴Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 24. So also, Caneday, “Everything is Vapor,” 32. The ESV translates two parallel Hebrew expressions as “striving after wind”: *re’uth ruah* (1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9) and *rayon ruah* (1:17; 4:16). DeRouchie shows that both phrases refer to either “shepherding/herding the wind” or “windy/disturbing thoughts” (“Shepherding Wind,” 11–12). Whether “striving after wind” indicates that it is impossible for man to comprehend God’s world or man’s ineffective internal struggle to put life together, this phrase refers to the enigmatic nature of this life.
- ⁴⁵“Qoheleth’s World and Life View As Seen in His Recurring Phrases,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (Fall 1974): 67.
- ⁴⁶See Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 22–24.
- ⁴⁷See James Bollhagen, *Ecclesiastes*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 154.
- ⁴⁸See Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 177.
- ⁴⁹Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 23.
- ⁵⁰See Shank, “Qoheleth’s World and Life View,” 67. The prepositional phrase “under the sun,” is used twenty-nine times in Ecclesiastes. Two other similar phrases appear in Ecclesiastes, “under heaven” and “on earth.” The first is used three times (1:13; 2:3; 3:1) and the later six times (5:2; 7:20; 8:14, 16; 11:2; 12:7). A parallel use of “on earth” and “under heaven” is found in 8:14–15. Qohelet describes an event that occurs “on the earth” in v. 14; but in v. 15, he replaces it with “under the sun.” This same pattern is again found in 8:16–17.
- ⁵¹“Qoheleth: Enigmatic Pessimist or Godly Sage?” *Grace Theological Journal* 7 (1986): 43–44.
- ⁵²For a fuller discussion of evidence that supports taking *hebel* as “enigmatic,” see DeRouchie, “Shepherding Wind,” 4–25.
- ⁵³Eccl 9:7–9 reflects some cultural and literary similarities with ancient Near Eastern literature (for a listing of pertinent texts, see Garrett, *Ecclesiastes*, 265–66). However, the most striking parallel with 9:7–9 is the Epic of Gilgamesh, with the Akkadian version dating back to the early second millennium B.C. (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, J. B. Pritchard [ed.], 90, sec. 10.3.6–14):
- Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly,
Make thou merry by day and by night.
Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing,

Day and night dance thou and play!
 Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,
 Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.
 Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,
 Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!
 For this is the task of [mankind]!

The similarities should be noted: feasting, rejoicing, clothes, his head, and spouse. The issue concerns whether or not Ecclesiastes is dependent on the Epic of Gilgamesh. For those who have a commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture, a couple of options seem apparent. First, the writer of Ecclesiastes could have drawn from this epic and theologically adapted it. Fredericks maintains, "OT wisdom can certainly borrow and then redeem its neighbours' wisdom gleaned through common grace" ("Ecclesiastes," 209). Second, because Ecclesiastes has general similarities with other ancient Near Eastern texts, Ecclesiastes shares similar motifs because of the common cultural background. For a cautionary note on the issue of Qohelet borrowing from either Mesopotamian or Egyptian texts, see Karel van der Toorn, "Did Ecclesiastes Copy Gilgamesh?" *Bible Review* 16 (2000): 22–30, 50.

⁵⁴David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (7 vols. to date; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994–), 3:243–44 (hereafter cited as DCH).

⁵⁵See Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 231.

⁵⁶DCH, 5:435.

⁵⁷The *carpe diem* passages are listed above in n. 4.

⁵⁸"Ecclesiastes," 999; also see Caneday, "Qoheleth," 54–55.

⁵⁹*New International Dictionary of Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. "Sheol," by Eugene H. Merrill, 4:6–7. For a discussion of the use of *Sheol* in Eccl 9:7–10, see Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 83.

⁶⁰Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 167.

⁶¹For a fuller discussion of the polarized subjects in Ecclesiastes, see Caneday, "Qoheleth," 39–42.

⁶²Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 17; so also Estes, *Handbook*, 279.

⁶³*Words of Delight*, 320–21.

⁶⁴See Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 190–91.

⁶⁵William H. U. Anderson, *Qoheleth and Its Pessimistic Theology: Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1997), 133.

⁶⁶Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lx.

⁶⁷*Yitrôn* is used in 1:3; 2:11, 13 (twice); 3:9; 5:9 (Heb. v. 8), 16 (Heb. v. 15); 7:12; 10:10, 11.

⁶⁸See Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 27–30.

⁶⁹David A. Hubbard, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 253.

⁷⁰"Ecclesiastes," 977.

⁷¹See Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 191–93.

⁷²Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 231.

⁷³*Ecclesiastes*, 34–35. As Longman notes, Crenshaw takes a similar position, though he differs from Crenshaw in that he derives the book's normative theology from frame narrator in 12:8–14 (*Ecclesiastes*, 28).

⁷⁴Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 224.

⁷⁵*Qoheleth*, 17. A few other advocates of this view include Fredericks ("Ecclesiastes," 38–39); Whybray ("Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 [1982]: 87–98); Glenn ("Ecclesiastes," 976–78), and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. (*Ecclesiastes: Total Life* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1979], 15–19)

⁷⁶*Qoheleth*, 163–67.

⁷⁷*Ecclesiastes*, 81–83.

⁷⁸Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 354–58; also see his "Ecclesiastes," in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 181–84.

⁷⁹*Ecclesiastes*, 305.

⁸⁰*Ecclesiastes*, 231.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 36.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 37–39.

⁸³Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 307, 310–11.

The SBJT Forum

SBJT: The book of Hebrews addresses a suffering church. What can we learn from Hebrews for us today on facing suffering as Christians?

Barry Joslin: If we are being honest, suffering

Barry Joslin is currently Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Boyce College of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also earned his Ph.D. degree.

In addition, he also serves as the Worship Pastor at Ninth and O Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky. Dr. Joslin is the author of *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law* (Paternoster, 2009) and numerous articles and book reviews which have been published in such journal as: *Themelios*, *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, *Library of New Testament Studies*, and *Currents in Biblical Research*. He is currently writing a commentary on Hebrews and has recently completed writing the *Adult Sunday School Exploring the Bible quarterly on Hebrews for LifeWay* (forthcoming, 2014).

is not something most of us treasure, embrace, or go looking for. Most of us avoid it, and those of us with children often seek to minimize or eliminate it altogether in their lives, and at all costs. We eschew pain due to a common, self-protecting fear, which also leads us to want to avoid persecution, and which, sadly, often requires our silence concerning the hope within us. But this kind of suffering-free life is an illusion. Sooner or later we will have to face it, just as our brothers and sisters in the book of Hebrews faced it, just as scores of believers are facing it now, and just like our

Lord Jesus faced it. It is naïve to think otherwise, so let us prepare ourselves for it; and let us learn from Hebrews on how to face suffering.

The term itself is found frequently in Hebrews, both in noun and verb forms (e.g., 2:9, 10, 18; 5:8; 9:26; 10:32; 11:36; and 13:12). The term conveys the idea of suffering which arises from an outside source, and in Hebrews it is the reality both for Christ and his people. For the believer, the goal is not to avoid suffering, but to suffer well, with his or her eyes fixed on Jesus who endured far more than we can imagine—and did so joyfully. This example of joyful endurance of suffering is also seen in the lives of believers such as Abraham, Moses, and in the original readers of Hebrews, but most of all, we see it in the suffering of Christ. What, then, does Hebrews teach us about suffering?

First, Hebrews teaches us that believers suffer. Repeatedly, we see the pattern of faithful suffering displayed in the life of Abraham (11:8-16) and Moses (11:24-27). Moses specifically is singled out as forsaking a lifetime of sinful pleasures in Egypt in order to have something better. As the son of

Pharaoh's daughter, all of Egypt's delicacies and sinful delights were his for a lifetime. Yet he chose to forsake the temporary delights of Egypt's treasures in order to gain the eternal reward, "seeing him who is unseen" (11:27), and endured significant sufferings as the deliverer of Israel.

As the pastor who wrote Hebrews wrote to his first-century people, he knew they were badly in need of perseverance. They had grown spiritually weak and dull (5:11-14), and some were tempted to return to Judaism. Pastorally speaking, their endurance through suffering is the purpose for the five warning passages, and is stated explicitly in 10:36. In former days, they had been much stronger in their faith. Hebrews 10:32-36 makes this plain. Some had been jailed for Christ, and had their possessions confiscated. They had endured significant suffering for Christ, were publically made a spectacle, yet they did not shrink back from Christ or one another.

What was their reaction? We would be tempted to think that they would react with fear, but verse 34 says that they accepted *joyfully* the seizure of their property. Why? Because despite the loss of their possessions, they knew that they had a better possession and one that endures and remains; it is both better and lasting (10:34). They disregarded one set of (temporary) possessions in favor of the (eternal) possession that cannot be seized. This is their "great reward" (10:35) and is for all who endure to the end (4:1, 11; 10:36-39). In other words, when our hope is on what is eternal, then the temporary and unavoidable trials of this life fade in relevance and significance. For the writer of Hebrews, there is no other way to endure suffering other than to see it in the light of eternity's reality, which is to have enduring, patient faith that is forward-looking, past the suffering of this age.

In contrast, such faith was not found in the wilderness generation when they suffered. Instead, they saw their circumstances without eyes of faith, consistently rebelled and received God's eternal judgment instead of his eternal joy (3:7-4:11). This is not so for those who are of saving faith, which

is the proof and evidence of that which is unseen (11:1-2, 39-40), and that which looks to the promised reward (12:22-24).

Second, Hebrews reminds us that despite our suffering now what awaits us is our promised reward. What is this promised, great reward and eternal goal? What can sustain the child of God when faced with incredible suffering? It is the promise and assurance of his eternal possession and destination—the long-awaited city to come where Jesus is seen, glorified, and eternally enjoyed (13:14; 11:10, 14-16). Such is the treasure of every believer, from the faithful saints of Hebrews 11 to the faithful followers of Jesus today. Hebrews 12:22-24 teaches that the reward for their suffering and endurance is no less than the joy-saturated presence of Jesus and all the saints. The author writes,

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

In a sermon on this text, John Piper opines that what fuels such endurance is a "deep satisfaction in that future glorious hope; it is a heart that joyfully treasures the promised reward" ("Embracing Suffering;" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyuIqf9cIIQ>). It is a forward-looking faith towards something infinitely better than the temporary losses incurred as a follower of Jesus in this life. This is, by definition, saving faith! It is the faith of Abraham, who looked for the city to come; of Moses, who chose the reward of Christ over the passing pleasures of sin despite great personal cost (11:23-27), "seeing Him who is unseen."

And yet, despite how positive are the examples in Hebrews of first-century believers who suffered well, they are not the primary example presented

in Hebrews. For Hebrews, it is Jesus Christ who best teaches us how to suffer, and not merely to endure it, but to embrace it.

Third, Hebrews presents Jesus as the best example of how to face suffering, embrace it, and endure it joyfully. Jesus suffered exquisite sufferings. Hebrews 2 focuses on Christ's suffering unto death (2:9-18). This perfected him (2:10; cf. 5:8-9), the idea being that in order to be salvation's "pioneer," he had to endure suffering and temptation blamelessly (something he had not done prior to the incarnation), without which his sacrifice could not atone for our sins. He had to be made like us in order to suffer death in our place as the once-and-for-all sacrifice. He has borne the full weight of temptation (2:18) so that he might be the wrath-bearing sacrifice (propitiation) for sin (v 17). In addition to this, Hebrews 9:26 and 13:12 focus on the suffering of Christ at the hands of others, *in order that* his people would be set apart and made holy as a result of his shed blood (note the purpose). In short, Jesus suffered temptation and death so that he might glorify God in the salvation of sinners.

Therefore, since he suffered, we also should expect a measure of suffering in this life since this was the pattern that Jesus himself established. He endured both the exquisite sufferings of incalculable temptation (2:17-18; 4:15) as well as death at the hands of men, even scorning the shame of the cross (Heb 12:2). But how did Jesus do this? How are we

to do this? He endured by looking past the sufferings to the joy and glory that awaited him *after* he faithfully endured. That, in short, is the key to suffering for the believer, seen so clearly in the life of our Savior. *This is crucial for understanding suffering in Hebrews!* Jesus knew that there was something far greater than the horror and suffering of his own execution. He saw past the suffering to the joy of Mt. Zion, the New Jerusalem, and

to the eternal joy and worship of his people! And as our Great Shepherd, he is leading us to our abiding destination (13:20).

How can suffering be endured and embraced? What produces courage and the ability to suffer well, whether part of the original audience of Hebrews, or a 21st century Sudanese believer, or a jailed pastor in Iran, or even a western believer in a free society? Though Hebrews focuses on the kind of harsh suffering that is a result of believing in Jesus, there are implications for other difficult situations as well. For example, what sustains you when you and I suffer because of our sin? What sustains you in the dark hours when cancer marches through the body of a loved one, or when you receive the agonizing phone call at 3 a.m. from the state police saying that your child was killed by a truck driver who fell asleep at the wheel?

Regardless of the cause, kind, or depth of suffering, Hebrews is clear when it comes to the answer for how one endures such trials and suffering: *a forward-looking, faith-filled joy in what is to come.* A heart that joyfully treasures the promised reward sustains his faithful ones throughout such periods. For the writer of Hebrews, such a joyful, forward-looking faith is seen in the examples of Abraham, Moses, the first-century believers, and most prominently, in Jesus himself.

SBJT: On the mission field, how do we balance meeting the needs of suffering people and making sure we are meeting their real need in terms of their relationship with God?

David Sills: The discussion over meeting "felt needs" or "real needs" is one worth having, but very difficult to have in the absence of one or the other. When ministering in the midst of the immense pain of war's destruction, grinding poverty, or starving people during a wasting famine or drought, sermons prepared in comparative security and comfort often seem inadequate. The only true balance is to do exactly what Jesus would do in every situation. Finding that balance begins with recognizing that there is not a single approach

M. David Sills is A. P. and Faye Stone Professor of Christian Missions and Cultural Anthropology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Sills previously served as a missionary in Ecuador, as a church planter and general evangelist among the Highland Quichua people and as Rector and professor at the Ecuadorian Baptist Theological Seminary. His recent books include *The Missionary Call: Find Your Place in God's Plan for the World* (Moody, 2008) and *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Moody, 2010).

that will always be the unique solution strategy to every situation. Jesus fed the multitudes, healed the sick, taught disciples, and preached truth, and in every case he ministered to people with precise balance. Since Jesus should be our model in all things, we should strive to do the same.

Our effort to respond to the world's hurts and lostness with a balanced approach requires that we be proactive and not merely reactive. A proactive strategy understands that philosophy drives methodology; what we believe informs what we seek to do. Reactive approaches merely respond to the needs around us which then must constantly adapt to the crises of each day. The proper balance begins with understanding the mission of the church, the vision and aim of the specific mission agency, or the gifts and calling of the believer. Just as great peace comes from knowing what God would have you do, concomitantly, a peace comes by knowing all that is not your task so that you are not constantly distracted.

Bob Pierce, founder of Samaritan's Purse and World Vision, used to pray, "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." He had seen the plight of the post-war Korean orphans and yearned to alleviate the needs of the hurting. Many Christians' hearts beat with the same passion, and mercy ministry seems to be their most appropriate action. As the pendulum of missions efforts has swung back and forth through the years between the opposite extremes of mercy ministries and Gospel proclamation, missiologists and theologians have sought to find the balance.

John R. W. Stott sought to find the balance in the mid-1970s in *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. This book began as the Chavasse Lectures in World Mission at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford in 1975. Stott sought to define and defend a balanced position on the topics of mission, evangelism, dialogue, salvation, and conversion. Although not as decidedly as many would prefer, Stott leaned away from the ecumenical efforts trending toward mercy ministries and sought to restore a biblical balance.

In 2005, David Hesselgrave dealt with the balance along with nine other issues in *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* in which he presents both sides of perennial issues facing missionaries, assisting readers to develop informed opinions. In his chapter on "Holism and Prioritism," Hesselgrave presents four positions on the continuum rather than a binary view of social ministry versus Gospel proclamation regarding ministry among the poor. He presents a "radical" view growing out of Liberation Theology, which seeks to promote justice and shalom on earth. Moving to the right, he presents two views growing out of what he calls holism theology. The first of these two is "revisionist" that seeks to minister to individuals without distinguishing between physical or spiritual needs. The next is a "restrained" approach that seeks to minister to physical needs while giving a certain priority to evangelism. The fourth position is the "traditional" approach that grows out of a prioritism theology, which is to make disciples of all nations; other ministries are good but secondary.

Most recently Greg Gilbert and Kevin DeYoung have addressed the question in a more exegetical approach with their 2011 book, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* Their book goes back to Scripture to find the church's mission rather than allowing the contemporary issues of this generation to define and direct missions. While sensitive to needs unique in our time, and while affirming many of the ways that Christians seek to be salt and light in the world are good things to do, they argue that these efforts are often not actually the mission of the church.

Finding the balance between ministering to felt needs versus true needs for the Gospel will always be a tension. Considering that a soul will live or die for eternity while a physical body is but a vapor, we may lean toward exclusive Gospel proclamation. Yet, a Haitian proverb teaches that a hungry stomach has no ears. Paul asks in Romans 10:14, "How are they to hear without someone preaching?" The Gospel is the power unto salvation, without it no one can be saved, and there are untold millions

still untold. Yet, how can they hear when their desperate need at the moment is to stay alive, or save their child, or escape physical attacks? When they know that the preacher could give them food, but he will only preach to them, they discredit the credibility and integrity of his ministry.

The balance we need to achieve can be seen dramatically in extreme situations: an Asian tsunami, a Haitian earthquake, or a typhoon in the Philippines. It is harder to see in the daily drain that comes from responding to poverty tapping on your car window at every stoplight, beggars tapping on your door at meal times, or upon hearing noises at night, peering through your curtains to see a mother with her baby tied on her back going through your garbage bags on the street to find any edible scraps for her family. 26,000 children die daily from starvation and hunger-related diseases. 6,000 people die daily from lack of clean drinking water.

During a famine in Sudan, photographer Kevin Carter snapped a photograph of an emaciated starving child in Africa with a vulture standing a couple of feet behind him, watching and waiting. The photo won him the 1994 Pulitzer Prize in the category of Feature Photography, and is said to be one of the most powerful images to capture the consequences of Africa's despair. Staring at the picture today, I ask, what is the balance? Seeking it will drain you emotionally, challenge your prayer life, and break your heart to find the answer.

I believe that the tension felt in the midst of a desperate search is an indication of balance.

When we arrive at some pre-calculated formulaic

approach that resolves every challenge before it even arises, and which dictates whether we will act or not, and if so to what degree, we have lost the balance. The only way to know the balance is to get as close to Jesus as you can, and stay there. Only there will you hear the still, small voice, "This is the way, walk in it."

Ted Cabal is professor of philosophy at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Cabal has served as the Dean of Boyce College, and has also taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Dallas Baptist University. He has written a number of articles on philosophy and apologetics, and is the general editor of *The Apologetics Study Bible* (2007).

SBJT: You have been living with an extremely serious illness. How has this changed your life and what have you learned that might help others facing similar illnesses?

Ted Cabal: Let me start by giving some background information to my present situation. I was diagnosed in 2001 with multiple myeloma, an incurable bone marrow cancer, at the age of 48. My mother had also received this diagnosis a year earlier. I already understood the grim implications when two of the best specialists in Louisville broke the news to me. They explained that I likely had at most three years to live. My variant of the disease was considered aggressive, and I faced the likelihood of attendant bone destruction.

Just about two years earlier I had moved my wife and sons from our extended family in Texas to Kentucky. Now our world was turned upside down. I was plunged into extremely debilitating treatments, including autologous stem cell transplant. This equivalent of a bone marrow transplant utilizes the patient's pre-harvested stem cells to "rescue" him from lethal doses of chemotherapy by regrowing his bone marrow. Years of treatments left me with the common side effects of chronic fatigue and "chemo brain" (the demonstrable loss of brain function). One drug caused periodic depression, something which I'd never experienced.

It has been thirteen years since I received this terminal diagnosis. I still have the disease. My doctors keep careful watch for the increasingly aggressive behavior typical of the disease, but at present I am doing remarkably well. I am so very humbled and grateful that the Lord has preserved me. Though he hasn't healed me, he hasn't called me home yet. Through it all he has taught me so very much which I now want explain.

First, let me describe some of my most difficult experiences of living with multiple myeloma. Immediately I dreaded that I had to break the news to my wife and sons that I would die sooner rather than later. I will never forget that day, unquestionably the most difficult of my life. Even now I can barely bring myself to ponder it. Watching my

family suffer with the news was far more painful than first hearing it. I so needed the Lord to help me provide them as much stability and perspective possible. Though they were extremely brave and godly in their responses, the first days were exquisitely sorrowful.

After the initial shock, a new reality set in for my wife and me. Spouses who love each other want to grow old together. But suddenly this hope was shattered. Our lives had been intertwined with memories and expectation of God's goodness, but it seemed now we only had the memories. We fully trusted our eternal future with the Lord, but death and the separation it brings are still our enemies. We had believed we should live each day as if our last, but that didn't change our being designed for living with future hope. I knew I would soon enjoy the full presence of the Lord, but I despised that I could do nothing for my dear wife. Thankfully, the Lord brought me to the place of entrusting him with my wife's future. And she and I have frequently discussed how dealing with such things without the hope of living forever with Jesus is almost unimaginable.

Though less important but still painful, I eventually realized some personal dreams were now impossible. I believed I was just entering the most productive period of my life. (Physical and mental health are such gifts!) Now due to the extreme physical and mental fatigue of treatments, some planned books became impossible to write. I would need time but eventually made peace with new limitations. His plans are better than mine.

For so long my focus had been on what the Lord might do through me rather than in me. But the hardest thing I've had to face is allowing the Holy Spirit to expose ugly sinfulness deep in my soul far worse than any cancer. I needed remolding in the character of Christ in my relationships with people far more than doing things for him. At diagnosis I was guarded by incomprehensible divine peace. I felt no fear and shared my hope in Christ with physicians and nurses. Thankfully that peace has never deserted me. But several

months later, I sensed the Lord telling me I was not exempted from the ongoing struggle of Christian transformation. Instead of peacefully waiting to die from cancer, I was to live with it in such a way that he could change me. "Living with" rather than "dying with" was going to be much tougher! In fact, my "darkest nights of the soul" have been in being brought face to face with myself. People, not goals matter most, and I am pained how often I still fail others. I'm a difficult project but the Lord accomplishes it by walking with me through the cancer valley. I am grateful for his resurrection power and infinite mercy operative in the otherwise impossible task of remaking me.

Second, let me describe a few things I have learned through my illness which may serve as a help to others who are also going through suffering in their own lives. Some days the only thing you can do is to take it easy on yourself. Sometimes it is quite the accomplishment to endure the day. Let endurance do its work on you. God is at work even when you can't.

Recognize God's love for you in the people he has placed in your life to help. I am deeply grateful for the Southern Seminary community which has been so kind to me through all this. I am so humbled and touched by students and churches regularly praying for me. And nothing so amazes me as the way my wife and I have grown closer through our suffering together. Be regularly reminded of God's love for you by appreciating His people in your life.

Gain perspective by recognizing how many others suffer much more than you. Don't shrink back from learning the stories of suffering people both near and far. Doing so will help you become softer rather than harder, better rather than bitter. Make it your personal project to alleviate someone else's suffering as much as you can.

Most of all, if you have been rescued by Jesus Christ, focus with all your might on his salvation. And by remembering how he has done so much for you even in this life, you can trust that he will keep his word to care for you in the future—even through all eternity.

SBJT: What advice can you give to help preachers preach about suffering?

Robert Vogel: Addressing the problem of suffering is one of the most prominent concerns in pastoral ministry. Thomas Oden writes,

No profession faces the direct question of the meaning of suffering more frequently than ministry. And no theological dimension of the pastor's work is more difficult. Theodicy remains among the most perplexing, practically pressing, and difficult of the theological issues of pastoral practice. Ultimately, it affects every other dimension in one's ministry.

No pastor can avoid these questions. They come with the territory. They arise inevitably as a result of the confluence of one's preaching ministry and caring ministries (*Pastoral Theology* [HarperCollins, 1983], 223).

As Oden notes, suffering frames major concerns of both the pastor's personal or "caring" ministry (e.g., visitation, counseling, intercessory prayer, etc.), and also his public ministry, the work of pastoral preaching.

The pervasive presence of suffering, due to both natural and moral evil, is evident in such life situations as illness, grief, poverty and other financial distress, natural catastrophes, broken relationships, persecution, abuse in its many forms, violence, war, cruelty, discrimination, oppression, hurtful speech, death—to name but a few causes.

Corresponding to the prevalence of suffering in life is its prevalence as a theme in Scripture. Before the Fall, God decreed that suffering (death) would be the consequence of sin, and the curse that accompanied the Fall inaugurated suffering in human experience. From Genesis forward, the Bible's storyline speaks to the reality of suffering. Words translated "pain," "anguish," "trial," "tribula-

tion," "affliction," "trouble," "sorrow," "weakness," "sick," "grief," and "distress" represent at least ten different words in the original languages related to suffering. The descriptive contexts in which such terms appear regularly feature the practical dimensions of suffering, and the believer's response to it.

Due to the prominence of issues of suffering both in Scripture and in life, the faithful expository preacher should expect naturally and regularly to address these matters in the course of his systematic preaching of the Bible. Such preaching equips believers for the time when the inevitable trial comes, for those particular occasions when suffering is an immediate congregational concern.

Claims of proponents of a health-and-wealth "gospel" notwithstanding, suffering is an inevitable part of life in a fallen world (Jas 1:2). The following advice is intended to strengthen preaching that addresses the reality of pain in a Christ-honoring way.

1. PREACH A BALANCED THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING.

Theological truths live in tension with one another. Thus it is important to keep in mind the teaching of the whole Bible on suffering when preaching upon one aspect of it. While a single sermon (from a particular text) may not address all matters of suffering, be careful not to present one part out of the context of the whole. For example, some suffering is disciplinary (Heb 12:4-11), but not all is (e.g., John 9:1-3; 2 Cor 12:7-10). Job's infamous friends wrongly understood God's purposes in Job's sufferings, and only compounded the misery of his affliction. Before the truth can be rightly applied to specific situations, it must be understood in its biblical, systematic fullness. Preaching that is so-balanced will prevent both preacher and hearers from taking an element of truth to an extreme of error.

2. PREACH EMPATHETICALLY; DON'T MINIMIZE OR TRIVIALIZE PEOPLE'S SUFFERING.

While authoritative biblical truth regarding life

Robert Vogel is the Carl E. Bates Professor of Christian Preaching and Associate Vice President for Institutional Advancement at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Prior to this role he served as Professor of Homiletics for twenty years at Western Seminary, where he also served as an Associate Dean and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program.

issues is always of primary importance, when it comes to the subject of pain, empathy from the preacher goes a long way in putting the truth across. “I feel your pain,” carelessly spoken, is a laugh line; but when empathy is genuinely communicated, the message will be taken more seriously than as a mere matter of information.

A preacher’s empathy with regard to suffering can be developed in a number of ways. First, when he is exegeting a passage speaking to the subject, careful attention to the mood of the text can help him identify the pain expressed in it. The terms used and the situations described, when carefully considered, can yield an empathy bearing the authority of God’s Word.

In addition, the preacher can develop empathy through his ministry of personal soul care. As he listens to people in his congregation speak of their suffering, his pulpit descriptions, illustrations, and applications related to life’s afflictions more effectively augment his proclamation of the authoritative message of the Word.

Empathy also develops as the preacher experiences suffering himself. This does not mean that he ought to quickly jump to tell his own story, but his experiences may temper the way he thinks and talks about life’s pain. The preacher whose greatest “trial” involved a hangnail on prom night may have a hard time relating to the difficulties of real suffering experienced by members of his congregation.

3. PREACH WITH A PURPOSE TO STRENGTHEN FAITH THREATENED BY DOUBT IN TIMES OF TRIAL.

Considering the problem of suffering, a natural, though somewhat abstract, question is the “why” question. Theodicy seeks to resolve, as far as possible, the tension between the presence of suffering and the infinite love, goodness, and sovereign power of God. Inadequate answers, such as those given by Rabbi Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, may seek to resolve tension, but wind up diminishing some attribute(s) of God in the process.

When the broader, more abstract “why” question

becomes practical and personal, a suffering believer may ask, “why me?” This can be a dangerous question, if it implies the belief that God is not treating one fairly and if it leads one to doubt the goodness of God. The better question to pose is, “what now?” “Why me?” can bog down in a present, painful reality, whereas “what now?” seeks to move forward with a faithful response. “Why me?” feeds doubt; “What now?” expresses faith. While the preacher may seek to explain the problem of suffering in his exposition, the application in his message should feature the “what now?” perspective.

For example, 1 Peter speaks of suffering injustice at the hands of wicked oppressors in positions of power. One particular case involved servants with unreasonable masters (1 Pet 2:18-20). Rather than raising “why me?” questions about unjust treatment at the hands of such masters, Peter directs his readers to submit to them with respect and thus to find favor with God.

4. DIRECT SUFFERING PERSONS TO LOOK TO JESUS.

The strength to bear up under suffering is ultimately found in Jesus. Indeed, in the passage immediately following the above-cited 1 Peter text, Christ in His suffering is presented as an example for us to follow, “in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21-23). In this context, the suffering involved for Jesus was that of the Cross. Peter’s readers would apply His example as they suffered injustice at the hands of others in the way that he did. More broadly, however, we will better understand the redemptive (sanctifying) purposes of God in our suffering as we look beyond the circumstances and focus on Jesus, our Redeemer, and the gracious purposes of our God (1 Pet 5:6-11).

5. BE A HERALD OF HOPE.

Pain and suffering can come from many possible sources (Jas 1:2). Some is the result of calamity in a temporal earth that groans under the curse. Physical sickness is the result of the sentence of death passed upon the human race at the fall. Moral evil enacted by human agents regu-

larly results in suffering afflicted on others. While the sources and kinds of affliction and suffering may vary, all find common ground in the truth that God is working out His gracious purposes in them, and that these trials cannot separate us from Him (Rom 8:28-39).

The preacher should regularly call his congregation to be people of hope in the long view. That is, rather than being consumed with the pain of the moment, we must be people who lift our eyes above the circumstances, fix our gaze on Jesus, and hope for the grace to be revealed at His coming. We must call our people to realize that these present afflictions are but for a time, and that ultimately God will establish perfect justice where injustice has prevailed for now. In our preaching, we must remind our people that God is using trials to produce the maturity of sanctification in us, and that he grants us wisdom to navigate the troubled waters in the meantime (Jas 1:2-8). In the face of grief and death, we proclaim that sorrow for the believer is tempered by the hope of the return of Jesus for His own—truth that offers genuine comfort in sorrow (1 Thess 4:13-18).

The reality of pain and affliction reminds us that our best life is not now. But faithful expository preaching provides true hope in this life, and for the life to come.

SBJT: How do you counsel someone who faces incredible suffering in their lives?

Heath Lambert: This is a good question. In fact, it's *the* question. Some of the most difficult counseling a person can do is the kind involving a person who is facing, or has faced, overwhelming sorrow. How do you offer genuine care that helps people turn a corner in a way that is patient, tender, and centered on Christ?

In my experience most people do not know how to do this. Many people keep a healthy distance between themselves and those going through intense pain because they are intimidated by the gut-wrenching nature of the pain and simply have no idea what to say. Others get close when they should keep their distance and offer shallow words and an easy fix that actually frustrates and complicates the emotions of suffering people. The church needs men and women who know how to offer care that helps people turn a corner in a way that is patient, tender, wise, and centered on Christ.

There is much we need to learn in order to be able to produce such men and women. In his Word, God has given Christian men and women many tools to do the slow and complex work of ministry to those with significant trials. Let me mention one tool that is available even though the church needs to know more than this one thing. Yet, I have seen God use this tool in the lives of many people to bring hope, comfort, and joy in the aftermath of anguish.

James 1:2 says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." This is one of the most controversial verses in the Bible. We are commanded to be joyful in the midst of various trials. The reason that is so controversial is because of all the varieties of overwhelming distress that can fit under the category of various trials. Women married to abusive men, children with life-altering birth defects, quadriplegics, rape victims, parents with children who have terminal cancer, folks struggling to overcome addictions to pornography, and people filing for bankruptcy are all facing trials of various kinds. The Bible's call in such situations is to count it all joy. That's controversial.

In fact it is so controversial that we need to be very careful how we use it. It probably isn't the first verse we will reference when ministering to people in pain. We will also want to avoid a cavalier attitude in referencing it. But we *will* use it. It is in the Bible, and God includes it as a crucial tool to help his people. In fact, the really encouraging

Heath Lambert is Assistant Professor of Biblical Counseling at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned his Ph.D. degree, and Boyce College where he serves as the Associate Dean of Applied Studies.

Dr. Lambert also serves as the Executive Director of the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC) and he has previously served as a pastor in Kentucky and North Carolina. He is the author of *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Crossway, 2011), the editor (with Stuart Scott) of *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture* (B&H Academic, 2012), and *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Zondervan, 2013).

thing about James 1:2 is that it makes it clear that joy is possible in trials. There is hope in knowing that no matter the degree of difficulty we face, we can also experience joy in distress.

The problem in counseling is that often people want to know *right now* how God can bring such joy out of their pain. As people who are finite, fallible, and frail we counselors will usually not know the particular answer to this question. But not knowing the details, however, of how God will use the details of their sorrow to produce specific joy, does not mean that we have nothing to say.

In fact, any Christian is equipped to point, even the most miserable sufferer, to joy by knowing who Jesus is and what he is done. Think about it: the cross is the most extreme case of suffering that has ever existed, or that can be conceived. Jesus was a sinless sacrifice and the infinite God. He existed in eternal glory as an exalted member of the Trinity. He traded this splendor for a manger, a homeless existence, mockery, and ultimately, a cross. You can think of no higher example of suffering.

As intense as the pain was, however, this terrible act of moral evil will redound to endless glory and praise for this Christ, and endless ages of heavenly glory for us. Ironically, the worst act of wickedness—in the sovereign plan of God—becomes the most exalted act of good. In this terrible event countless Christians see the source of their endless delight.

This means that God is able to take the most horrific example of suffering and turn it into the most exalted source of joy. If God can do that, then sufferers can find hope. This reality means we have a word for every victim of childhood sexual abuse, every person defrauded in a financial con-scheme, every widow standing in the funeral. We can look to them, point them to the cross, and let them see the example that God knows how to bring joy out of their pain.

To sufferers in their grief, there are many things we can say and do. When we are at a loss for words, however, one reliable reality that will always be worth discussing is the powerful hope we can offer

to those in pain by seeing God's ability to turn even the worst act of wickedness for good.

SBJT: How can a pastor prepare his people for suffering?

David Schrock: When Peter wrote to the elect exiles scattered across Asia Minor, he told them not to be surprised by their "fiery trial ... as though something strange were happening to [them]" (1 Pet 4:12). Tragically, in a fallen world, suffering is to be expected. And for Christians, whose allegiance to Christ often increases suffering, Christ's flock is called to suffer well by receiving suffering as a gift and a gateway for amplifying the gospel (Phil 1:29; Col 1:24).

As a pastor, I think about suffering a lot. What pastor doesn't? We minister to saints who weep over unexpected funerals and all kinds of abuse. At the same time, we look out on our congregations each Sunday and pray that the sermon's message will equip them to enter a world filled with dangers, toils, and snares.

As D. A. Carson wisely observed, "All we have to do is live long enough, and we will suffer" (*How Long O Lord?*, 16). Because of its ubiquity, pastors must be prepared to address suffering—retrospectively and prospectively. In what follows, I will suggest five ways pastors can help their people prepare to suffer well.

First, pastors must highlight the theme of suffering in the Bible. Outside Eden

depravity, disease, and death are normal. So, pastors must routinely address the origin of suffering, God's solution, and the means of grace available to pilgrim saints (for an excellent treatment of suffering, see Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson, eds., *Suffering and the Goodness of God* [Crossway, 2008]). Pastors must help their people see that just as the head suffered so the body must as

David Schrock is the senior pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Seymour, Indiana. He earned his Ph.D. from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Schrock is also the book review editor for the *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, as well as CBMW's book review channel. He has written for The Gospel Coalition, Credo Magazine, PureHome Ministries, and has contributed a chapter to *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of God's Mercy* (Founders, 2012).

well. For Christ and his church suffering is the necessary prerequisite for glory (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 5:10).

Suffering is not a sideline issue in the Bible. Scripture gives us barren women and blind sons, deadly storms and international wars. In addition to stories of suffering, the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, give us language to express our pain. At its center is Christ's agonizing death. To preach the Bible faithfully is to regularly address human suffering with the good news that death is swallowed up by Jesus' life.

Second, pastors must give their people a theology as big as God himself. In other words, for people to suffer well, they must stand on sound doctrine. In particular, pastors must gird their people with a theology that strengthens faith in God's sovereignty and hope in Christ's victorious return. While the particulars of suffering are a human mystery, it is vital to reassure believers that their plight has purpose. God is the author of the story, he "bottles" every tear (Ps 56:8), and he promises that the eternal weight of glory will recover every loss and heal every hurt (2 Cor 4:17).

Third, pastors must tie all suffering to Christ's death and resurrection. To every form of suffering, the cross is the answer. On the cross, Jesus bore God's wrath for our sins and he identified with humanities deepest pain—death. In this act of love, God dealt with the ultimate source of suffering and its deadly effect. For Christians, then, personal suffering is not God's testimony against us, as it was perceived to be under the old covenant. Rather, in Christ, suffering indicates our fellowship with our Lord (Phil 3:9-10) and God's fatherly love (Heb 12:3-11). Pastors must remind their people of this regularly. On a related side-note: If I were to add another priority for pastors, it would be helping Christians understand passages like Proverbs 10:22 ("The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow to it") in their covenantal context. Too much prosperity teaching and believing results from a failure to see the shift in suffering between the old and new covenants.

Fourth, pastors must inform their people about church history. The church victorious stands in heaven awaiting Christ's return. The church on earth suffers and bleeds. In our Western context, Christians need to hear the stories of faithful saints. Names like Ridley, Latimer, Elliot, and Saint should be as familiar as Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln.

A familiarity with church history reminds us that suffering is part of God's plan for his church. Wise pastors will illustrate Acts 14:22 and the book of 1 Peter with stories of John Bunyan's "voluntary" imprisonment, Horatio Spafford's "It is Well," and Richard Wurmbrand's injured feet. Access to these stories has never been easier, and the need for such courageous heroes has never been greater. North America's relative security has fostered an unrealistic view of suffering. Robert Yarbrough captures this point well when he writes about the laxity of twenty-first century, North American faith. He observes: "Healthy, well-fed, and gainfully-employed" Westerners have "lived relatively untouched by acute personal consciousness of many kinds and dimensions of suffering. Starvation, imprisonment for Christian faith, and being 'tortured for Christ' ... have sounded distant, exotic, and vaguely unnecessary" (see "Christ and the Crocodiles" in Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 27). So what we desperately need to be familiar with are saints who have suffered well, so that we might learn from them.

Fifth, pastors must call attention to the persecuted church. In obedience to God's word (Heb 13:3), pastors must lead the charge in praying for and supplying aid for persecuted Christians. Yet, the ministry of the persecuted church is not a one-way street. We must also champion the persecuted church because we need to see what it means to treasure Christ above life itself.

While Western Christians often look to the converted celebrity for inspiration, Scripture has a different witness in mind. According to Colossians 1:24, the man God uses to display his gospel is one who suffers deeply. As John Piper comments, "*God intends for the afflictions of Christ to be presented to*

the world through the afflictions of his people" (*Desiring God* [Multnomah, 1996], 225).

In other words, Christians who love their enemies and pray for their persecutors bear witness to the gospel. Such suffering might include Christian celebrities ridiculed by secular reporters. But by comparison, Christians who have shed blood for their faith are the ones who need to teach us how to suffer. Western pastors must keep both lanes of ministry open with the perse-

cuted church: The persecuted church needs our aid, but we also need theirs.

In the end, a good theology of suffering strengthens our faith, but it doesn't eliminate the pain. In moments of affliction, we need a strong vision of God, but even more we need God himself, the father mercies and all comfort (2 Cor 1:3). In time this fallen world will afflict all of us. Therefore, let us, as Christ's under-shepherds, be passionate in preparing our people to suffer well.

Book Reviews

40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law. By Thomas R. Schreiner. Edited by Benjamin L. Merkle. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010, 256 pp., \$17.99 paper.

Most serious students of the Bible would jump at the chance to spend a day or two in personal conversation with a distinguished Bible scholar peppering him with questions about the most important theological issues. Sadly, few ever have anything close to such an opportunity, that is, until now. Merkle's *40 Questions* series allows students to eavesdrop on a conversation in which an imaginary student poses question after question to a top scholar on some of the topics that matter most.

The series offers particular advantages to the reader that the average student interrogator would probably lack. First, though the student might gain access to a respected scholar, he might pose questions that were outside of the scholar's true area of expertise. Schreiner, on the other hand, is uniquely qualified to address questions related to the Christian and biblical law. He is the author

of *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law*, an advanced commentary on Romans, an intermediate-level commentary on Galatians, a Pauline theology, a New Testament theology, and most recently, an impressive whole-Bible biblical theology. Schreiner's discussions of the believer's relationship to the law are by no means the musings of a novice. These conversations are the product of careful reflection spanning over a quarter of a century by a respected specialist.

Second, even if a student had access to a scholar one-on-one for hours to discuss important theological issues, most students, without first conducting extensive research in the field, would squander some of their rare opportunity. They would likely spend a good bit of their time asking the wrong questions, questions that address peripheral issues of varying importance but do not actually get to the heart of the matter. The student knows what questions he would like to ask. The scholar knows what questions he should be asking. Recognizing this, the *40 Question* series permitted the scholar to furnish the questions to the student

and then provide helpful answers. This ensures that the reader gains the maximum benefit from the theological dialogue.

Schreiner divided his questions into five major parts: the law in the Old Testament; the law in Paul; the law in the Gospels and Acts; the law in the General Epistles; and the law and contemporary issues. Not surprisingly, he devoted just over half of the questions to issues related to the law in Paul. He subdivided the treatment of the law in Paul into three sets of questions relating to a) the New Perspective, b) the role of the law in the Christian life, and c) justification.

In the space allowed here, one cannot summarize or interact with each of Schreiner's forty questions and responses. However, several sections treat matters so significant for one's view of "the Christian and Biblical Law" that they deserve special mention.

Question 12 relates to the purpose of the law. Schreiner argues that the law was given to provoke transgression and expose human sinfulness so that sinners would despair of any hope of earning God's favor through personal obedience. The law demonstrates "that salvation is available only through faith in Christ" (83).

Question 14 queries whether Paul distinguished between the moral, ceremonial, and civil law. Schreiner begins by citing the *Westminster Confession of Faith's* discussion on the matter. The confession claims that ceremonial laws and judicial laws are abrogated under the New Testament, but that "the moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof." Schreiner counters that although the distinction is partially true, "it does not sufficiently capture Paul's stance toward the law" (89-90). He adds, "To say that the 'moral' elements of the law continue to be authoritative blunts the truth that the entire Mosaic covenant is no longer in force for believers" (90). The law still has an important message for the church today because it fulfills a revelatory and pedagogical function. The moral norms of the law express the character of God and still express God's will for believers since they are

repeated as moral norms in the New Testament.

Question 15 treats the "third use" of the law in which the law provides moral guidance and instruction to believers. Calvin and the *Westminster Confession* affirm this third use, but Luther firmly rejected it. Although he admitted that one should not overestimate the difference between Calvin and Luther, Schreiner concludes that "Luther is closer to the truth on this matter than Calvin, for he sees more clearly that the Old Testament law is not normative for believers, and that believers are no longer under the Mosaic covenant" (99). Nevertheless, Schreiner affirms that the Old Testament offers instruction for believers today and fulfills a vital role in Christian ethics.

On Question 16, "What is the 'Law of Christ,'" Schreiner argues persuasively that the law of Christ is the principle of Christ-like love. Such love constitutes the primary moral norm of the believer. The response to Question 17, "Is the Law Fulfilled Through Love?" shows that this love serves as a broad moral principle from which more specific norms issue. Adultery, murder, theft, and covetousness are contrary to the law of love. Thus Christ-like sacrificial love prevents freedom from the law from degenerating into libertinism.

Finally, Question 40, "What Role Does the Law Have In Preaching," seeks to understand how pastors should handle the law in proclamation. The author urges pastors to consider carefully the placement of any text in the movement of redemptive history. Pastors cannot simply draw a commandment from the Old Testament and preach it as binding on believers now without justification from the whole canon of scripture. Furthermore, pastors should avoid preaching moral lessons that turn the gospel in "a self-help program so that radical forgiveness of sins is replaced by ethics, as if our goodness qualifies us to obtain eternal life." Pastors avoid this by recognizing that the moral norms of the law have a convicting function that drives sinners to Christ. Finally, elements of the law that are utilized in moral exhortations in the New Testament should be used to call believers

to personal obedience as well. Schreiner notes, “Certainly the apostle Paul, whose letters are filled with moral exhortations, believed that such exhortations are helpful in one’s spiritual life and can drive believers to trust in the power of the Spirit and to live in a way that is pleasing to God” (229).

The relationship of the believer to biblical law is one of the most complex issues of biblical theology. Nearly three centuries ago, Jonathan Edwards noted that no topic received such careful study and generated such sharp disagreement among faithful divines as the “precise agreement and difference between the two dispensations of Moses and Christ.” His observation is as true now as then.

Schreiner has carefully navigated this complex issue, avoiding both the Scylla of legalism and the Charybdis of antinomianism. Schreiner’s years of study have taken him from a traditional Reformed view of the law to what one might classify as a modified-Lutheran view. The book reveals his mature reflections and most recent opinions on the topic, sometimes qualifying or even correcting views expressed in earlier works. Schreiner’s work is marked by the scholarly acumen, brevity and clarity, and pastoral concern that one seeks in a work of this nature. This is likely the single best introduction to this difficult issue for church members, students, and pastors.

—Charles L. Quarles
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Professor of New Testament and Biblical
Theology

Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction. By Jonathan T. Pennington. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012, 268 pp., \$24.99 paper.

Intended as a companion to more traditional introductory texts on the Gospels, *Reading the Gospels Wisely* focuses on the nature and necessity of the Gospels within scripture and provides

theoretical and practical guidance for how to read them well as disciples of Christ. Jonathan Pennington identifies among evangelicals a neglect of the Gospels within local church life in favor of the Pauline epistles and propositional doctrine, a neglect he aims to counteract by “ignit[ing] a flame of interest in studying and preaching from the Gospels and reading them well as Holy scripture” (38). Seeking to instruct his readers in how to read the Gospels wisely, Pennington divides the book into three parts, organized around the metaphor of a wise builder drawn from Jesus’ parable in Matthew 7:24-27. The wise reader first prepares a good foundation, addressing presuppositional issues such as genre, proper hermeneutics, and the relationship between history and theology. The wise reader then builds the house through wise reading, for which Pennington supplies an eight-step narrative model to assist the reader in analyzing and interpreting the Gospels. Finally, the wise reader lives in the four-roomed Gospel house by proclaiming and applying their message.

Among the contributions the book makes is a helpful discussion of the Gospels’ genre, including a well-crafted definition which provides the reader with proper genre expectations. In particular, the definition highlights the “aretological” or virtue-forming purpose of the Gospels as instruments of transforming disciples as they emulate Christ (35). Pennington also gives a cogent overview of the debate within biblical studies concerning the relationship between history and theology. He comes to a balanced conclusion, on the one hand upholding the importance of historical studies for their apologetic value and their ability to provide a “thick” understanding of the historical context of scripture’s composition. On the other hand, he recognizes the full legitimacy of a theological reading of the Bible which presupposes its status as credible historical testimony, apart from any historical-critical tests of verifiability. In balancing these two concerns, Pennington recognizes both the necessity of efforts to harmonize the Gospels along with embracing the diversity and individual

integrity of each canonical Gospel.

In discussing the four Gospels' status as "testimony," Pennington astutely identifies the epistemic root of the debate over the relationship between history and theology. The question is not fundamentally a choice between doing history or theology, but a question of what is "the true nature of (historical and other) knowledge and how we apprehend it" (101). Following Richard Bauckham, Pennington argues that knowledge is received "through evaluating and trusting testimony" (101). Understanding the Gospels as testimony therefore provides a category which maintains for the Gospels a dual identity as both history and theology, a genre which is "simultaneously making theological and historical claims" (104). Since the Gospels are making theological claims, the wise reader must approach them with an attitudinal posture in keeping with those claims. Pennington rightly contends for the high importance of a reader's posture, even while promoting a "beautiful balance" between the reader's exegetical skill and heart attitude (141). But within this balance, Pennington claims that "the priority is posture" (138). One question is whether this claim of priority best represents Paul's attitude in Philippians 1:14-18, where he seems to give some measure of priority to the accurate proclamation of the gospel over the proper motivations for proclaiming it. Nonetheless, Pennington's larger point is a crucial one—the wise reader is not a mere technician who lords it over the text but a humble believer who sits under the text.

When discussing proper interpretive presuppositions for reading the Gospels wisely, Pennington argues that the reader must consider three avenues: the history behind the text, what is written in the text, and aspects of the reader's response in front of the text, including both the history of interpretation and facets of meaning which go beyond human authorial intent. An area for further clarification is Pennington's use of "authorial intent." He uses the phrase to refer to both what was in the mind of the author at the time of composition and what the author actually explicitly stated in the text, without always making a clear distinction between

these two aspects of authorial intent. Pennington distinguishes them when he says, "not to say that we can recover the psychological intentions an author may have had, but we can describe what an author *did* say by using certain words in a certain way" (126). But at other times Pennington seems to equate "authorial intent" with the author's unexpressed intentions. Perhaps a helpful way to maintain this necessary distinction would be to differentiate between "author-intended meaning" and "author-encoded meaning." Another aspect of Pennington's use of authorial intent that invites debate is his assigning of biblical theology, figural (typological) readings, and intertextuality solely to the category "in front of" the text, beyond human authorial intent. But an argument can be made that at least some aspects of these three are properly in the realm of human authorial intent.

Like his use of "authorial intent," Pennington's use of "textual meaning" could use further clarification. On the one hand, he recognizes that making a distinction between textual meaning and significance (or application) is "helpful conceptually and heuristically" (216). On the other hand, he rejects this distinction as "more convenient than accurate" (130, n. 21) and as "a late modern reaction to the crumbling edifice of the Enlightenment" (132). One of the reasons Pennington rejects this distinction are the insights of speech-act theory which posit that a text's propositional meaning (locution) cannot be separated from the text's "call for action, response, change of view, and commitment (illocution)"—in other words, textual meaning cannot be separated from significance (132). But speech-act theory also distinguishes between illocution and perlocution. If illocution is understood as the "author-intended significance" and perlocution is understood as the "reader-responded significance," then locution and illocution can be rightly held together as expressions of the author's intent even while making a necessary distinction between illocution and perlocution. Following this line of reasoning, a distinction between author-intended meaning/significance and reader-responded sig-

nificance is still a legitimate one to make. Pennington also seems to correlate the making of a meaning/significance distinction with a reductionistic approach to interpreting the text (132, 136). In any case, one can agree wholeheartedly with Pennington in rejecting “thin” readings of the text without also rejecting the meaning/significance distinction as a legitimate and useful concept.

In seeking to re-establish the importance of the Gospels, Pennington also is careful to uphold the “abiding canonical value of the epistles” (42) and commitment to “propositional doctrine,” (44) since both narrative and propositions are valid and necessary “maps or discourses of truth” (45). At the same time, Pennington also argues that Gospel narratives are a “more comprehensive and paradigmatic type of map,” which communicate truth “most comprehensively and transformatively” and “most powerful[ly]” (46). According to Pennington, “story, even more than propositions, communicates the most foundational kind of truth: worldview” (48). But even while agreeing with Pennington concerning the unique power of stories and the importance of the Gospels, one may also wonder whether he overstates his case. Pennington is right to recognize the virtues of the Gospels and some of the limitations of the Epistles, but the full picture should also recognize the virtues of the Epistles and the limitations of the Gospels. So when Pennington argues that the Gospels on their own “provide a well-rounded picture of the Christian faith” (248), even though in their narrative setting the Spirit was not yet poured out, New Testament church life had yet to begin, and the mission to the Gentiles was still future, Pennington seems to claim too much. But even if at times he seems to overstate his case or require further clarification, Pennington has presented an eloquent and persuasive case for the Gospels to reclaim a central place in the life of the church.

—John Wind
Ph.D. candidate

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically. By Gordon J. Wenham. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012, xvi + 233pp., \$22.99.

Gordon J. Wenham, tutor in Old Testament at Trinity College, Bristol, and professor emeritus of Old Testament at the University of Gloucestershire, has written numerous works on the Pentateuch, as well as a related work on the ethical reading of narrative. The book currently under review, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically*, is the first of two monographs he has produced on the Psalter. His most recent work is entitled *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Crossway, 2013). According to Wenham, *Psalms as Torah* is a “sequel to the earlier volume,” *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Baker Academic, 2000). He states that, like the earlier work, *Psalms as Torah* has arisen because the “failure to recognize the influence of the Psalms on the ethics of both Jews and Christians” is another area neglected by scholars (xi).

In chapter one, Wenham examines the use of the Psalms in the worship of the church and the synagogue throughout the centuries. Specifically, Wenham examines what the “canonical texts say about the use of the Psalms in Old Testament times” as well as “the use of the Psalms in subsequent eras” (11). He first suggests that the Psalms were sung during the offering of sacrifices and battle. Secondly, in the second temple and synagogue there were also specified Psalms that were sung daily, on the Sabbath, and during festivals. Finally, he argues that in the early church the Psalter was used for public and private prayer as well as for worship.

In his second chapter, Wenham considers the various views of the modern era on the origin of each specific Psalm, as well as the collection of the Psalms into the Psalter. However, he makes it clear that it is not his intention to “enter into the main debates but simply to highlight some of the implications of different approaches for the interpretation of the ethics of the Psalms” (27). Wenham mentions three main views: (1) the Talmud’s view,

in which no Psalms were written after David's death, and all Psalms were written by David or the ten elders; (2) the Reformers' view, which accepts the reliability of the titles, and in which the Psalter was created after the time of David, possibly by Ezra; (3) the modern view, which questions traditional authorship and the reliability of the titles, and which has established a wide scholarly consensus that the bulk of the Psalms were composed after the exile and edited in the Maccabean period for use in Israel's worship (28–32). Moreover, he discusses canonical criticism, defining it as that which "focuses on the editing process of the Psalter and the interpretation of the final form of the text" (32). The point Wenham makes is that the main distinction between canonical criticism and modern form criticism is that the former attempts to interpret the Psalter as a unified book, whereas the latter insists that each Psalm must be interpreted as a self-contained unit, since Psalms is not a unified book.

In chapter three, Wenham seeks to refine the canonical critics' approach by arguing that the Psalms "were intended to be memorized, with a view to being publicly recited for the purpose of inculcating the nation's values" (46). He defends his thesis by interacting with and building upon the work of David Carr and Paul Griffiths, who called for a "reexamination of the way sacred texts were viewed and used in antiquity, before the advent of printing" (41). He acknowledges that the literacy rate in the ancient world is one major difficulty in applying this thesis to the general populace. However, he aptly responds to this question by drawing attention to the importance of oral learning in the ancient world (46–49). Further, he points to three features of the Psalms that aid in memorization: poetic form, musical accompaniment, and thematic macrostructures (49–52). Wenham concludes by stating that the impact of memorization is that one "becomes textualized; that is, he embodies the work that he has committed to memory" (53).

In the fourth chapter, Wenham considers how

prayer affects a worshipper's ethics. He argues that what makes the claim of prayer on the ethics of the worshiper unique from other ethical discourse is not simply memorization, for other texts were likely memorized. Rather, it is their use in worship as hymns and prayers, since by praying the Psalms one is actively committing oneself to its values and standards (57–58, 75–77). In other words, the Psalms actively commit the worshiper to this ethic by encouraging him to embrace the standards of life set forth in the Psalms and by obligating the worshiper to describe the actions he will embrace and avoid (65). Thus, when one prays, it is like making a vow or an oath (65). He defends this by applying reader-response criticism and speech act theories to numerous texts. Wenham concludes by stating that his objective for this chapter is simply "to draw out some of the similarities between taking an oath, making a vow, confessing faith, and praying the Psalms" (75–76).

In chapter five, Wenham examines the concept of the law in the Psalms, with the intention to "look at what the Psalms have to say about the law and, in particular, their attitude toward the law as an idea and as an institution" (78). He argues that the law holds a primary place in the Psalter, that the concept of law is the totality of God's revelation, and that the psalmists were not "legalists." He seeks to accomplish this by examining the importance of the law in the Psalter as a whole and then examining the psalmists' attitude toward the law in two Psalms in which the law is the focus, Psalm 119 and 19. Wenham's final conclusion concerning the concept of the law in the Psalter, therefore, is that it is the whole of God's revelation and the attitude of the psalmist toward the law is an acknowledgement of the psalmist's love for God's law in conjunction with his recognition of his inability to fulfill it (95).

In the sixth chapter of the book, Wenham seeks to qualify his assertion made in the previous chapter that the law is the whole of God's revelation. He supports this with two arguments: (1) The ethic taught by the Psalter is dependent upon the revela-

tion at Sinai and the Mosaic sermons about the law in Deuteronomy (he maintains that the giving of the law is omitted because Zion is the new Sinai in Psalms and the event was presupposed); and (2) the psalmists use the Pentateuchal narratives for ethical instruction by affirming the ultimate destruction of the wicked and the final vindication of the just (97-110).

In chapter seven, Wenham argues that the Psalms are heavily dependent upon the Pentateuch and that they teach two lessons. The first lesson is the national tendency to sin and the disasters that ensue. Two Psalms with which he interacts to support this are Psalm 14 and 53, arguing that they are “a theological reflection on the three stories of universal judgment in the book of Genesis: the flood, the tower of Babel, and Sodom and Gomorrah” (121). The second lesson is the long-suffering mercy of God. Wenham cites a thematic shift between books three and four, from a theme of despair to an assurance of God’s reign and steadfast love despite their sin. Therefore, he examines various Psalms from the Pentateuch and demonstrates how they either echo narratives concerning rebellion against God and the ensuing judgment or speak of God’s *hesed* (120–137).

In the eighth chapter, Wenham claims that the psalmists compare the wicked to the righteous in order to discourage the imitation of the vices of the wicked and encourage the replication of the virtues of the righteous. He maintains this based on how the descriptions, conduct, and outcome of these two groups incline the worshippers to embrace the virtues of the righteous and reject the vices of the wicked.

In chapter nine, Wenham addresses the topic of laments or imprecatory Psalms, the most common type of Psalm, which is regularly found on the lips of the righteous. The reason he addresses this topic is because this type of Psalm receives very harsh criticism from modern readers because of the “savage” way it prays for the destruction of the psalmists’ enemies (167). Wenham argues that these Psalms are not merely curses parad-

ing as prayers but expressions of the psalmists’ conviction that since God is sovereign and just, he cares about the injustice suffered by the poor and downtrodden. Wenham then examines three of the harshest imprecatory Psalms (Pss. 35, 69, 109), and he offers three points of justification: The psalmist is (1) praying out of a concern for the vindication of the power and character of God; (2) he asks only that God judge in accordance with the talionic principle; and (3) he leaves all vindication to God (170–71).

In the tenth chapter, Wenham considers the influence of the Psalms on ethical teachings found within the New Testament. He seeks to demonstrate the influence of the Psalter in shaping the ethical framework of the New Testament writers by providing an examination of select passages from Romans, Hebrews, and Revelation. For instance, in Romans he shows that Paul develops at least three ethical issues from the Psalter: (1) his teaching on the universal reign of sin in Romans 1–3 (Pss. 71; 98; 14/53, 62); (2) his teaching on suffering in Romans 8 (Pss. 118:6; 44:22); and (3) his teaching on the issue of retaliation in Romans 12 from Ps. 94:1 (189–94). Wenham concludes the chapter by stating that while this study is not exhaustive, it is sufficient to support his thesis (202).

Wenham’s book *Psalms as Torah* is a helpful addition to the study of the Psalter, and it adds to the discussion in a unique and insightful manner. Specifically, Wenham offers the reader a compelling, well-developed, and well-researched argument that the Psalms were a significant means by which ethical instruction was given in Judaism as well as the early church. Moreover, it is a helpful example of how the New Testament authors integrated the Psalms into their writings, thus opening new avenues for the study of the Psalter from both an Old Testament and New Testament perspective.

While there are many other areas of Wenham’s work that are worthy of commendation, I have two minor critiques. The first critique concerns his statement made in the second chapter, “It probably is not of great moment whether one adopts

a form-critical or a canonical approach, for both agree that throughout their usage the Psalms have been a vehicle of prayer both public and private” (40). This statement seems rather surprising, since in the next chapter Wenham appeals to recent work in canonical readings as a point of support for his thesis. These two methods of interpreting the Psalter approach it in vastly different ways.

The second critique concerns Wenham’s claim that singing the Psalms is the most powerful instructor, because unlike listening to stories, commands, or wisdom sayings which is passive, singing the Psalms is active, involving the whole person and necessitating commitment to what is being said or sung if it is to be done honestly (55). While Wenham’s stress on the active nature of singing the Psalms is helpful and a much needed emphasis, the question that must be asked is, does this preclude active learning from other genres such as the reading of narratives at religious festivals? That is, in light of the increasing discussion on performance criticism (see David Rhoads, “Biblical Theology Bulletin” Vol. 36, Part I, II)—an interpretive method which recognizes the oral culture of the biblical world, and a point Wenham also recognizes in chapter three—his conclusions on the inactive nature of listening may need to be more nuanced.

Nonetheless, despite these small critiques, *Psalms as Torah* is a well-crafted work that blazes a new trail in the study of the Psalter. Further, Wenham masterfully composes this monograph in such a way that it may benefit both the specialist and non-specialist. Finally, in comparison to other similar works on the Psalter, Wenham’s work is unique in that he is the first to specifically examine how the Psalms were used to inculcate the ethics of both Jews and Christians.

—Michael Graham
Ph.D. candidate

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals. Ed. by Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013, 332 pp., \$24.00.

Evangelicals seem more interested than ever in reading spiritual classics, those long-standing Christian writings that have enjoyed broad and enduring appeal, yet evangelical readers seem to be of two minds with regard to the classics. Some readers are concerned with affording non-biblical works too high a place in the Christian life, while other readers seem never to have met a “classic” they didn’t like (10). The contributors to this volume hope to help both groups by “developing a robust hermeneutic grounded in markedly evangelical spiritual and theological commitments” (11). The book is divided into four parts that seek to answer such questions as why (Part 1) and how (Part 2) evangelicals ought to read the classics, what constitutes a classic (Part 3), and who wrote many of these works (Part 4).

The book’s contributors include James Houston, Evan Howard, Timothy George, and Tom Schwanda. About half of the contributors have some affiliation with Biola University or its Talbot School of Theology, either as faculty (Betsy Barber, John Coe, Greg Peters, Steve Porter, and Fred Sanders) or alumni (Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel).

Rather than summarize each chapter, the following review will interact with some of the book’s high points (there are many) as well as some of its not-so-high points. The first chapter provides the foundation for the rest of the book, so this chapter will receive significant attention.

Steve Porter’s introductory essay on why evangelicals should read the spiritual classics offers an interesting definition of a Christian classic as a “writing that (1) is clearly attributable to a reborn follower of Jesus, (2) focuses on a biblical understanding of sanctification, and (3) a multitude of voices across Church history attest to its value for Christian living” (16). I found his definition commendable in principle but difficult in practice. Who

arbitrates an author's spiritual standing and who defines a "biblical" understanding of sanctification? Based on some of the classics recommended by Porter's fellow contributors, they found it difficult to follow these two guidelines as well.

Porter offers three theological rationales for reading the classics. First, he proposes a pneumatological rationale: since the Spirit applies and illumines "God's truth to a receptive heart," and since the Spirit utilizes a variety of "extrabiblical means to prepare the soil and even implant the meaning" of God's presence and word, "then it is evident that one fitting means would be the writings of other Christ followers regarding a biblical understanding of the way of holiness" (21-23). Next, Porter suggests an incarnational rationale drawn from Paul's imitation references in 1 Corinthians 4:16-17, Philippians 3:17 and 4:9, as well as 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9. Porter argues that if the early church could imitate Paul, Timothy, or other unspecified believers (cf. Philippians 3:17), then later Christians could serve as similar exemplars (25). Finally, he argues for an ecclesiological rationale for reading Christian classics: since the body of Christ is essential in spiritual formation, and since the Spirit uses other believers for our sanctification, then reading the spiritual classics could be a helpful, and sometimes the only effective way, "to embed ourselves in a properly functioning church body" (29). Porter concludes that reading the classics is more than "permissible"—rather Christians "ought" to read spiritual literature (19, 30).

Porter's arguments are generally sound, but don't necessitate his conclusion. Can the Spirit utilize spiritual classics to prepare one's heart for significant spiritual changes? If we are to believe Augustine's testimony about the role which Athanasius's *Life of Antony* played in his conversion, or to listen to late eighteenth-century Baptist missionaries who had read Edwards's *Diary of David Brainerd*, then we must agree that such works can indeed be used by God in shaping the heart. The Spirit's normal work of illumination, however, seems biblically to be tied to the mystery and

wisdom of the Gospel (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:6-13). While devotional classics may be a useful means, it seems a stretch to call them a necessary means.

Porter's second argument is his strongest, for "observing good theology lived out in concrete situations" is indeed a clearly articulated New Testament principle. Yet incarnation and ecclesiology are more closely linked than Porter recognizes. Porter's ecclesiological rationale begins on a solid premise, namely that true, biblical sanctification cannot occur in isolation, but rather in body life (27). Furthermore, he believes that "written materials mediate the ministry of the body of Christ" (28). He then envisions a scenario in which a Christian's membership in a deficient congregation might lead one to turn to the classics "to embed ourselves in a properly functioning church body" (29). This conclusion is problematic. First, this cannot constitute a New Testament church in any sense. Second, such an arrangement would be a one-way venture: I might learn great truths from reading the classics, but I can never fellowship with a book, which I can put safely away on my shelf when I find its demands too convicting or its insights too penetrating, so that the author cannot hold me accountable for walking consistently anymore than I can require authors to reconsider their doctrine. Then, what is to keep me from fashioning a church body in my own image and likeness when I control its membership? One of the beauties of genuine biblical ecclesiology is the tangible and mutual interactivity of fellowship, community, and discipline with living people. All of the biblical "one another" passages envision relationships with living people. Reading good books may inform one's ecclesiology but cannot replace the brothers and sisters whom the scriptures command us to love, serve, and forbear. Fellow contributor John Coe addresses this last criticism helpfully in his "Temptations in Reading Spiritual Classics." Coe warns against allowing reading spiritual classics to replace "the risk and messiness of love and community" (42).

Evan Howard's survey of various "Schools of Christian Spirituality" provides a useful sum-

mary of historical spirituality and is among the best chapters in the book. Howard strikes a good balance of summarizing historical emphases and pointing readers to important primary and secondary sources. His section summarizing Reformed and Puritan spirituality (72–73) would be helped by more extensive secondary sources such as Kavic and Gleason’s *The Devoted Live* or Charles Hambrick-Stowe’s *Practice of Piety*. Other high points include Greg Peters’s chapter on “Spiritual Theology,” James Houston on “Engaging Classic Literature,” James Payton’s guide to “Reading Orthodox Spirituality,” and Gerald Sittser’s exploration on the spiritual classics of “The Desert Fathers.” I’ll admit that I felt most at home when reading Tom Schwanda’s chapter on reading classics from the Puritan and Pietistic (both German and Dutch) traditions. Peters, Payton, George, and Sittser’s chapters were excellent models of clear writing, solid scholarship, and pastoral sensitivity. Peters raised one of the most important questions of all of the contributors: When reading a spiritual classic, what does the author view as the goal of the Christian life (80)? This question is critical for evangelicals to ask when reading any spiritual classic, especially several of the classics recommended by Barber and Demarest.

Bruce Demarest is a fine evangelical theologian who has been very open about the place which Catholic spiritual writings have played in his own path of discipleship. Demarest rightly notes two problems many evangelicals have with Catholic spiritual works, some rejecting them outright, thus missing occasional insights, and others accepting them uncritically and embracing “unbiblical assertions” (128–29). To be sure, he devotes considerable space in his chapter to warning evangelicals about many of these theological problems—more than twice as many pages as he gives to describing the spiritual benefits of Catholic classics. He concludes that “as [evangelicals] read Catholic spirituality we are likely to find greater agreement spiritually than theologically” (129). Yet theology and spirituality are inseparable; what one believes

about God, justification, revelation, or the Eucharist will have practical implications for piety. I wish Demarest would have made this link clear. For example, Demarest commends Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* as a model of spiritual direction. Later, Demarest warns readers to be wary of writers that confused the grounds of justification and that promoted severe asceticism, but fails to mention that Ignatius viewed his *Exercises* as meritorious and commended self-flagellation and other self-tortures to atone for one’s sin.

I profited from Betsy Barber’s chapter on the classics and soul care and found her insights on how the classics address suffering very thoughtful (56). I appreciated her concept of utilizing developmentally-keyed classics in discipleship (50–52), a theme shared by other contributors. Barber acknowledges the difference between historic Protestant and more mystical conceptions of sanctification (53), but many of the authors she suggests as helpful guides (Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, Benedict of Nursia, and Francis of Assisi) blurred distinctions between sanctification and justification. I don’t think that Barber intends to call evangelicals to follow the mystical three-fold pattern so much as to recognize that Christians are often at different places of maturity, but I do question how helpful it is to direct evangelicals to authors whose writings seriously distort the gospel and biblical concepts of holiness.

Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics is intended to help evangelicals become informed and wise readers of a large and varied body of spiritual literature and I think the book accomplishes this goal. Although I can’t recommend every “classic” suggested, I believe this collection of essays will serve as an important introduction for many years to come.

—Joe Harrod

Ph.D. candidate

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book about a (Really) Big Problem. By Kevin DeYoung. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013, 128 pp., \$11.99 paper.

Chronic busyness is a significant problem for an increasing number of Christians, and Kevin DeYoung has written “a mercifully short book” that addresses “the frenetic pace” of life which consumes the lives of many and “poses a serious threat to our physical, social, and even spiritual well-being.” DeYoung believes that busyness has become an increasingly serious problem in the West in part because of the expanded opportunities and complexities of modern life (23-25). In his words, “because we *can* do so much, we *do* do so much” (24). While the busyness of modern life takes its mental and physical toll on us, DeYoung encourages readers to consider the great spiritual dangers which result from busyness and “put our souls at risk” (26). Because busyness is something that can “ruin our joy,” “rob our hearts,” and “cover up the rot in our souls” (26-32), DeYoung likens it to sin, in terms of its destructive effects, and counsels that we must “kill it [busyness], or it will be killing you” (28).

In his analysis of busyness, DeYoung rightly states that much of modern busyness is self-inflicted. While the world draws us toward certain lifestyles and a certain pace, the problem is not so much with modern culture as it is a problem of our own hearts. DeYoung diagnoses seven specific problems that lie at the root of self-inflicted busyness, and this material makes up the bulk of the book. First, DeYoung points to the many manifestations of pride that drive people into a lifestyle of busyness, including people-pleasing, perfectionism, and self-promotion (33-41). We often make decisions that are self-serving, and we resist saying no to others because of pride. Such prideful choices are often at the root of self-inflicted busyness. Second, DeYoung cites his own experience of busyness as at times being rooted in an overly sensitive conscience and a misplaced desire to please God by taking on more work and service

than we are able to bear (43-51). DeYoung notes that we must understand our own individual calling and not succumb to any form of Messiah-complex which drives us to do more than we are able. Third, DeYoung notes that much busyness comes from failing to have clear priorities for one’s life and the self-discipline to do only what one should be doing (53-64). This chapter highlights the need for ruthless self-discipline in the management of one’s life. Fourth, DeYoung criticizes what he calls “kindergarchy,” or the overly anxious approach of hyper-parenting which drives some parents to put almost obsessive demands upon themselves and what they are able to do for their children (65-75). Fifth, DeYoung insightfully addresses the strangling effects of internet over-use and addiction, the concomitant sloth (or “acedia”) that accompanies it, and the constant noise and distractedness that it brings to our hearts, our relationships, and our minds (79-85). DeYoung gives wise counsel in his discussion of technology, such as: “cultivate a healthy suspicion toward technology and ‘progress,’” “be more thoughtful and understanding in your connectedness with others,” “deliberately use ‘old’ technology,” “make boundaries,” and “bring our Christian theology to bear on these dangers of the digital age” (85-88). Sixth, DeYoung highlights the need for rest and the faith that such rest presupposes (101-108). Finally, DeYoung points to the need to distinguish between the good busyness that we are called to embrace and endure as a part of our submission to Christ, and the self-inflicted busyness that we are called to fight and resist (101-108).

What solution is there to the pervasive and soul-killing threat of self-made busyness? DeYoung closes *Crazy Busy* by arguing that there is one thing that individuals must prioritize if they are to appropriately deal with busyness in their lives, and that is to “spend time everyday in the Word of God and prayer” (113). Drawing from the story of Mary and Martha, DeYoung states that “we must make learning from him [Christ] and taking time to be with him a priority” and that “being with Jesus is

the only thing strong enough to pull us away from busyness” (113, 117). The answer to the problem of busyness is Jesus and in daily saying yes to him, disciplining the rhythm of one’s life around the daily disciplines of the Bible and prayer.

By addressing the problem of self-inflicted busyness in a short, concise, and entertaining way, DeYoung has provided the Church with a very helpful tool for self-reflection and group discussion. DeYoung rightly sees the biblical connection between busyness and Christ’s teaching on the “thorns” in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20), that is, covetousness, the love of money. Other root causes of self-inflicted busyness such as lust, greed, and heart-idolatry receive less attention. DeYoung’s chapters on “kindergarchy” rightly criticize neurotic and obsessive hyper-parenting, child-centrism, and parental determinism, but some of his statements seem to minimize the importance of wise, diligent, and intentional parenting. Godly parenting calls for a particular kind of sanctified busyness (which DeYoung certainly agrees with), and this point should not be lost in any criticism of hyper-parenting. DeYoung’s section on “the screen” is especially insightful and practical, outlining the kind of specific practical counsel that pastors need to give their people regarding the use and misuse of technology and social media.

If evangelical spirituality is going to be cultivated in our churches, the issues that DeYoung addresses in this book are the kinds of issues that need to be addressed head-on. Wise pastors must give specific pastoral counsel and advice to address the specific spiritual pitfalls of our day, self-imposed busyness being one of them. For those wanting to live spiritually healthy and godly lives in a busy world and to help others to do the same, this book is a real gift and deserves a wide reading.

—Gary Steward
Ph.D. candidate

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Theology of the Reformers. Revised Edition. By Timothy George. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013, 394 pp., \$29.99.

Timothy George, dean of the Beeson Divinity School and professor of Church History and Doctrine, first published the *Theology of the Reformers* in 1988. Since that time it has maintained a reputation as an excellent introduction to the history and theology of the reformers. This twenty-fifth anniversary edition provides an opportunity for George’s work to be highlighted, expanded, and re-introduced to current students of theology. In this revised edition, George includes a new chapter on the life and theology of William Tyndale, the great English reformer. The inclusion of Tyndale expands the breadth of George’s work to now include representatives of the magisterial Reformation, the Anabaptist movement, and the English Reformation.

George sets each reformer within his historical context and considers the issues to which each responds. The Reformation in some ways was a response to late medieval Europeans’ deep anxieties, which included, George writes, guilt, fear of death, and loss of meaning. George explains the critical trends of the late medieval era that proved to be fertile ground for the Reformation: conciliarism, the ministries of Wyclif and Hus, the Waldensian movement, and above all, the rise of humanism. George argues that “humanism, like mysticism, was part of the scaffolding that enabled the reformers to question certain assumptions of the received tradition but which in itself was not sufficient to provide an enduring response to the haunting questions of the age” (48).

With clarity and grace George insightfully explains the life and thought of the three main magisterial reformers: Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. Luther is the obvious starting point when discussing the Reformation. His posting of the *Ninety-five Theses* set off a firestorm of responses and launched Luther to the forefront of the movement that became the Protestant Reformation. Although

Luther initiated a reform movement that produced vast consequences, what drove Luther was not a desire to lead this movement but rather a desire to save his soul and a commitment to the supremacy of the word of God. George wrote that Luther “listened to the Word because it was his job to do so and because he had come to believe his soul’s salvation depended upon it” (55). George explains well Luther’s emphasis on the gracious mercy of Christ and his absolute devotion to the scriptures.

George explains clearly Zwingli’s somewhat different vision for reforming the church. While Zwingli and Luther had much in common and were in most respects allies during the Reformation, their strong disagreement concerning the Lord’s Supper kept them divided. What they held in common above all else was devotion to the sole authority of the scriptures. But as George points out, they shared also the courage to “do something bold for God’s sake.”

While Luther and Zwingli were the first major proponents of the Reformation, Calvin extended its reach and lasting impact. George writes that “Calvin’s great achievement was to take the classic insights of the Reformation and give them a clear, systematic exposition, which neither Luther nor Zwingli ever did” (174). Because of his influence in giving full shape and powerful expression to Reformation thought, Calvin is often the figure who elicits the most dramatic responses of either praise or denigration. Regardless of one’s evaluation of Calvin’s theology, Calvin’s courageous commitment to faithful service of the Word of God by seeking to point men to its revelation of Jesus Christ and to their obligation to submit to his mercy and rule, was extraordinary.

George explains the life and thought of Menno Simons as the representative of the Anabaptist movement. Anabaptists were a diverse lot, but Simons stood at the forefront of the continuing tradition. The Anabaptist movement was the most important part of what is now called the Radical Reformation. It took a decidedly different approach to the church, insisting that the church

was independent of the authority of the magistrate. Theologically Simons disagreed with the magisterial Reformers on a number of other important issues, most visibly on baptism. Anabaptists experienced violent persecution and extraordinary suffering. Simons was not as brilliant a theologian as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, but he was no less faithful as a servant of the scriptures.

Finally, this revised edition includes a most welcome addition, a chapter on William Tyndale as a representative of the English Reformation. Tyndale’s life ended violently. His devotion to the sole authority of the scripture and to its divine power to save and sanctify sinners, led him to seek to provide access to the Bible for the common people. He translated the Bible into English and published it without the authorization of the king. English authorities searched out copies of Tyndale’s translation to destroy them, and they sought him with the same end in mind. They finally succeeded. Tyndale suffered martyrdom but helped establish the Reformation in England.

Each of these reformers recognized their duty under God to extend his kingdom. They differed substantially on some matters. What made them great was their common conviction that the Bible alone was God’s word, and that he called them to sacrifice all things for the sake and service of Jesus, who died for them. This was the foundational element of the “theology of the Reformers,” for it alone could sustain the Bible’s central place. George summarized their vision of a true Christianity, which was this, that “the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the only foundation, the only compelling and exclusive criterion, for Christian life and Christian theology” (383).

—Keith Brown
Ph.D. candidate

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary