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### **Editorial**

This issue contains several articles of interest and help to both ministers and scholars. Each contributing author is committed to scholarship in the service of Christ and the church.

I wish to offer special thanks to Dr. Thor Madsen, the out-going academic editor. His insights and support have been a tremendous boon to the journal and to me personally. I also want to thank Joni Carrico for all of her valuable help and time on the formatting of this and the previous edition of the journal.

The first and second articles are written versions of two of the three Sizemore lectures that were presented at Midwestern Seminary in the fall of 2008. Dr. Steven Ortiz of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary gave the lectures on the nature of biblical archaeology and its usefulness to the evangelical community.

The third article is a helpful piece submitted by Alan Branch who teaches ethics at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. This article gives a helpful critique of the hermeneutics practiced by the Metropolitan Community Church. The article will help readers understand good hermeneutical principles as well as the dangers inherent in forcing the Bible to conform to our desires.

The fourth article is a submission from David Wenkel who is a Ph.D. student studying at the University of Aberdeen. David's article examines the oft overlooked two-age eschatology in the book of Matthew and how that eschatology impacts our understanding of the book.

The final article is by Michael Fox who recently graduated from Midwestern Seminary with his M.Div. degree and who is now pursuing a Ph.D. at Brite Divinity School. The article gives an insightful examination into the concerns of Malachi by examining nuances present in the Hebrew text.

If you would like to have a Midwestern Seminary faculty member speak in your church, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are more than happy to serve you.

Enjoy!

N. Blake Hearson, Ph.D.  
Managing Editor

# **Purpose of Biblical Archaeology: Media Hype, Myths, Models, and Mission**

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## **Abstract**

The following paper is one of three lectures given at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall of 2008 as part of the Sizemore Lectures. The paper explores the changing nature of biblical archaeology. The discipline has undergone numerous changes due to the increased interest in archaeological finds by the media, the expansion of archaeology into other areas of the ancient Near East, and changing world views among scholars. The article examines and summarizes these changes and draws conclusions about the purpose and use of archaeology for those holding and evangelical Christian worldview.<sup>1</sup>

## **Media Hype**

It seems that not a month goes by when we do not hear about some spectacular find that is going to revolutionize what we think about the Bible or Jesus. No matter how small or insignificant the find, the media is able to somehow make it more important than it actually is. This is understandable to a point; the public likes sensation. The Bible is still the most purchased book ever (I used to say “most read book,” but I have tempered my statements to correlate with the evidence). Anytime there is

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to honor the Sizemore family and their commitment to providing seminary students with an outlet to discuss current and important trends in biblical studies. They have left a legacy of fidelity to the in-depth study of God’s Word. I would like to thank Dr. Roberts and the faculty of Midwestern Seminary for inviting me to give the Sizemore Lectures this year. I appreciate Dr. Roberts evangelistic zeal, his understanding of the great commission as a historic event and something that followers of Jesus should be actively engaged in. I also appreciate his passion for training men and women to handle God’s word properly. His personal commitment for current archaeological research and his commitment to Midwestern’s participation in the Tel Gezer excavation project goes beyond the duties of most seminary presidents.

some find associated with the Bible, it is going to draw public interest. Hence, the media is quick to report on any find that has some biblical relevance. We are all familiar with the examples from the past five years or so: James Ossuary, Joash Inscription, John the Baptist's Cave, as well as son of the High Priest, palace of David, etc., etc. Not to mention the finds that resurface almost annually: Noah's Ark and the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, archaeologists are not necessarily victims, because they also participate in the media hype. We need funds to support our research; we need the so-called free advertising that media offers—so archaeologists are quick to use the media to promote our work. Sometimes this relationship is abused by archaeologists. The best examples are the Cave of John the Baptist and the Lost Tomb of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Each of these finds was promoted with a media circus. It was also convenient that these discoveries were reported just before a book or a documentary was about to come out.

The media's desire to sensationalize finds and the archaeologist's desire to publicize his work creates a marriage of convenience that only supplies fuel to the fire of the sensationalization of artifacts. This creates an environment ripe for several types of individuals to become associated with biblical archaeology: caricatures, charlatans, critical scholars, and criminals/collectors.

### **Myths**

Most public perceptions of an archaeologist follow the Hollywood model of Indiana Jones. He is a studious archaeologist with a dual personality of scholar in the classroom, wearing a tweed coat during the academic semester; and during the academic breaks, he becomes transformed into a whip-carrying swashbuckling hero, who fights evil forces as he heads off on an adventure to find some lost object. It is humorous to those of us in the field of archaeology that whenever amateurs want to portray themselves as serious archaeologists, they portray themselves as a modern-day Indiana Jones. This is true whether they are looking for the lost Ark of the Covenant, Mt. Sinai, Noah's Ark, Paul's shipwreck, the route of the Exodus, or the "real" location of the Tomb of Jesus. The scripts for all these amateur portrayals are very similar. It must work,

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<sup>2</sup> Shimon Gibson, *The Cave of John the Baptist: The First Archaeological Evidence of the Historical Reality of the Gospel Story* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007).

because several men have made names for themselves as they take on this persona of the Hollywood adventurer making these phenomenal discoveries.<sup>3</sup>

The church has also fallen captive to these archaeologists who are making famous discoveries. As stated earlier, the best examples are Noah's Ark, the Ark of the Covenant, Location of Mt. Sinai, and my favorite—chariot wheels in the Gulf of Aqaba. Students and pastors fill up my outlook inbox with grainy pictures of supposed chariot wheels deep in the sea. These websites that display various archaeological reports all have a similar conclusion: They are on an expedition, on the last day they found...[insert find], they need money to go back and get it.

Is all media bad? No! As with any discipline, biblical archaeologists desire to make their research available to non-specialists. The best example of this is the popular publication of *Biblical Archaeology Review* (*BAR*). While some archaeologists would place this publication within the domain of caricatures and charlatans, many see it as a valuable interface between the work of biblical archaeologists and the public. Granted, it is a for-profit publication and as with any publication there is a tendency to sensationalize, but it has served the discipline well.

In addition to caricatures and charlatans, we also have critical scholars. Critical scholars have realized the impact of the media on the public's perception of the historicity of the Bible. *BAR* has demonstrated that there is a public desire to know the results of scholarly research. Therefore, critical scholars have created their own media circus to promote their views. The most prominent is the Jesus Seminar during the early 1990s. This group of scholars got together under the auspices of finding the historical Jesus. Each year they put out media guides and reports of their scholarship. In truth, the Jesus seminar was not searching for the historical Jesus, but reinventing Jesus in *their own image*. These scholars got together and voted on each saying of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. They would hold press conferences and be interviewed by major print publications such as *Time* or *Newsweek* every Christmas and Easter season. The conclusion of their research was that Jesus' words as recorded in the New Testament are not authentic, but were added later by the early church to support their "corrupted" doctrine of a resurrected Lord. When it was all said and done, their research concluded that only

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this type of distortion see, Steven M. Ortiz "The Use and Abuse of Archaeological Interpretation and the Lost Tomb of Jesus," pp. 1-50, in Charles Quarles (ed.) *Buried Hope or Risen Savior? The Search for the Jesus Tomb* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2008).

about 18% of what we have in the Gospels are actually the words of Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

A similar trend has occurred in Old Testament studies commonly referred to as the minimalist and maximalist debate.<sup>5</sup> The underlying premise of the minimalist position is that not much of the Hebrew Bible is historical. In the past, even secular, non-conservative scholars held to some degree of historicity of the biblical text. While these scholars discounted the supernatural, they still acknowledged that there was an historical event that was the impetus for the account. Basically there was a David and a Solomon, but the later writers added a layer of so-called God speak that accounted for the miraculous and propaganda. To use a modern term—a layer of spin. A new school of thought is now becoming dominant as scholars are proposing that the Bible is a document created sometime during the Persian or even Hellenistic period—a work of fiction.<sup>6</sup> Not only are the miraculous accounts considered to be fairy tales but even the underlying historical events are fiction! David and Solomon are figures like King Arthur—national and ethnic myths made up in the minds of mad Jewish priests.

While archaeologists have not adopted this view, there is a movement that questions the standard archaeology of David and Solomon by proposing the Low Chronology which redates the archaeological record by nearly 100 years. Thus all the archaeological evidence for the United Monarchy disappears into the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>7</sup>

I have briefly introduced the main characters in the media drama of biblical archaeology: caricatures, charlatans, and critical scholars. However, there are two more characters: the Criminal and Collector. Beneath the sensationalism of all these finds is the exposure of the relationship between collections (whether public or private) and the illegal excavations that are done to bring artifacts to the black market. A

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<sup>4</sup> Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar; *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the history of the debate see Megan Bishop Moore, *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988); Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written & Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Keith W. Whitlam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> For a popular overview of the trends and issues see Amy Dockser Marcus, *A View From Mt. Nebo: How Archaeology is Rewriting the Bible and Reshaping the Middle East* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 2000).

second criminal activity is the forging of biblical artifacts. Since there is a public and private demand for artifacts from the biblical world—there will always be the criminal element associated with biblical archaeology. This came to the forefront with the James Ossuary and the current court proceedings of the owner, Oded Golan. While the verdict is still out, we do know that several finds associated with biblical history are fakes, and those that are authentic—are suspect.<sup>8</sup>

Al Mohler was recently asked the question of the use/importance of archaeology. He addressed the same issues I mentioned—media hype and critical scholarship, unfortunately he also downplayed the value. I quote him:

Archaeological findings are of great interest, of course. But the key issue is what kind of authority we invest in archaeology in terms of authenticating or disproving the text of the Bible. Christians err by accepting or investing too much evidentiary authority in archaeological “findings,” whether considered to support or to question the biblical accounts.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately the media hype and myth are going to be dominant forces. The question that lies before us is, “What is the purpose of biblical archaeology?” Does it have a place in academia? More specifically, does it have a place in the seminary? According to Dr. Mohler, one easily gets the impression that it has limited value.

### Models

I have stated that the popular, public portrayal of biblical archaeologists is as caricatures, charlatans or critical scholars. Real archaeologists and those who are doing the actual scholarship never make it to the public eye—and the few evangelicals in the field have an even harder time having their voice heard. Biblical Archaeology is a young discipline that has only grown exponentially in the past 50 years. There have been many developments during this short period. One of the main developments is that biblical archaeology is no longer a subset of biblical studies. It is its own discipline with its own research goals and strategy. These changes have happened so rapidly that the public has not been informed of the changes. The Mohler critique of biblical archaeology is accurate—

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<sup>8</sup> See Nina Burleigh, *Unholy Business: A True Tale of Faith, Greed and Forgery in the Holy Land*, (2008).

<sup>9</sup> “What Should We Think About Archaeology and the Bible?” [www.AlbertMohler.com](http://www.AlbertMohler.com), posted: Tuesday, July 8, 2008.

however it is anachronistic. He is critiquing the biblical archaeology of the last generation—the biblical archaeology that has become a caricature in the media.

In this essay I hope to address the changing paradigm of biblical archaeology and its usefulness to biblical studies. First, I will present an overview of the history of biblical archaeology and the nature of the archaeological enterprise in order to define the *Purpose of Biblical Archaeology*. In the following essay I will address the nexus of archaeology and its contribution—but more importantly, its value to biblical studies. Hopefully this will demonstrate the process of archaeology within biblical studies.

The first question that needs to be addressed is, “How did we get to this place?” The second question is “Where should we be?”—or more specifically, “What is the nature of archaeology?”

### *History of Archaeology and Biblical Studies*

There is a growing corpus on the history of biblical archaeology.<sup>10</sup> A recent work focuses specifically on the relationship between biblical archaeology and biblical history—particularly its use among conservative scholars. Davis is the first to address the interplay between field archaeology, theology, and the debates within biblical studies on the use of archaeology. In addition, he sets the parameters of the debate and trends of historical minimalists and accurately addresses the theme of biblical archaeology—the question of the historicity of the Bible. I will use Davis’ analysis and historical framework to discuss the history and development of biblical archaeology.

### *Early explorers of the Holy Land*

The birth of biblical archaeology is tied to the draw of pilgrims to Palestine and western man’s fascination with exploration. With the discovery of the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, biblical scholars were quick to make the connection with the biblical accounts. They were quicker to realize the use of archaeological data to support the historicity of the Bible. The emphasis was on the debate between

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas W. Davis, *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); P.R.S. Moorey, *A Century of Biblical Archaeology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Neil Asher Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799-1917* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

conservative and critical approaches within biblical studies. With the birth of archaeology of the ancient Near East, several works already emphasized the impact the archaeological realia has on the historicity of the Bible.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis was on texts versus monumental inscriptions. To quote Davis:

Biblical Archaeology remained a part of the biblical, rather than the archaeological, world. The illumination of the Bible provided a rationale, a framework, and an interpretive key for archaeological research. The conservatives used the results of archaeology in an attempt to demonstrate the historical accuracy of the Bible, to support their theological positions.<sup>12</sup>

### *Monuments confront Critical Scholarship*

The emphasis of the use of archaeology for apologetics focused on the historicity of the biblical text. Even though biblical archaeology was a young and developing discipline, biblical scholars were quick to discern the value of archaeology for the defense of the faith—that is, it has great potential for apologetics.

Several scholars at the turn of the century proposed that the monuments and archaeological finds substantiated the truthfulness of Scripture.<sup>13</sup> The premise of these scholars was that the Bible represents an historical account, or a collection of historical records, that you can compare to other historical records. This was in direct response to the critique of the Bible as European critical scholars adopted source criticism. The premise of critical scholarship was that the Bible is a man-made product of various periods in Israelite history and the development

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<sup>11</sup> George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, Ltd, 1894). See bibliography and discussion in Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1979)

<sup>12</sup> Davis 2004: 45-46.

<sup>13</sup> A.H. Sayce, *Monuments Facts and Higher Critical Fancies* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1904); Ira M. Price, *The Monuments and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1925); Edwin Cone Bissell, *Biblical Antiquities* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1888); A.H. Sayce, *Fresh Light From the Ancient Monuments* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1890); James Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament: Considered with Reference to Recent Criticism* (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1908). George Adam Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1901).

of the Pentateuch reflects an early nationalistic mythologizing of Israelite origins.

The methodology in these early works of biblical archaeology was a comparative study between the texts of the ancient Near East and the Bible. Even today, within seminary circles, when I tell people I am an archaeologist, they will usually reminisce about their archaeology course when their professor passed around a cuneiform tablet. It is encounters like these that make me realize biblical studies has not caught up to developments in biblical archaeology and biblical archaeology still continues to be considered a sub-discipline of biblical studies. It is still modeled after those early apologetic works. Biblical archaeology has changed as a discipline and the emphasis has shifted from a philological to an historical, and now to an anthropological framework. To summarize this early period: conservative scholars focused on archaeology to support the historicity of the texts and critical scholars turned to form criticism.

### *Birth of Biblical Archaeology as a Discipline*

The development of biblical archaeology as a discipline was fulfilled as Albright masterfully used the science of archaeological excavations to address the questions of textual scholars in biblical studies. The theoretical paradigm of this new discipline was the correlation of the archaeological data (biblical world) with the biblical text. The methodology of archaeology now became stratigraphic analysis and ceramic typology.<sup>14</sup> This was a major watershed in the development of the discipline. Although Albright still saw the foundation of biblical archaeology as philology versus history, his scientific positivistic approach to the archaeological data shifted the relationship between archaeological and textual data. Now instead of comparing biblical and Assyrian cuneiform texts (such as Hezekiah's defense of Jerusalem against Sennacherib and Sennacherib's prism) the equations have shifted to evidences such as the fact that Tell Beit Mirsim Stratum C<sub>2</sub> has a destruction level and this is evidence of Joshua's Conquest, or that Gezer IX contains red-slip burnished wheel burnished pottery therefore this is the stratum of Solomon. This is an important shift, now biblical scholars had to master new and different datasets.

Albright developed his archaeology further into two perspectives: biblical archaeology and Palestinian archaeology (later to be termed

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<sup>14</sup> Two brand new methods never before used in biblical studies.

Syro-Palestinian Archaeology in 1938).<sup>15</sup> In his new model biblical archaeology is the process of constructing biblical theory on the realia of archaeology.<sup>16</sup>

Albright directly addressed the school of Wellhausen through archaeological data in the publication of *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible*.<sup>17</sup> Because of his critique and positive view of the biblical text and archaeology, Albright was accused of fundamentalism—especially in statements supporting the historicity of the biblical text, such as: “Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition of the Bible as a source of history.”<sup>18</sup> One of Albright’s students, Nelson Glueck, held a more conservative position and is famous for his statement in his book *Rivers in the Desert*: “It may be categorically stated that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference.”<sup>19</sup> In reality, Albright theologically was in the middle of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. While he had a high view of the historicity of the Bible—this was based on the archaeological data and not a theological position of the nature of sacred scripture.

### *G. Ernest Wright—Biblical Theology Movement*

Albright’s integration of archaeology and biblical studies was carried further by his student G. Ernest Wright. Wright’s Biblical Theology Movement made archaeology an integral part of Old Testament theology—using the realia of the archaeological data as the paradigm of Old Testament theology that the basis of God’s revelation is in the events themselves and not the text. This approach was short lived as it received criticism from many theologians.<sup>20</sup>

Wright’s presuppositions were as follows:

- 1) to take biblical theism and supernaturalism very seriously
- 2) to see the unifying factor as the will and purpose of God, and

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<sup>15</sup> Davis 2004:87.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>17</sup> G. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1932).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>19</sup> Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Grove Press, 1959); p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> For a summary of this critique see, Leo Perdue’s *The Collapse of History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1994).

3) to have a sympathetic, understanding faith for the best biblical scholarship.<sup>21</sup>

4)

Wright's aims of biblical study were:<sup>22</sup>

1) to attempt to gain a view of the Bible as a whole

2) to discover the meaning of the Bible against all other systems of faith; and

3) to take a stand pro or contra the essentials of its proclamation.

Wright did not view archaeology as something to verify faith, but as something that could enhance the reliability of faith.<sup>23</sup> Wright wanted to return to the central focus in theology—the divine-human encounter.<sup>24</sup> According to Davis' analysis, Wright cautiously distanced himself from apologetical archaeology, keeping his foundation on Albright's positivism that focused on the objectivity of the data. Nevertheless, Wright's program and assumptions placed him on the conservative side of the fundamentalist-modernist debate as he attempted to use the critical methodology and responses to New-Orthodoxy while also having a high view of the historicity of the Bible.

When Wright shifted his focus back to the dirt (in particular to the excavations at Shechem) he realized that the archaeological data does not easily match up to the biblical text. There was not an exact one-to-one correlation between both datasets. Thus one of the sets of data needed to accommodate the other set. Either archaeological data needed to be changed or the biblical text needed to change. In the field of biblical archaeology, the archaeological data naturally became king and the measuring rod to evaluate the biblical data.

The end of the Albright-Wright period saw the use of "the perceived realia of the field data to modify the biblical record." Davis summarizes this period: "the archaeology was used to correct the biblical record, which was used in turn to interpret the archaeology: a circular trap."<sup>25</sup>

### *Post Albright/Wright-Death of Biblical Archaeology*

The heyday of biblical archaeology took off at a gallop. With the establishment of the state of Israel and Israeli schools of archaeology—

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<sup>21</sup> Wright 1946:90-93; Davis 2004:98.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Davis 2004:99.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Davis 2004:121.

archaeology was producing data on a daily basis.<sup>26</sup> With the accumulation of this data; the collapse of the Biblical Theology Movement and its positive equation of archaeology and Bible—the pendulum started to swing back to critical scholarship. Archaeologists started to excavate sites of the Conquest and were not finding mass destructions. We could not find Abraham in the archaeological record and we could not find any evidence for Israel in Egypt nor in the Sinai.

The mantle of biblical archaeology in America was assumed by one of Wright's students: William G. Dever. While he was tasked as a student of Wright's to look for Abraham in the archaeological record—he found no evidence. Although his work was instrumental in redating and defining the Early Bronze-Middle Bronze transition and he single-handedly changed Albright's MBI to EBIV. Besides his work on ceramic analysis, he introduced the *new archaeology* into biblical archaeology which emphasized anthropological approaches to the archaeological record. Now the *search for the Bible* in the archaeological record changed to the *search for social processes* in the archaeology of ancient Israel. Dever proclaimed the death of biblical archaeology and proposed the shift to Syro-Palestinian Archaeology (Dever has since tempered his medical pronouncements on the discipline).<sup>27</sup>

### *Current Trends*

The historicity of the Bible has dominated the discipline of biblical archaeology the last 25 years. Today, we see three trends in the post-Albright/Wright era.

The first trend is how to define biblical archaeology from a conservative perspective. Biblical archaeology, as used by evangelicals, has not changed from the early days of equating text and artifact. Among evangelicals—most use the Albright/Wright model in their use of archaeological and biblical data. For brevity, I will quote Davis' summary:

Biblical Archaeology rested on two fundamental a priori assumptions: that the Bible was historical, and that archaeology

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<sup>26</sup> For a summary and overview see Raz Kletter, *Just Past: The Making of Israeli Archaeology* (London: Equinox, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> W.G. Dever, "Syro-Palestinian and Biblical Archaeology," in D.A. Knight and G.M. Tucker (eds.), *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia: 1985), pp. 31-74; "Biblical Archaeology--Death and Rebirth?" Pp. 706-22 in A. Biran and J. Aviram, (eds.), *Biblical Archaeology Today, 1990. Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, June 1990* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993).

provided an external, objective source of reliability. These in turn were dependent on a belief in the Bible as the Word of God and on a nineteenth-century understanding of science as an endeavor that was immutable and unaffected by the presuppositions of the scholar. Archaeology was properly one of the humanities, and as such it was the handmaiden of history. Thus, the endeavor of archaeology in a historical era should be the elucidation of this history and should be geared to answer the questions of *Kulturgeschichte*. The Bible was the historical document of Palestine; therefore, it was the source of the agenda for biblical archaeology. This agenda was historical, biblical, and, in its ultimate extent, apologetical.<sup>28</sup>

A second trend is the separation of biblical archaeology and biblical studies. Part of this trend is due to Dever's reaction to Wright's Biblical Theology Movement. Nevertheless, this separation would have developed due to a natural outcome of specialization and the growth of the discipline, and the burgeoning data coming from archaeological excavations. Evidence of the theoretical and methodological shift is demonstrated by the separated scholarly societies between ASOR and SBL.<sup>29</sup>

The third trend is a crisis in biblical historiography. Since the archaeological record does not match up nicely with the biblical text, many scholars began to ask questions and debate how much of the Bible is authentic history. This has led to the development of the minimalist school which states that there is very little history in the biblical text. This school is starting to dominate Bible history. This dominance is mostly due to an "evangelical zeal" of revisionist history found in the postmodern paradigm shift in biblical studies. This zeal has spilled into the public arena with much publicity and popularization of these minimalist trends. These last two trends have come to dominate biblical archaeology and have reached the popular arena as scholars are free to address this question: What is really historical? And conclude...not much.

### **Archaeological Data and Historical Reliability of the Bible**

Why have these last two critical trends come to dominate biblical archaeology? At face value it appears that archaeology has provided

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<sup>28</sup> Davis, pp. 154-55.

<sup>29</sup> The American Schools of Oriental Research and the Society of Biblical Research used to meet jointly until a major break in 1997.

more questions or doubt concerning the historicity of the Bible. A lot of the archaeological data does not seem to match up with the text of the Old Testament. A majority of biblical archaeologists question the historical reliability of the biblical text. How have Christians dealt with the situation? There are four approaches.

The first approach is to walk away from the faith. I can't tell you how many archaeologists I have met in my career who tell me that they used to be believers, or had a high view of the historicity of the biblical text. As they study archaeology or advance in their graduate studies, they become disillusioned with the claims of Scripture. If they do not abandon the faith altogether, they are fully down the path of liberalism.

The second approach is to leave archaeology. Since the discipline provides supposed problems for the faith, abandon the discipline. All this has done is created a generation where we have no evangelical voices or expertise in the field of biblical archaeology. As evangelicals have taken a back seat, we have allowed critical scholars to dominate the field. This is hopefully being corrected by the current program at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and the new one started at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The third approach is to rearrange archaeological data. Most of this is done by non-archaeologists, or biblical scholars not trained in archaeology. They propose several major chronological shifts in attempts to match up the biblical text with archaeology.

The fourth approach is starting to gain influence as evangelical scholars are reevaluating our, and critical scholars, presuppositions of the biblical text and the archaeological data. We believe that there is no need to abandon the biblical text, nor the archaeological data—the problem is with our methodology and theories.

#### *Misuse of a Model*

Previous approaches using biblical archaeology have applied the simple equation: biblical text = archaeological data. Even the Albright paradigm also indirectly used this equation for the methodology of biblical archaeology. Problems arose when this simple equation appeared to create more disjunctures between the text and the archaeological data. I would go one step further and suggest that the result of this equation is a gross caricature of the relationship (see picture 1).



Picture 1. Example of caricature

Christian apologists use the same equation when they use archaeological data. First you isolate an event in the biblical text, then you postulate a specific object that must be found, forcing a simplistic direct one-to-one correspondence. For example, if the event is the biblical flood, then you go find Noah's ark; if the event is the Exodus then you go find Pharaoh's chariot wheels, parting of the Red Sea, or Mt. Sinai. This approach is the result of an incorrect understanding of the revelation of the biblical text and the nature of the archaeological enterprise. Simply stated, you take a reference in the Bible and show that this reference is supported by extra-biblical data (e.g. texts or material culture). Any use of archaeology is solely within a historical framework. Usually most arguments are framed in the equation, quoting a biblical text (e.g. Luke's census during the birth of Jesus) and equating it with a historic text. Apologetic works typically use this approach.<sup>30</sup> This simplistic equation does not take into account the nature of the archaeological data nor the nature of God's revelation.

<sup>30</sup> John Argubright, *Bible Believer's Archaeology: Historical Evidence That Proves the Bible: Volume I and The Search for Truth: Volume II* (Fairfax: Xulon Press, 2001 and 2003); Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Volume I and II* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1972, 1975); Ralph O. Muncaster, *Can Archaeology Prove the Old Testament?* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers 2000).

Ironically, critical scholars also hold to this distorted view of the relationship between archaeology and the biblical text. I'll briefly illustrate this with the case study of the Israelite Settlement and conquest. Critical scholars read the conquest account of Joshua and assume a Pompeii result in the archaeological record (just like conservative scholars). This Pompeii effect assumes that we should find destroyed cities 'frozen in time' waiting for the archaeologist to come and expose them.<sup>31</sup> We assume that we should find each city mentioned in Joshua's conquest destroyed in a massive conflagration left undisturbed waiting for the spade of the archaeologist. Since we do not find the "Pompeii effect," scholars conclude that the Bible is not historical. Not recognizing that the biblical text does not state this (e.g. only 3 sites were "burned"), and a destroyed site of the ancient world is not going to look like modern day military campaigns with bombed out buildings, etc.—their assumptions of the historical records of the biblical text are also caricatures.

The problem is not with the biblical text, nor the archaeological data—the problem is with the method and interpretations. Scholars are either adding to the biblical text and making it say what it does not—or they are using the archaeological record to state something that it is not capable of supporting.

### **Archaeological Enterprise**

The main reason for the misuse of archaeology in biblical studies is that biblical scholars do not understand the nature of the archaeological enterprise—What types of questions can archaeology answer and what is the nature of the archaeological data?

#### *Pots, People, Processes*

The archaeological enterprise addresses three components of the social sciences (Anthropology, History, and Sociology). Archaeology deals with material culture studies, social processes, and yes, historical events. When I am teaching an introductory archaeology course, I use the rubric of pots, people, and processes. Archaeologists focus on material culture studies. We look at artifacts—the material remnants of society. We study religion—but our data are temples, iconography, tombs, figurines, etc.—not ritual texts that describe human behavior. We also address questions

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<sup>31</sup> Pompeii is a city that was covered up by the effects of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79. This is a unique event that allowed for a well-preserved Roman city.

of the historian. Usually it is only the larger political picture such as kings and kingdoms. Where events such as ‘building a kingdom’ will leave its mark through settlement patterns; or international trade will be evidenced in the distribution of trade items. We can find military campaigns through destructions. Hence, we can discern centralized authority and postulate the kingdoms of David and Solomon through settlement patterns but we cannot find a tribal leader such as Joshua; we might find evidence of Saul’s activities but not the prophet Samuel. The third component deals with social processes. These are usually questions asked by anthropologists and sociologists: development of urbanization or domestication of plants and animals. Questions focus on such processes as ruralization, tribalism, centralization of authority. It is very rare that our questions refer to a single historical event. It is not that archaeologists are not interested in events of history, we just realize that the archaeological data cannot address something this specific.

### *Nature of Archaeological Data*

Archaeology is the science of reconstructing the past (e.g. culture/human behavior) by a systematic study of material culture. The material culture reflects only a small part of society. Archaeological data reflects that small part of material culture that is preserved through time. It represents an even smaller part of the whole based on that part that has been exposed by the archaeologist’s spade. Hence, archaeological data is incomplete—it is fragmentary. Not only is the archaeological record fragmentary, but it has been altered. There is a whole discipline complete with journals addressing formation processes in the archaeological record.<sup>32</sup>

Another issue is that the archaeological record is mute (whether we are looking at artifacts or ecofacts). The archaeologists make the interpretations. A key to the interpretation is the relationship between material culture and human behavior. Human culture does not always encode the material record of society. Even if we had the complete archaeological record preserved—it would not provide a complete picture of biblical events.

Does archaeology prove the Bible? No. Does it disprove the Bible? No. Archaeological data is neutral. It is how it is used by scholars, that determines its usefulness to address the question on the historicity of the Bible. It all comes down to whether you take an inductive or deductive approach. If you take an inductive approach you will naturally disprove

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<sup>32</sup> See Michael Schiffer, *Formation Processes in the Archaeological Record* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

the Bible. If you take a deductive approach—you can demonstrate that the Bible is historical. The nature of the archaeological record and inquiry demands that we must take a deductive approach.

### Mission

The question poised in this essay is what is the purpose of biblical archaeology? Archaeology is a science that reconstructs the past. It participates with the historian in documenting historical events. This should be a neutral enterprise based on the discipline of archaeology and other social sciences.

Does archaeology serve a purpose for biblical study. Yes. Can it be used for apologetics. Yes. The past decade has seen a renewed interest in the historicity of the Bible with events and recent publications. *The DaVinci Code*, *The Passion of the Christ*, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, and recent scholarship such as the *Jesus Seminar* and *The Bible Unearthed*. These recent publications are attempting to reinterpret Jesus and the Bible—unearthing the real history because it has been distorted by the church and fundamentalists. Unfortunately biblical scholars do not understand the nature of archaeology.

Should archaeology be used for the presentation of the Gospel? Yes. It is a sad state when the first century Christians were going out to the market place and telling people about an empty tomb and a resurrected Lord and we are walking around the market place on the defense saying “that is not the tomb.” The focus has shifted from the resurrection of Jesus to the Tomb of Talpiot. We need a new generation of students who know God’s word and go out and preach the resurrection as a historical event and not a theological statement. The early disciples preached a God who acted in History, within a space time continuum. In fact, the first sermon recorded in the book of Acts after the resurrection of our Lord used the template of God acting in history, and archaeological data! Peter’s Pentecost sermon unfolded the events of Israelite history, as well as the events of his day. The emphasis was on the mighty acts of God and not the feelings of his audience. Peter did not do an internet search on the recent Pew research or go to Lifeway to see the latest research poll. Peter did not go and make philosophical or theological arguments. His data were the events of the Old Testament, and the events of the past two months—the passion of our Lord. God acted in history to fulfill His plan of salvation. The early believers went out and preached—A living God who is sovereign, acting in history. When all is said and done—chariot wheels in the Red Sea must take a back seat to the preaching of the cross. The purpose of archaeology is to reconstruct the past, this is

what I do as an archaeologist. My purpose as an evangelical is to preach the cross.

## **Process of Using Archaeology for Biblical Studies: Incarnation, Revelation, and Event**

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### **Abstract**

The following paper is one of three lectures given at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall of 2008 as part of the Sizemore Lectures. This paper focuses on theological underpinnings and biblical hermeneutics in the use of archaeology for biblical studies, and the underlying debate between a canonical approach and the historical-critical method. It will be proposed that theologians and biblical scholars who downplay the role of archaeology in biblical studies do not understand the nature of archaeological inquiry nor its benefits for biblical hermeneutics.

### **Introduction**

In the previous article I discussed how archaeology is abused by the media. I discussed the problems of the simplistic methodological approaches conservatives and critical scholars use. I stated that biblical archaeology reconstructs historical and social processes of the past as it relates to biblical history. In this essay I want to focus on the process of using archaeology for biblical studies.

Archaeological data is different from textual data. Because of this fact, the purpose of biblical archaeology should be separate from biblical studies in terms of *methods* and *procedure*. This does not mean that they do not contribute to each other. You cannot be a biblical scholar without using the data that is being unearthed daily in Israel and its environs nor can you be an archaeologist that is uninformed about the biblical text or unaware of its rich literary composition.

Archaeology and biblical studies will always be intertwined. Conservative biblical scholars cannot downplay archaeological data nor can they be dismissive of its value. To illustrate this point, let me refer

you to the past issues of *The Evangelical Journal of Theology*.<sup>1</sup> There has been a dynamic ongoing debate on the date of the Israelite conquest. The editors apparently acknowledge the importance of the use of archaeology for biblical interpretation and have allowed for several evangelical scholars to debate these issues openly. Naturally the crux of the debate is centered on the biblical text and the archaeological data.

So, if the Bible does not equal archaeology, and biblical studies and archaeology are separate disciplines—how should they be used together? Or as my title states: What is the process of using archaeology for biblical studies? I will first discuss archaeology and faith, trends in the study of historical Israel, then theological views of the relationship between the events of Scripture and the canon of Scripture. I will make two propositions: the first is that archaeology is useful for apologetics. The second proposition is that archaeology is instrumental in hermeneutics. That is, archaeology is integral to the interpretation of Scripture and theology.

### **Archaeology and Faith**

I have been critical of the way archaeology is used in apologetics and biblical studies. Naturally the question I should answer is, “Do I think archaeology is valuable for faith?” The answer is yes. Christians have always used archaeology for the defense of the faith. In the preceding article I briefly referenced the preaching of the disciples as recorded in the book of Acts. Any review of the content of these sermons will show that these men knew that the proclamation of the gospel is tied into the mighty acts of God!

The Christian faith, and the proclamation of the gospel have always been based on the revelation of God through the events and persons of the Old Testament—and the events and actions of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. God acted in history through specific events, in a

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<sup>1</sup> “The Rise and Fall of the 13<sup>th</sup>-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory,” B. Wood *JETS* 48 (2006); “What is the Biblical Date for the Exodus? A Response to Bryant Wood,” J. Hoffmeier *JETS* 50/2 (June 2007); “The Biblical Date for the Exodus is 1446 BC: A Response to James Hoffmeier,” B. Wood *JETS* 50/2 (June 2007); “Propositions for Evangelical Acceptance of a Late-Date Exodus-Conquest: Biblical Data and the Royal Scarabs from Mt. Ebal,” R. Hawkins *JETS* 50/1(2007); “A Critical Analysis of the Evidence from Ralph Hawkins for a Late-Date Exodus-Conquest,” R. Young and B. Wood 51/2 (2008); “The Date of the Exodus-Conquest Is Still an Open Question: A Response to Rodger Young and Bryant Wood,” 51/2 (June 2008).

specific time, among a specific people for the redemption of the world. Even our individual personal testimonies are based on an event—a space-time continuum in which we state that at such and such a time and place, Jesus knocked on the door and we answered. If you want to understand the Bible—you need to understand it within its revelation—in other words: its historical, geographical, and cultural context. Biblical archaeology is the one discipline that does this.

Biblical scholars have recognized this fact and a whole sub-discipline in biblical studies is devoted to the study of ancient Israel. All Old Testament and New Testament courses present the text within its ancient Near Eastern context. Exegetical courses have a unit on the historical and cultural context of the specific biblical book or books one is studying. You do not study the prophecies of Amos without placing Amos in the Iron Age hill-country context. Even in your preaching classes, a major component of sermon preparation is placing the chosen text not just in its literary context, but the historical and cultural backgrounds as well.

Today, critical scholars know that the key to undermining the proposal that God acted in history—is to question the historicity of the Bible. The past two decades have seen a growing trend of scholars who question the historicity of the biblical text. I would like to address these trends today.

### **Trends in the Study of the Bible as History**

Both conservative scholars and critical scholars acknowledge the importance of studying the biblical text within its historical context. Part of this trend is due to the wealth of data coming from the spade of the archaeologist. Apologists have realized the value of archaeology data and have done an excellent job of illustrating the many historical hinge pins.<sup>2</sup>

It was a natural fit since it is plain from the biblical text that the pages of Salvation History are filled with historical, geographical, and cultural markers. Today, there is a raging debate over the nature of biblical history. I will briefly discuss the trends that led up to this point and how evangelical scholars are addressing the issues.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in Ralph O. Muncaster, *Can Archaeology Prove the Old Testament?* and *Can Archaeology Prove the New Testament* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2000) over 55 references to a correspondence to a biblical text and archaeology. In a fold out chart booklet Rose Publishing has 50 references of an archaeological find that corresponds with a biblical text (*Archaeology and the Bible: Old Testament*, Torrance: Rose Publishing, 2002; *Archaeology and the Bible: New Testament*, Torrance: Rose Publishing, 2003).

*Trends in Biblical History*

I have isolated five trends in the study of biblical history. These are:

1. Bible equals history
2. Interpret ancient Israel as an historian vs. a Bible scholar
3. Question if the Bible can be used to reconstruct the history of Israel
4. Determine that Israel's history is actually a fabrication
5. Crisis: the search for a paradigm

1. *Bible equals history*

This has been the basic approach of biblical scholars when writing a history of ancient Israel. It assumes that the biblical accounts provide an accurate account of history. While the Bible presents an account from creation to the cross: most evangelical scholars realize that the Bible does not record a direct time-line of historical events. Old Testament scholars realize that some events are contemporary, some are not necessarily in historical order, based on their position in the canon. The primary model, or paradigm, is that while the biblical text has a message (redemption, prophetic oracles, etc.), beneath the message are historical events. The authenticity of these historical events varies between conservative and moderate scholars. Most of the major textbooks hold to this paradigm.<sup>3</sup> The main difference being that evangelical scholars believe that the history is integral to the message.

2. *Interpret ancient Israel as an historian vs. a Bible scholar*

The next group of scholars, or period of research, attempts to remove the integration of the message and history. Scholars state that we should write an history of ancient Israel without the overlay of theology—i.e. the message. One of the basic premises of this approach is the presupposition that the editing that was involved in the construction of the message of the Old Testament texts altered the authentic history. The main goal of reconstruction in Old Testament studies is to remove the 'bias' of the authors and then reconstruct the history. The view is that we

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<sup>3</sup> Alpert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1996); John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville:Westminster, 2000); Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), E. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids:Baker Books, 2008), Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids:Baker Book House, 1977), Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1970).

should be like any historian that uses texts as primary data (the artifacts)—and put together a viable reconstruction of the events and social processes. This is also where the artifacts uncovered by the archaeologist assist the historian.<sup>4</sup>

Many of these scholars have varying views of how much history is preserved in the biblical text. Most would agree that there is some authentic history but it must be analyzed within the larger historiography of the ancient Near East. Halpern<sup>5</sup> has written an influential work where he postulates that the biblical writers were historians—but we need to judge their work within their cultural context.

Within this camp of historians—there is a trend to place the history of ancient Israel within the larger framework of the history of the Ancient Near East. Israel is only one tiny group of people among many (e.g. Philistines, Transjordan tribes) and it is only the fate of history that we have the survival of their sacred texts.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. *Question if the Bible can be used to reconstruct a history of Israel*

This trend, to separate history from the message, started a natural trajectory to question whether the biblical text had fabricated what actual happened, due to attempts to create a unifying story of origins for the Israelite nation. These scholars propose that the biblical text is so altered that there is very little historical validity in it.<sup>7</sup> This view is exemplified in any conference with the intent to demonstrate that it is not possible to write a history.

While the biblical text is a sacred document and a theological work—beneath this level, historians believed they were able to reconstruct ancient history. The question is whether or not the Hebrew Bible is written with the *intent* of history? If the goal of the biblical

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<sup>4</sup>Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), Michael Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984), J. M. Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006). B.S.J. Isserlin, *The Israelites* (Minneapolis: The Fortress Press, 2001), Antony Kamm, *The Israelites: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), J. Alberto. Scoggin, *An Introduction to The History of Israel and Judah* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993).

<sup>5</sup>Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>6</sup>Nadav na'aman, *Ancient Israel's History and Historiography: The First Temple Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006); K. L. Noll, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup>Lester L. Grabbe, *Can a 'History of Israel' Be Written?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

writers was to make theological statements—can we trust that it is authentic history?

#### 4. *Israel's history is actually a fabrication*

Once Old Testament scholars started down this path of minimalist history, it was not long until the paradigm changed from the Old Testament text being a corruption of actual history—to the Old Testament being a complete fabrication of history. Instead of the biblical authors recording history, the biblical authors created history. Titles of recent books articulating this view are: “*The Invention of Ancient Israel*,” and the “*Creation of Ancient Israel*.”<sup>8</sup> A book by Thomas Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* proposes that not only did the biblical writers create this myth of history, but biblical archaeologists (and conservative scholars) continue this fraud.<sup>9</sup>

The current view among critical scholars is that the history recorded in the Bible is either a complete fabrication to support the Temple theology of the Babylonian returnees or, at best, it contains pieces of fragmented history pasted into a theological framework.

#### 5. *Crisis: the search for a paradigm*

This is a natural result of the current biblical criticism. First the patriarchs were removed from history, then the Exodus was removed from history, next the Israelite settlement and conquest were removed, finally in the last decade, David and Solomon were removed from history. No wonder we are having a major crisis.

The history of the Bible is at a critical point. This is a major problem for critical scholars. If you, as a biblical scholar of ancient Israel, say there is no history in the Bible, then you have painted yourself into a corner and pulled the carpet out from under your job security. There is only one logical next step. Most scholars are not willing to go there. Therefore they need to find a paradigm that allows for the study of the history of the Bible stating that the Bible has value for defining what happened in the past—while also stating that these events did not happen.

There are three trends among critical scholars to deal with the reliability and historicity of the Bible. The first is to redate the history. Finkelstein has proposed that archaeologists have misdated our strata by nearly 100

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<sup>8</sup> For examples of these scholarly approaches see: Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London Routledge, 1995) and Keith Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London:Routledge, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> London:Random House, 1999.

years. What we have is the state starting in the ninth century instead of the tenth century. Thus the later kings of Israel fabricated the stories of David and Solomon. Many biblical scholars have jumped on this bandwagon—fortunately not many archaeologists have adopted this low chronology.

The second trend is to state that there are two histories: the actual history—that is revealed in the archaeological record; and the created history (theology) of the Bible. Davies has come out with a new book proposing that we need to study how ancient societies constructed their past with an emphasis on the theory of cultural memory.<sup>10</sup> These first two approaches present a paradigm in which the Bible is real, it is just not *truth*. Even secular scholars of the Bible realize that there is a need for something substantive to study.

The third trend was proposed earlier this year: Get rid of biblical studies altogether. In a recent publication, Hector Avalos writes a treatise on biblical studies.<sup>11</sup> He provides a radical-critical view of the Bible, the enterprise to study the Bible (biblical studies), and the scholarly guild that conducts this enterprise. Avalos concludes with three proposals: 1) Eliminate biblical studies completely from the modern world; 2) retain biblical studies as is, but admit that it is a religionist enterprise; 3) retain biblical studies, but redefine its purpose so that it is tasked with eliminating completely the influence of the Bible in the modern world. He states,

I do not advocate the first option, at least for the moment, because I do not believe that the Bible should be studied, if only as a lesson in why human beings should not privilege such books again. My objection has been to the religionist and bibliolatrous purpose for which it is studied. The second option is actually what is found in most seminaries, but we must advertise that scholars in all of academia are doing the same thing, though they are not being very open and honest about it. *I prefer the third option. The sole purpose of biblical studies, under this option, would be to help people move toward a postscriptural society* (emphasis mine).<sup>12</sup>

*Current approaches among Evangelicals*

Evangelical scholars have not sat idle on the sidelines. They realize that these trends have undermined the Bible as an historical text. They also

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<sup>10</sup> Philip R. Davies: *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical history, Ancient and Modern* (Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press,, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst:Prometheus Books, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 341.

realize that they have taken a backseat in the use of social sciences in the interpretation of Scripture.

In the last few years, two major works of Old Testament history have been produced by conservative scholars. These two books both use archaeology to support the historicity of the biblical text. While they are not apologetic works in their genre, they do provide a defense for the faith, and more specifically, the historicity of the biblical text. Both books have the same goal of addressing the current minimalist paradigm; however, they are completely different in their approaches.<sup>13</sup>

Provan, Long, and Longman offer a theoretical discussion of historiography and the biblical text. This book is an excellent treatise on historiography and recent abuses in critical scholarship. The authors demonstrate that modern critiques of the history in the Bible are unfounded because they are basing their criticism on modern paradigms of history writing versus looking at how people in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia wrote history.

Kitchen is magisterial and comprehensive in his approach. He takes a classic historical-critical approach to the textual and archaeological data. Both books provide excellent treatments on the use of the social science of history and related fields; the archaeological and textual data, and their fidelity to the Word of God.

### **Event versus Canon**

Fidelity to the Word of God: This takes me to my last topic in this essay—the Word of God. While the debate rages over the nature of history in the biblical record, believers are also debating the relationship of history to canon. Biblical archaeology has opened up a wider view of events in the past. Egyptian and Assyrian records provide events that happened in history, but are not recorded in the Bible. As a case in point, the Merneptah Stela is an account that mentions a major battle that occurred in the promise land that is not mentioned in the Bible. The irony is that this is the only text outside the Bible that mentions Israel. I come back to our simplistic equation: apologists use this artifact to demonstrate the historicity of ancient Israel—and rightfully so. The problem is that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between text and artifact. This can be duplicated for many other finds. Just over a week ago, a major

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<sup>13</sup> Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), Iain Provan, V. Phillips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

fortification was reported in a conference at Hebrew University that was most likely built by King David.<sup>14</sup> It is natural to correlate this with David's protecting his new capital city, Jerusalem, against the Philistines down in the valley of Elah (which was a common staging ground between the Israelites and the Philistines).

Evangelical scholars realize that the historical events in the Bible are only a partial glimpse of what happened in history. Even the apostle John, in concluding his account of the life of Jesus, tells us that not all the miracles and sayings of our Lord could be recounted. Hence one of the issues is the nature of revelation, incarnation, and canon in reconstructing a history of ancient Israel, and specifically—the use of archaeology.

### **Current Methodology/Hermeneutics**

To understand the theological truths found in the Old Testament one must understand the genre of historical narrative, therefore scholars addressing issues of biblical inerrancy and historicity have focused on historical criticism – particularly in Old Testament studies. At the heart of the issue is the nature of the interplay between history and revelation.

#### *Debate between text and artifact*

Ironically, as critical scholars started to abandon the whole enterprise of a history of Israel, evangelical scholars began to abandon the methodological debates between text and artifact and instead, focused on the literary aspects of the Bible. Conversely, evangelicals became marginalized in the archaeological enterprise. Thus archaeology programs began to diminish within seminaries and leading theologians preached the limited value of archaeology. Most evangelicals focused on the text to address the trends of critical scholars that were challenging the historicity of the Bible.

#### *OT Narrative Criticism*

A majority of evangelical Old Testament scholars believe that regardless of the difficulty of using archaeological data—the nature of the Old Testament text implies studying it within its historical context and the same is true for the New Testament. They also hold to the text as something above history—the incarnate Word. Hence, there have been major works to address these issues with a proper understanding of the

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<sup>14</sup> Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor, "Khirbet Qeiyafa: Sha'arayim," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* Volume 8, Article 22, pp. 2-10.

nature of the biblical text, and its uniqueness as historical writing. While the focus on the literary aspects of the biblical text have provided scholars with great insight into the depths of God's word, enough scholars realize that you cannot study theology or the biblical text without an understanding of the history in the Bible.

In a well-used and authoritative evangelical dictionary of theology, E.H. Merrill provides eight characteristics of OT history: 1) it is narrative, centering on people and events; 2) it is biographical, telling the story about God's work in this world through people; 3) it is tendentious, seen through the perspective and interpretation of the authors; 4) it is theocentric, presenting itself as the Word of God and not just a human record; 5) it is selective, as all details that do not relate to the central message are ignored; 6) it is historiographic, presenting itself as the writing of history; 7) it is consistently contextual, not just telling the past but relating to the needs of the present; and 8) it is interpretive, yielding the author's assessment of the events, often by way of editorial asides.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Canonical Approach: John Sailhamer*

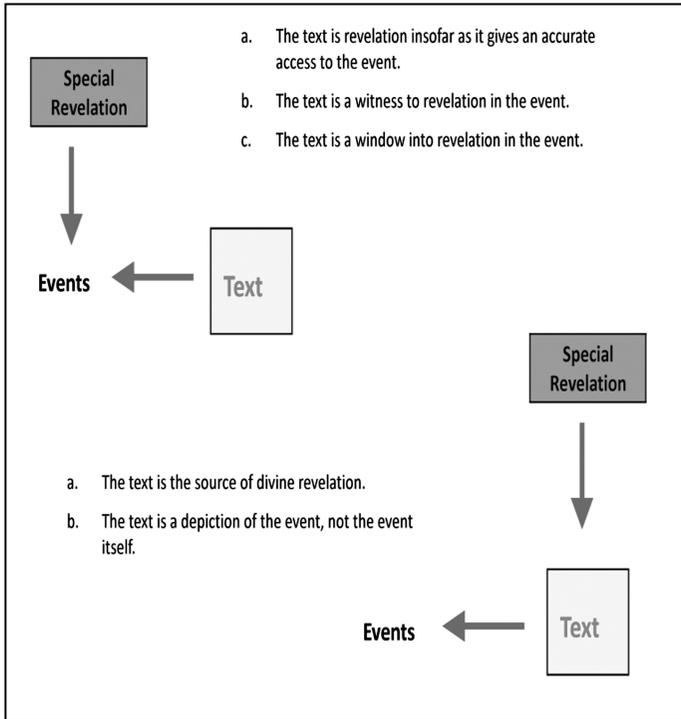
Theologians have struggled with the nature of God's revelation, especially as it is revealed in Old Testament texts. Not all theologians hold to the value of archaeology because the actual historical events are separate from the canon. Sailhamer's approach will serve as an example of the issues involved. In his major work on Old Testament Theology he discusses the relationship between text and event.<sup>16</sup> He notes that a key to Old Testament theology is "the question of whether to find divine revelation in the text of Scripture or in the events to which the Scriptures refer."<sup>17</sup> In the following illustration I have provided his two views of the relationship between text and event.

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<sup>15</sup> Eugen H. Merrill, "Old Testament History: A Theological Perspective," in the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *An Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.



He notes that there is a problem among evangelicals in their discussion of this issue. He states that,

Recognizing the importance of the inspired text of Scripture, evangelicals want to affirm that a theology of the Old Testament should look to the text itself as its source. However, wanting also to affirm the importance of history and God’s actions in real events, they, for good reason, do not want to relinquish the importance of actual historical events. Consequently, the inclination of evangelical theologians has been to attempt to retain both options. They want a theology based both on revelation in the events themselves and revelation in Scripture.<sup>18</sup>

Sailhammer believes that the locus of revelation is the text (i.e. The Inspired written Word of God). This provides the foundation for Sailhammer’s model of a canonical approach to Old Testament theology. Sailhammer points out some problems with historical reconstructions of the Old Testament. First is a critique of the historical-critical method.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

This method elevates *something* outside of Scripture to judge Scripture (Neo-orthodoxy). Thus history becomes the arbitrator for the interpretation of Scripture. Another problem is that the attempt to study the world of the Bible is a modern endeavor and not a theological enterprise of the early church.

While Sailhammer emphasizes that the locus of revelation is the inspired text, he realizes that part of the revelation is placing the text in its historical-literary context.<sup>19</sup> While this division between text and canon is useful—especially having a high view and keeping the authority on God’s Word (the canon), I prefer to struggle with the attempt to try and understand the relationship between the two because of the incarnation.

### *Historical narrative and Truth*

In a recent issue of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Grant Osborne discusses these issues in an essay entitled “Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible.”<sup>20</sup> His essay is a statement that historical and theological truth are intertwined in historical narrative and cannot be separated into isolated compartments.” He notes that “both the raw facts and the assessment of those facts are essential in interpreting the stories in Scripture. He agrees with Sailhammer on the primacy of the canon, but he also acknowledges that the text uses historical events to present theological truths. Hence we need to have a hermeneutical approach that acknowledges that history is integral to the authority of the Bible.

### *Incarnational Analogy:*

Peter Enns has written a popular book addressing issues of Old Testament historiography.<sup>21</sup> He presents his model to deal with text and event as incarnational analogy. Just as our Lord came in a historical and cultural context—so too has Scripture. His point is that just as Jesus was both man and God, we need to view Scripture as both man-made and

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<sup>19</sup> Sailhammer uses the example of the first plague of the Exodus event where the Nile was turned to blood. Earlier commentators believed that the Nile actually became blood while conservative historical approaches interpret it as the water turning red in color due to a microorganism/sediment killing all living creatures in the river at once.

<sup>20</sup> Grant R. Osborne, “Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/4:673-88 (December 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005).

God-made. He would point out that just as Jesus was sinless yet fully a man, so too is Scripture without error yet written by humans. In contrast to Sailhamer, he attempts to provide a theological model that addresses the relationship between text and canon by focusing on Old Testament historiography within its context.

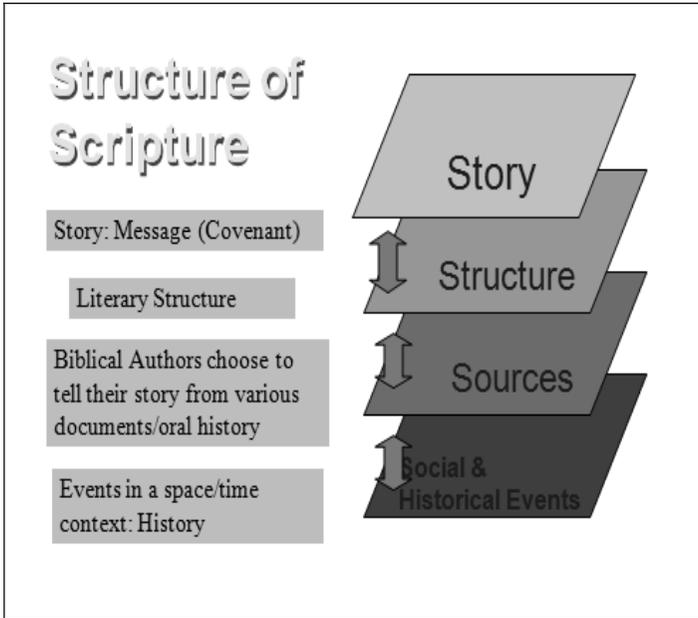
### **Paradigm Shift**

Beneath the current attempts to address both revelation and events in the Old Testament, is the search for a model that keeps the historical nature of the Bible at the center. Critical scholars realize that at the heart of the authority of Scripture is the implicit claim throughout the Bible that the events of Scripture are historical acts of a mighty and sovereign God. They are not just Sunday School stories to teach morality such as Aesop's fables or the genre of the American fairy tale. They are not fictional accounts of great warriors and prophets to validate the ruling religious party in Jerusalem or the authority of a king. If they can remove the historicity of the events—they remove the Bible's authority. What is needed in the current archaeological debate of events in Scripture is a paradigm shift in our reconstructions using archaeological and textual data.

As I stated earlier, the problem is a simplistic equation that equates the biblical text in a direct one to one correspondence with the archeological/historical data. What is produced is a caricature of biblical history. In a paper I presented at the National ETS meetings four years ago,<sup>22</sup> I proposed a paradigm shift for the use of archeology in apologetics. I introduced a model that takes a synchronic approach to revelation.

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<sup>22</sup> Steven M. Ortiz, *Retrospect and Prospect for Biblical Archaeology as Apologetics: Purpose, Process and Paradigm Development*, Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meetings, San Antonio, TX, November 17, 2004.



### Conclusion

I return to my original questions: What is the process of biblical archaeology? Is archaeology valuable to biblical studies? I believe that the canon is set and we do not need any additional writings or archaeology to supplement scripture. On this point I agree with Al Mohler: “Authentic Christianity is based upon the inscripturated revelation of God—the Bible—as our authority.”<sup>23</sup> In the end, archaeology cannot prove or disprove the biblical text. Nothing can be found, or not found, that should shake our faith in the total truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Word of God.” Nevertheless, while stating the timeless truth of the authority of Scripture, we realize that the Bible did not fall out of the sky. The revelation occurred over a long space-time continuum.

Critical biblical scholars are proposing that we separate the Bible into two histories: the truth of the historical events and the theologizing of those events. This allows them to hold to the position that there was an ancient Israel in the Past—but the canon is a man-made object of created history. They know that if they are able to relegate the Bible to myth, it

<sup>23</sup> Al Mohler, *What Should We Think About Archaeology and the Bible?* [www.AlbertMohler.com](http://www.AlbertMohler.com), posted: Tuesday, July 08, 2008 at 2:44 am ET

loses its authority. They realize that historical events are foundational to Scripture's authority—something that some theologians are comfortable abandoning. We hold to the same dichotomy, except we hold to the authority of the canon and do not propose a twenty-first century man-made dichotomy, but that the events that underlay the biblical text are intertwined with the revelation.

So, if the Bible does not equal archaeology, and biblical studies and archaeology are separate disciplines—how should they be used together? Or as my title states: What is the process of using archaeology for biblical studies? You cannot remove the Bible from history—and you cannot remove history (events) from the canon. This is part of God's revelation. The early disciples realized this when they encouraged the church that the Gospel is unique because we do not follow cleverly devised myths. How ironic that Peter was preaching against Gnostic teaching and today on the wave of the criticism of the historicity of the Bible is the renewed interest in Gnostic literature. *The DaVinci Code* was an old story, it just finally took off under Dan Brown due to his excellent writing but also it was following trends in the public arena. Archaeology is that one discipline that anchors the events in the Bible in a real time-space continuum.

Our sacred scriptures are unique. They are not just a collation of the sayings or the teachings of our founder. These are not a collection of wise sayings or mysteries of the universe as we find in eastern religions. They speak of a God who acted in history. They speak of a God who created the universe, a God who called Abraham, a God who heard the cries of Israel in Egypt, a God who sent a deliverer in Moses, a God who sustained the Israelites in the wilderness and led them into the Promise Land; a God who raised up a king and prophets; a God who sent his only begotten son to die on the cross; a God who knocked on the door of a young boy in East Los Angeles and that boy answered and accepted Christ and a God who perhaps knocked on your door.

We are called to preach this text. This text describes a living God who is sovereign in history. I believe that when we get back to this type of New Testament preaching—that God acted in the past, He is acting today, and He will act in the future—we will have the same transformational effect on society as it did in the first century AD.

## **The Metropolitan Community Church: A Brief Analysis and Critique**

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### **Abstract**

The Metropolitan Community Church is a community that applies questionable hermeneutical principles to the biblical text in effort to justify homosexuality as an acceptable part of the Christian life. This article explains the origins of the Metropolitan Community Church and examines and critiques the creative exegetical methods their interpreters apply to the passages dealing with homosexuality.

### **Introduction**

Many evangelicals were taken quite by surprise earlier this year when popular Christian song writer and recording artist Ray Boltz announced he had divorced his wife in order to embrace homosexuality. The author of favorite songs such as “Thank You,” “Take Up Your Cross,” and “The Anchor Holds,” Boltz declared his homosexuality in a September 12, 2008 article in *The Washington Blade*, a homosexual newspaper. Boltz now claims to affiliate with the Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination which self-identifies as a refuge for “Gay Christians.” Boltz’s announcement brings the issue of the Metropolitan Community Church to the foreground. What does this denomination believe and how do they arrive at their conclusions about sexuality? Does their position withstand a rigorous biblical analysis? The purpose of this article is to evaluate the theological and ethical premises of the Metropolitan Community Church. I will begin with a brief history and background of the group, move to a review of their hermeneutics, and then focus on the manner in which they interpret key biblical texts addressing homosexuality.

### **History and Background**

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) was founded in 1968 in Los Angeles. Though the denomination self-

identifies as “Christian,” the group is well-known as a church for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgendered (LGBT) people.

Specifically, the church markets itself as a safe place for people from diverse sexual backgrounds. While heterosexuals are welcome, the MCC is definitely associated with people who identify as “Gay Christians.” The group now claims to have 250 affiliate congregations in 23 countries around the world.

The founder of the MCC is Troy Derooy Perry who was born in 1940 in Tallahassee, FL. Perry’s father died when he was very young and his mother remarried a man who was abusive. As a result, Perry ran away from his home and lived with several relatives, returning to his mother when she divorced her second husband. Having settled in Winter Haven, FL, Perry was licensed to preach by a local Baptist church at age 15. He quickly moved to affiliate with the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) and became an evangelist. Married at 18 to Pearl Pinion, he soon moved to Illinois to study at Midwest Bible College while serving as pastor of a Church of God in Joliet. Soon thereafter, he was caught in a homosexual affair and dismissed from the Church of God.<sup>1</sup> Perry quickly moved to affiliate with the Church of God of Prophecy.<sup>2</sup> Perry transferred from Midwest Bible College to Moody Bible Institute (1960-1961), then moved to California without completing a degree and began pastoring a church in Santa Ana. Eventually, he became more heavily involved in the homosexual lifestyle and divorced his wife, with whom he had fathered two sons. After serving in the U.S. Army from 1965-1967, Perry settled in Los Angeles and soon began his church as an outreach to homosexuals.

Troy Perry shares his own journey in his book *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I’m Gay*, first published in 1972. According to Perry, he attempted suicide in 1968. Soon thereafter, his mother encouraged him not to give up on religion and to start a church for homosexuals. So, he placed an advertisement in the *Advocate*, a magazine for homosexuals, announcing the start of his church. The first service was in his living room with twelve people on October 6, 1968. Perry’s book is a non-systematic summary of his own theology. In one of the more bizarre passages, Perry reflects on his pre-conception existence and says:

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<sup>1</sup> The Ecclesiology of the Church of God, Cleveland, TN places more emphasis on the centralized authority of the denomination than the de-centralized authority of the Southern Baptist Convention.

<sup>2</sup> The Church of God of Prophecy began as a splinter group of the Church of God, Cleveland, TN in 1923.

One thing is certain about me: I feel I have a total sense memory that predates my birth by a good long time. It's like being a seedling soul in two parts, your mother's and your father's genes. I have an awareness of having been a seedling – a physical presence in my father's sperm and in my mother's ovum before they were united.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, Perry is attempting to build a case for his view of sexuality which is somehow tied to his conflicted view of gender. Following from this observation, he goes on in the next paragraph to suggest that people are in fact born gay. The tenor of his book is that homosexuality is good, blessed by God, and should be celebrated. Perry has argued many times in the ensuing decades that Jesus never condemned homosexuality and that Old Testament passages condemning homosexuality are internally inconsistent or misunderstood. Perry was invited to the White House by President Jimmy Carter in 1978 and, more recently, by President Bill Clinton. He retired as the moderator of the MCC in 2005.

The bylaws and doctrinal statements of the MCC are readily available at the group's website.<sup>4</sup> The MCC claims that its doctrinal convictions are within mainstream Christianity, making specific reference to both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The church states the following about Jesus Christ: "Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, presented in the New Testament, and proclaimed by the Christian Church in every age and in every land."<sup>5</sup> The statement of doctrine goes on to affirm a vague form of trinitarianism and says, "We believe in one true God . . . of one substance and of three persons: God, our parent-Creator; Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, God in flesh, human; and the Holy Spirit, God as our sustainer."<sup>6</sup> Noticeably absent is reference to God the Father. Concerning Jesus, the group further states: "We believe that Jesus . . . the Christ . . . historically recorded as living some 2,000 years before this writing, is God incarnate, of human birth, fully God and fully human, and that being one with God, Jesus has demonstrated once and forever that all people are likewise

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<sup>3</sup> Troy Perry, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay* (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1972), 10.

<sup>4</sup> [www.mcccchurch.org](http://www.mcccchurch.org).

<sup>5</sup> *Bylaws of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches*, Article III: Doctrine.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Article III.1.

Children of God, being spiritually made in God's image."<sup>7</sup> Again, while this statement sounds somewhat orthodox at outset, the last line reveals a commitment to universalism and confuses Christian belief in the *imago Dei* with the New Testament terminology of "children of God," a title only properly used of those who have been converted. This confusion about salvation is further seen when the group says, "We are saved from loneliness, despair and degradation through God's gift of grace, as was declared by our Savior."<sup>8</sup> Completely missing from the group's confession of faith is any mention of sin. Salvation is only about freedom from psychological impairment ("loneliness," "despair").

I have briefly summarized the MCC's history and doctrine and now will address the hermeneutics of the MCC church in relation to human sexuality with special reference to homosexuality. At points, I will cite authors friendly to the MCC, but who are not directly related to the MCC.

### Hermeneutical Foundations

Before examining how the MCC addresses specific biblical passages, it is important to understand what I contend are their three hermeneutical foundations: gender as a social construction, literary deconstruction, and liberation theology.

#### *The First Hermeneutical Foundation: Gender as a Social Construction*

Prior to the last half of the twentieth century, all societies considered one's gender to be decided at birth. People are born either male or female and should then, in a best case scenario, be raised in a manner that affirms the uniqueness and goodness of their gender. While there are rare occasions when some people may be born with genitalia that reflect both sexes (hermaphrodites), these are the exception and not the rule. Such cases have been traditionally considered anomalies similar to many other challenges presented by the fact we live in a fallen world.

In complete contrast to this view, the MCC considers gender to be a social construction and, in so doing, aligns itself with the most extreme components of modern secular and religious thought. The MCC offers the following definition for gender:

**Gender:** A set of complex and often contradictory socially constructed signifiers associated with a person's masculinity or femininity. Includes but is not limited to genitalia, gonads,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Article III.3. Elipses in original.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Article III.6.

chromosomes, hormones, secondary sex characteristics, psychological or emotional self-understanding, roles, clothing, mannerisms, interests, and language. Gender is and can be assigned at birth, assigned by others interpreting these signifiers, or claimed for and expressed by one's self.<sup>9</sup>

Note that in this definition, gender can be something each of us claims for one's self. In this world, men may self-identify as women and women may self-identify as men based on their own self-understanding. Thus, a concept foreign to Scripture is imposed upon Scripture and becomes an interpretive key, thus leading to many errors.

At a most basic level, the assumption of gender as a social construct opens the way for an ever-expanding list of sexual self-identification. Furthermore, the MCC fails to address the most basic difference between genders: childbearing. Women become pregnant and carry children to term and then nurse them after birth. Men cannot become pregnant or nurse children. In this light, it is difficult to comprehend how the MCC can say childbearing is a social construct.<sup>10</sup> In stark contrast to the MCC, historic Christianity has affirmed that these aspects of human sexuality should be expressed in heterosexual and monogamous marriage. Gender is not an accident of evolution or a social construction, but gender is part of the goodness of God's creation.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Second Hermeneutical Foundation: Literary Deconstruction*

A second foundation for MCC hermeneutics is literary deconstruction, a movement which gained momentum in the late twentieth century. Major facets of literary deconstruction include a "reader-centered" interpretation of major texts and the corresponding disregard for authorial intent. A presuppositional commitment to literary deconstruction is clearly seen the MCC pamphlet, "Our Story Too . . .

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<sup>9</sup> "Trans-Glossary," an electronic resource provided by the MCC available at <http://www.mcccchurch.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Transgender2&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=1054#Gender>. Accessed 2/20/08.

<sup>10</sup> Outside the MCC, other authors have gone further and claim that heterosexuality is merely a social construct as well. For example, Dr. Robert Minor, professor of religion at the University of Kansas, argues that heterosexuality is forced upon people. He bemoans the fact that no one is asking, "What is the cause of heterosexuality?" Robert N. Minor, *Scared Straight: Why It's So Hard to Accept Gay People and Why It's So Hard to Be Human* (St. Louis: Humanity Works, 2001), 130.

<sup>11</sup> I've borrowed this language from *The Baptist Faith and Message*, Article III, "Man."

Reading the Bible with ‘New Eyes.’” A reader-centered hermeneutic is clearly advocated:

Most modern gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people are either afraid of the Bible or unfamiliar with its content, thinking that the Bible has only bad news for them. While it is true that the Bible was written in the context of patriarchal, heterosexist cultures, the message of God’s unconditional love in Christ can also be the “power of salvation” for our GLBT community.

A bold, proactive reading of the Bible offers new life for GLBT individuals, their families, and their friends. Consensus is growing among respected scholars of Scripture that the Bible does not condemn such relationships. Contemporary GLBT Christians have focused on proving that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. It is time to move beyond defending this position. It is not enough for the Bible simply not to condemn homosexuality. We must be able to say, “Yes, it is . . . OUR STORY, TOO!”

Liberation theology and feminist biblical critique have shown that the Bible, in order to empower all people, must be read with new eyes from the vantage point of oppressed peoples. When we read the biblical stories through today’s experience, they come alive with new relevance. What if we just assume that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people were always in the Bible? Their historical counterparts followed Moses and Miriam in the Exodus, and walked with Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. We are everywhere, and always have been, even when silent and closeted about our sexuality.<sup>12</sup>

Note that the original context of the Bible is considered to be “heterosexist”: In other words, the authors had unfair preference for heterosexual behavior and an unjustified bias against homosexual behavior. To overcome “heterosexism,” we are encouraged to read the Bible through the lens of the modern experience of GLBT people.

In response, it must be said that literary deconstruction as a hermeneutical device violates the law of non-contradiction. A text cannot both affirm and reject contradictory claims and still be consistent.

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy L. Wilson, “Our Story Too . . . Reading the Bible with ‘New Eyes,’” Electronic resource available at [www.MCCChurch.org](http://www.MCCChurch.org). Last accessed 2/20/08. Emphasis and elipses in original.

Furthermore, literary deconstruction can prove to be dangerous to the civil rights of all people. By this, I mean that individual and self-centered readings of the biblical text lead us away from consensus and promote the views of special interest groups who desire to have their own agenda pressed upon others. While the MCC may believe this is actually advantageous to them in the current environment, the same hermeneutic could easily be used to exploit any number of people. For example, what is to keep violent homophobic activists from saying, "Reading the Scripture through our eyes, we discover a legitimization of our own need to hurt other people in the name of God. We have a special interest in cruelty towards homosexuals. This is really consistent with our current experience." Such a conclusion should be rejected because it is inconsistent with any system of hermeneutics taught within the boundaries of orthodoxy. However, MCC hermeneutics leave one with the conclusion that no interpretation is better than any other interpretation as long as we can validate our own experience. As a result, interpretation is no longer objective, but completely subjective with no intent to find the true meaning of the text.

### *The Third Hermeneutical Foundation: Liberation Theology*

Liberation theology is the third foundation for MCC hermeneutics.<sup>13</sup> A multi-faceted movement, liberation theology is essentially a blend of Marxism and Christianity. The key premise is that all relationships are characterized by a struggle between oppressors and the oppressed. According to this system, God always sides with the oppressed. All Biblical texts are then read through the lens of conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor. A favored theological system among radical feminist theologians, liberation theology is essential to the MCC understanding of themselves as oppressed people who are unfairly subjected to cruelty by the systemic evil of patriarchal and heterosexual churches.

It is beyond my scope here to provide an extensive critique of Liberation Theology. While the movement as a whole has rightly pointed out the tendency of Christians to focus exclusively on personal sin while avoiding problems of systemic evil, the entire framework of Liberation Theology is flawed.<sup>14</sup> Liberation Theology is flawed because it has a

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<sup>13</sup> Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez is most commonly considered the "father" of liberation theology. Gutierrez now teaches at Notre Dame.

<sup>14</sup> Evangelicals have not been silent on the subject of systemic evil. For example, as early as 1947, Carl F. H. Henry published a significant work on the topic of systemic evil, *The Troubled Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.

retrograde view of human sin as exclusively corporate. However, the human sin nature is first and foremost an individual problem for each human being requiring the death of God's Son to reconcile sinners to God. When sinners gather together in groups, such as governments, the collective nature of human sinfulness becomes more apparent. Furthermore, Liberation Theology assumes that God always sides with the poor and the oppressed. While Scripture is completely clear that we are to be kind and helpful to those who have less financial means, Scripture is also quite clear that *some* people are poor and suffer because of their own personal choices.<sup>15</sup> Liberation theology is also flawed because it assumes that every relationship between a majority and a minority must be adversarial. In fact, it is possible for a majority tradition to affirm a strong disapproval of certain behaviors while treating people involved in those behaviors with kindness.

With these three foundations noted, we will now address the MCC interpretation of some major texts addressing human sexuality and various hermeneutical errors in their position.

### **The MCC and Major Biblical Texts Addressing Homosexuality**

I will discuss the MCC approach to six biblical areas relating to homosexuality: Genesis 1 & 2; Genesis 19; Leviticus 18 and 20; the Ministry of Jesus; Romans 1; and 1 Corinthians 6.

#### *The MCC and Genesis 1 & 2*

While many people may not think of Genesis 1 & 2 in relation to homosexuality, the creation narrative is in fact the proper place to begin since it is here we find God's intent and design for gender and sexuality. The literature available on the MCC website does not address Genesis 1 & 2 in relation to homosexuality. This leads them to a truncated view of sexuality since the Christian doctrine of creation is the foundation for a correct understanding of Gender and sexuality. Genesis 1:26 – 28 emphasizes that both males and females share equally in the image of God, thus affirming the goodness of the gift of gender. Genesis 2:24-25 is the foundational passage of Scripture for marriage and clearly emphasizes that sex is to be reserved for marriage between a man and a woman. Sex is designed by God to be shared in the marriage covenant between a husband and a wife. Any deviation from this standard is sin. In

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<sup>15</sup> I want to be careful here and not make the same theological mistake of Job's "friends" who assumed that Job *must have* done something wrong to suffer in such a manner.

his teaching about divorce, Jesus Christ reaffirmed Genesis 2:24-25 as the correct starting point for understanding marriage (Matthew 19:4-6). The MCC has a flawed starting point because of its failure to engage these texts in a rigorous way.

*The MCC and Genesis 19 and “to know”*

The Sodom story of Genesis 19 receives a great deal of attention among homosexual activists and this is especially true for the MCC. The text in question says:

Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter. And they [men of the city] called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.” But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, “Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof. . . . Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. **Genesis 19:4–8** (NASB)

The MCC denies claims that this passage reflects a divine disposition against homosexuality and says, “Some ‘televangelists’ carelessly proclaim that God destroyed the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of homosexuality. Although some theologians have equated the sin of Sodom with homosexuality, a careful look at Scripture corrects such ignorance.”<sup>16</sup> The MCC basically says that Genesis 19 is concerned with rape and is not a condemnation of two homosexual people in a loving committed relationship. Using a tactic common among homosexual activists, the MCC overstates the importance of the lexical breadth of the word “to know” (*yada*): “The Hebrew word for ‘know’ in this case, *yadah*, usually means ‘have thorough knowledge of.’ It could

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<sup>16</sup> Don Eastman, “What the Bible Does and Does Not Say – Homosexuality: Not a Sin, Not a Sickness, Part 2,” Electronic resource available at [www.MCCChurch.org](http://www.MCCChurch.org). Accessed 2/20/2008.

also express intent to examine the visitor's credentials, or on rare occasions the term implies sexual intercourse. If the latter was the author's intended meaning, it would have been a clear case of attempted gang rape."<sup>17</sup> The MCC seems to be arguing from two different directions in this instance. First, they seem to be suggesting that the request was not sexual in nature, a claim common among homosexual activists. Secondly, even if the request was sexual, it could only be classified as a case of rape, and not a blanket condemnation of two homosexuals in a loving, committed relationship. What does the text mean? How valid is the MCC's interpretation? The debated phrase is found in Genesis 19:5 where the Hebrew text says: ונדעה (*that we may know*). The specific verb in question is a Qal cohortative of ידע (*yada*) which is used in most contexts as "to know" in the sense of "to be acquainted with someone or something." However, *yada* is used occasionally as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. For example, Genesis 4:1 says, "Now the man had relations (יָדַע) with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD.'" Various English translations reflect the way the term is used in Genesis 19:5:

KJV	"that we may <b>know</b> them"
CEV	"so we can <b>have sex</b> with them"
ESV	"that we may <b>know</b> them"
HCS	"so we can <b>have sex</b> with them"
NASB	"that we may <b>have relations</b> with them"
NET Bible	"so we can <b>have sex</b> with them"
NIV	"so that we can <b>have sex</b> with them"
NLT	"so we can <b>have sex</b> with them"
MSG	"so we can have our <b>sport</b> with them"

The various modern English translations, with the exception of the ESV, understand the language of Genesis 19:5 to imply a request for sexual intercourse. Lot definitely understood a sexual connotation to the Sodomites' demand because his immediate response was to offer his two daughters who "have never slept with a man" (Genesis 19:8, NIV). The same verb, *yada*, is used in Genesis 19:8 to describe the virginity of Lot's daughters.

The MCC interpretation is not new. Theologians or activists who contend that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was not homosexual behavior frequently do so based on the broad lexical meaning of the Hebrew verb ידע (*yada*). As stated earlier, the basic meaning of the word

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

is “to know.” Occurring 944 times in the OT, it “is used in every stem and expresses a multitude of shades of knowledge gained by the senses.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, revisionist interpreters suggest that this basic meaning of *yada* is how we should understand the request by the men of Sodom “to know” the visitors in Lot’s house. Sherwin Bailey, perhaps the first person forcefully to question the traditional understanding of Genesis 19, commented in 1955, “Our ignorance of local circumstances and social conditions makes it impossible to do more than guess at the motives underlying the conduct of the Sodomites; but since *yada*’ commonly means “ ‘get acquainted with,’ the demand to ‘know’ the visitors whom Lot had entertained may well have implied some serious breach of the rules of hospitality.”<sup>19</sup> Bailey goes on to contend that Lot actually precipitated the mob scene outside his door by flaunting the expected standards of behavior for someone who was not a citizen proper of Sodom, but merely a sojourner. He contends that Lot should have informed the city leaders of the presence of his guest. Since Lot did not do so, the men of the city came to his home out of concern for their own safety. Bailey then summarizes his own view and says:

Is it not possible that Lot, either in ignorance or in defiance of the laws of Sodom, had exceeded the rights of a *gēr* [sojourner] in that city by receiving and entertaining two “foreigners” whose intentions might be hostile, and whose credentials, it seems, had not been examined? This would afford a natural and satisfactory reason for the investment of Lot’s house by the citizens, and for their demand: ‘Where are the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out to us, that we may know them’—that is, take cognizance of them, and enquire into their *bona fides*.<sup>20</sup>

Bailey goes on to say that Lot’s plea for the men of Sodom “not to act wickedly” towards his guests is simply the plea of a good host attempting to avoid an embarrassing social occasion.

Why then were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed? Bailey claims his “re-interpretation” in no way affects the legitimacy of the judgment which ensued. He says, “The lawless commotion before Lot’s door and the boorish display of inhospitality (coupled, no doubt, with other signs of wickedness which would not escape their scrutiny) could well have

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<sup>18</sup> Jack Lewis, “*Yada*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, Harris, Archer, Waltke, eds. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 366.

<sup>19</sup> Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, 3-4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

been sufficient to satisfy the angels that the report was true – and judgment followed accordingly.”<sup>21</sup>

Most people assume that Lot’s offer of his daughters to the men of Sodom confirms the sexual nature of their demand. Bailey sidesteps this and says, “No doubt the surrender of his daughters was simply the most tempting bribe that Lot could offer on the spur of the moment to appease the hostile crowd.”<sup>22</sup> Bailey believes that the desperate nature of Lot’s offer suggests Lot’s tacit admission to his own fault in causing the commotion.

Finally, when all is said and done, Bailey does not even believe the event recorded in Genesis 19 actually occurred! According to Bailey, the story of the destruction of the cities of the plain was invented as ancient people superimposed divine motives onto natural phenomenon. In short, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by an earthquake, but “the people of that time who, being ignorant of the scientific explanation, would inevitably tend to ascribe the disaster to supernatural agencies.”<sup>23</sup> Bailey believes the story was expanded further into a morality tale to warn people that sometimes divine beings visit them in the form of strangers. While the original moral to the story was related to hospitality, Bailey says “the association of homosexual practices with the Sodom story is a late and extrinsic feature which, for some reason, has been read into the original account.”<sup>24</sup>

Bailey’s arguments have been very influential and widely repeated. For example, John Boswell affirmed Bailey’s re-interpretation and said, “Since 1955 modern scholarship has increasingly favored [Bailey’s re-interpretation], emphasizing that the sexual overtones to the story are minor, if present, and that the original moral impact of the passage had to do with hospitality.”<sup>25</sup>

In response, let us say first of all that both Bailey and the MCC have a defective view of biblical inspiration. Sherwin Bailey views the story of Sodom and Gomorrah from a “history of religions” approach.<sup>26</sup> It is

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 7. Bailey later says, “It is clear that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was an historical event, and that it was due to natural and not supernatural causes.” Ibid., 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>25</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 93.

<sup>26</sup> The History of Religions school of thought theorizes that it is possible to cut across all religions phenomenologically in order to find the lowest common denominator shared by all religions.

simply one myth among many similar myths in the ancient world. In contrast, Jesus Christ affirmed the historical reality of the event (Matthew 10:14-15). Second, it is in fact the case that the citizens of Sodom were definitely inhospitable!

Third, of the 10 clear uses of *yada* in a sexual context, half are in Genesis. As was stated earlier, *yada* has the basic meaning of “to know.” Yet, it is occasionally used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Outside of Genesis 19:5 and Judges 19:22, it is used 10 times in clear reference to sex. These ten occurrences are quote below from the NKJV because it translates *yada* as “know” in every context.

Genesis 4:1: Now Adam **knew** (*yada*) his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.”

Genesis 4:17: And Cain **knew** (*yada*) his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch.

Genesis 4:25: And Adam **knew** (*yada*) his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth.

Genesis 19:8: [Lot said] See now, I have two daughters who have not **known** (*yada*) a man; please let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish.

Genesis 24:16: Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had **known** (*yada*) her.

Genesis 38:26: So Judah acknowledged them and said, “She [Tamar] has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son.” And he never **knew** (*yada*) her again.

Judges 11:39: And it was so at the end of two months that she [Jephthah’s daughter] returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She **knew** (*yada*) no man.

Judges 19:25: But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought her out to them. And they **knew** (*yada*) her and abused her all night until morning.

I Samuel 1:19: And Elkanah **knew** (*yada*) his wife, and the LORD remembered her.

I Kings 1:4: The young woman was very lovely; and she cared for the king, and served him; but the king did not **know** (*yada*) her.

Bailey himself agrees that these ten passages demonstrate the use of *yada* in an unambiguously sexual way. Of these ten occurrences, six are in Genesis and one is in the very passage in question! Furthermore, to claim a sexual connotation to these ten passages which refer to heterosexual intercourse and reject a sexual connotation to Genesis 19:5 and Judges 19:22 when homosexual activity is in question is a selective application of hermeneutical principles on the part of Bailey.

Fourth, the arguments of Bailey and the MCC do not adequately explain why Lot offered his daughters. Bailey's argument concerning Lot's daughters seems especially weak. One is left to wonder why Bailey agrees to a sexual use of *yada* in 19:8 and rejects such an interpretation in 19:5, other than a predisposition to remove moral stigma from homosexual acts. Christians do not attempt to expunge Lot from guilt: his offer of his daughters is cowardly and cruel. Yet, the context does indeed favor the idea of a sexual offer of his daughters instead of sex with the visitors to his home. Also, if the Sodomites were only concerned about hospitality, one is hard pressed to understand why they did not seem the least bit puzzled at a sexual offer of two young women. Instead, they became more insistent and violent, requiring angelic deliverance for Lot.

Finally, if the MCC is correct, the reinterpretation which denies the sexual request of the Sodomites makes God unjust. Essentially, God destroys the cities because of a misunderstanding of ancient hospitality protocols. In fact and in contrast to the MCC, Sodom later became the Biblical paradigm for sinful behavior in opposition to God. The public celebration of their homosexuality hastened judgment. Thus, the prophet Isaiah could say, "And they [Judah/Jerusalem] display their sin like Sodom; they do not even conceal it" (**Isaiah 3:9**). Furthermore, the wickedness of Sodom extended beyond sexual immorality to economic exploitation of the poor (**Ezekiel 16:49**).

#### *Genesis 19 and Ezekiel 16:48-50*

The MCC also suggests another way of avoiding the implication that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for sexual immorality. In an interpretation frequently suggested in the broader homosexual community, they say:

Ezekiel 16:48-50 states it clearly. The people of Sodom, like many people today, had abundance of material goods. But they failed to meet the needs of the poor, and they worshipped idols. The sins of injustice and idolatry plague every generation. We stand under the

same judgment if we create false gods or treat others with injustice.<sup>27</sup>

The text in question says, “Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it.” (Ezekiel 16:49-50 NAS). Thus, the MCC claims, based on Ezekiel 16:49-50, that Sodom was punished for failing to help the poor, not because of homosexual behavior. The emphasis of the MCC argument here is that Sodom was not punished for sexual immorality.

This argument is appealing to many people because homosexual activists appear to be following the principle of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. However, on closer inspection, one sees that the MCC argument poses a false dichotomy and says we must choose *either* abuse of the poor *or* sexual immorality as *the* sin of Sodom. In reality, Ezekiel’s comments indicate that a hedonistic culture contributed to class exploitation. Ralph Alexander agrees: “Sodom’s chief sin had been pride and self-exaltation. This stemmed from her abundant materialism (food), given to her from God (Gen. 13:10), which had resulted in false security, apathy, a luxurious life of ease, and the corollary disdain and neglect of the poor and needy. This material ease fostered sexual perversion.”<sup>28</sup>

It is also the case that revisionist arguments typically ignore Ezekiel 16:43 which states, “Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add *lewdness* to all your other detestable practices?” The word translated as *lewdness* is *zimma* (זִמָּה). According to Wold, it refers to premeditated sexual crimes (Lev. 18:17, 20:14, Judges 20:6, Ezekiel 16:27, 58, 22:9, etc), is applied to deliberate sin, and sometimes stands

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<sup>27</sup> Don Eastman, “What the Bible Does and Does Not Say.”

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 817.

<sup>29</sup> Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 88.

parallel to words for lust and harlotry in Ezekiel. Ezekiel's purpose is not to diminish the sins of Sodom, but to illustrate the seriousness of Israel's rebellion. In context, he is referring to lewd sexual behavior among God's people, thus making a reference to Sodom most appropriate.<sup>29</sup>

Homosexual activists and the MCC tend to take Ezekiel 16:49 out of context and ignore Ezekiel 16:50 which states that the people of Sodom committed "abominations." This is the word תועבה (*to'ebah*). This is the same word used in Leviticus 18:22, "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an *abomination (to'ebah)*." While it is clear that the prophets referred to a great number of things as abominations, it is obvious that sexual immorality was one of those things.

Finally, Jude 7 clearly states the sexual nature of Sodom's sin: "Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire" (Jude 7 NAS). This verse clearly teaches that sexual immorality was central to the judgment Sodom and Gomorrah underwent. The phrase translated "indulged in gross immorality" is one word in Greek: *εκπορνεύσασαι (ekporneusasai)*. In an earlier generation, A. T. Robertson identified the connection to homosexuality and said that Jude 7 refers to "horrible licentiousness, not simply with women not their wives or in other nations, but even unnatural uses (Romans 1:27) for which the very word 'sodomy' is used (Genesis 19:4-11)."<sup>30</sup>

Bailey argued that Jude does not "ascribe the punishment of the Sodomites to the fact that they purposed to commit homosexual acts *as such*; their offence was rather that they sought to do so with "strange flesh" – that is, with supernatural, non-human beings."<sup>31</sup> Richard Hays of Duke University makes the same assertion and says, "The phrase 'went after other flesh' . . . refers to their pursuit of nonhuman (i.e., angelic!) 'flesh.' According to their argument, the expression *sarkos heteras* means 'flesh of another kind'; thus, it is impossible to construe this passage as a condemnation of homosexual desire, which entails precisely the pursuit of flesh of the *same* kind."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 189.

<sup>31</sup> Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 404. Emphasis in the original. One should note that Hays does not advocate an overall approach towards homosexuality that is as radical as Bailey or Boswell.

This argumentation concerning Jude 7 fails in the several ways. First, the contention that Jude has the angels in mind when he refers to “strange flesh” is a stretch at best. Second, though Bailey admits the sexual nature of their sin, he downplays the strong nature of the term “indulged in gross immorality.” Third, what might possibly be true when the terms “indulged in gross immorality” and “strange flesh” are used on their own, is far less likely when the terms are used together. Fourth, Jude 4 reinforces the sexual nature of the sin. Finally, much of Bailey’s argument in particular only works if one assumes the Bible does not advocate a uniform view of sexual morality.

### *The MCC and Leviticus 18 and 20*

Leviticus 18:22 says, “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination (תועבה).” This prohibition is repeated in Leviticus 20:13 “If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

While the prohibition of homosexual behavior seems clear enough, the MCC says: “Given the strong association of *to’evah* [abomination] with idolatry and the Canaanite religious practice of cult prostitution, the use of *to’evah* regarding male same-sex acts in Leviticus calls into question any conclusion that such condemnation also applies to loving, responsible homosexual relationships.”<sup>33</sup>

In fact, the MCC does not tell the whole story of the context for these verses. The first half of Leviticus records regulations primarily related to public worship. A distinct shift in emphasis begins in chapter seventeen, and the ensuing regulations address individual morality and religious expression. After addressing individual religious practices in chapter seventeen, chapter eighteen begins to set out the fundamentals of Israelite morality and specifically defines which sexual unions are compatible with worship of the one true God.<sup>34</sup> In the midst of the sexual-ethical imperatives of chapter eighteen, the Israelites are reminded seven times (18:3 [2x]; 18:24; 18:26; 18:27; 18:29, 18:30) not to imitate the practices of the surrounding nations which worship false gods. This call to separation is emphasized even further by the phrases “I am the LORD your God” or “I am the LORD” six times (18:2; 18:4; 18:5; 18:6; 18:21; 18:30). Wenham captures the relationship between

<sup>33</sup> Don Eastman, “What the Bible Does and Does Not Say.”

<sup>34</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 250.

worship of the one true God and sexual morality inherent in Leviticus eighteen when he says, “Israel’s sexual morality is here portrayed as something that marks it off from its neighbors as the Lord’s special people.”<sup>35</sup> As a component of a distinctive sexual morality, God explicitly and categorically prohibits homosexual behavior.

The MCC asserts an overly narrow interpretation and claims the Levitical passages are only concerned with homosexual acts as part of pagan worship. In context, several other destructive behaviors are condemned in Leviticus 18, such as incest and burning children. Does MCC mean that these practices are acceptable as long as they are not part of pagan worship? Homosexual activists will also seize upon the death penalty mentioned in Leviticus 20 and will say, “If you affirm the moral precepts in the holiness code, then you must be in favor of capital punishment for homosexuals!” This is a case of *argument in absurdum*. This argument fails to understand the distinctions between civil, ceremonial, and moral law in the Old Testament.<sup>36</sup>

### *The MCC and the Ministry of Jesus*

The MCC and other homosexual activists frequently claim, that Jesus never specifically condemned homosexuality. Sometimes, they will grant that other texts teach that homosexual acts are sin, but they claim to follow Jesus instead of Scripture on this issue. One MCC document says, “While the Bible is an important witness to the relationship between God and humanity, it is not the ultimate revelation of God—Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh is. We must guard against what some scholars have called bibliolatry—making an idol out of Scripture.”<sup>37</sup>

In response to the MCC, we must first be clear that they are making an argument from silence. For example, let us apply their form of argumentation to wife-beating. The Gospels do not record Jesus ever specifically saying, “Thou shalt not beat your wife.” However, no one would argue that wife-beating is acceptable. Second, Jesus affirmed the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament and the Old Testament clearly defines homosexual behavior as sin. Third, Jesus condemned

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Minor, professor of religious studies at The University of Kansas, rejects the tripartite division of the law, saying it is “historically unsupportable.” Robert Minor, *Scared Straight: Why It’s So Hard to Accept Gay People And Why It’s So Hard to Be Human*, 19. In fact, there is a rich tradition in Christian hermeneutics affirming this approach.

<sup>37</sup> Mona West, “The Bible and Homosexuality.” Electronic resource available at [www.MCCChurch.org](http://www.MCCChurch.org). Accessed 2/15/08.

sexual immorality in general and raised the standard even higher (See Matthew 5:27-30). Finally, this argument poses a false dichotomy between Jesus and the rest of Scripture.

*The MCC and Romans 1*

According to the MCC, the apparently clear condemnation of homosexual acts in Romans 1 does not apply to loving, committed homosexual relationships between persons who are constitutionally homosexual; Paul only condemns "unnatural" homosexual activities. Romans 1:24 – 27 says:

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (NASB)

The MCC comments on this passage and says, “[Paul] is not attempting to give an ethical teaching concerning homosexuality. He is trying to meet his gentile audience on their terms; using the example of some people who are not upholding the dominant/submissive model as an opportunity to talk about all persons’ need for the saving grace of Jesus Christ.”<sup>38</sup> Boswell and others, such as the MCC, have suggested that in Romans 1, Paul is not condemning a loving committed relationship between two people who are genuinely homosexual. Instead, the claim is made that here Paul is condemning heterosexuals who pursue homosexual relationships in rejection of their heterosexual nature.<sup>39</sup>

At this point, the MCC may be at their weakest hermeneutically and seems to be engaging in wishful thinking instead of serious exegesis. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul details humanity’s rejection of God (1:18-23) and the ensuing consequences of this rejection (1:24-32).<sup>40</sup> The severity of

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<sup>38</sup> Mona West, “The Bible and Homosexuality.”

<sup>39</sup> Some self-professing evangelicals have suggested ideas very similar to the MCC. See Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 72 -73.

<sup>40</sup> Cranfield says, “That in this sub-section Paul has in mind primarily the Gentiles is no doubt true. But it may be doubted whether we shall do justice to

God's judgment on fallen humanity is emphasized by three-fold repetition of the phrase "God gave them over" (1:24; 1:26; 1:28). One of the first consequences of rejecting God is sexual immorality, with specific reference to homosexuality. The word translated "impurity" in verse 24 is *ακαθαρσία*; it carries a clear moral sense, with special emphasis on sexual immorality. This is clearly seen in Galatians 5:19-21, where impurity (*ακαθαρσία*) is placed between "sexual immorality" and "debauchery" among the works of the flesh. Paul's position is unambiguous: In Romans 1:24-27, homosexual acts are a form of impurity.<sup>41</sup> This passage is also the only explicit reference to lesbianism in the Scripture. Karl Barth catches Paul's idea here and says that when humanity rejects the Creator and worships the creation, "Everything then becomes Libido: life becomes totally erotic."<sup>42</sup> In the final conclusion, Romans 1:18-32 teaches that sexual immorality, of which homosexual behavior is a subset, is both a form of idolatry and a result of idolatry. Furthermore, Paul's critique is closely related to the view of gender presented in Genesis because advocacy of homosexuality by a society is a sign that that culture as a whole has been worshipping idols and that its God-given male-and-female order is being fractured as a result.<sup>43</sup>

Why does Paul choose to place strong emphasis on homosexuality in this passage? Thomas Schreiner answers this question and says Paul addresses homosexuality here because it functions as the best illustration of that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. He says, "Idolatry is 'unnatural' in the sense that it is contrary to God's intention for human beings. To worship corruptible animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God is to turn the created order upside down. In the sexual sphere the mirror image of this 'unnatural' choice of idolatry is homosexuality."<sup>44</sup> Since the MCC has a defective view of sin (noted

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his intention, if we assume—as many interpreters seem inclined to do—that these verses refer exclusively to them." C. E. B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary Romans*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), 105.

<sup>41</sup> James D.G. Dunn agrees that Paul is unambiguous here. See James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, *Romans 1 – 8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 74. Dunn is convinced Paul was influenced by Stoic philosophy in his moral critique, a claim I find unpersuasive.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., Edwyn C. Hoskyns, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 52.

<sup>43</sup> I've borrowed this language from N.T. Wright, *The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. X, *The Letter to the Romans* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 435.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 6, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 94.

earlier), they also have a flawed understanding of the context of Romans 1 and the corresponding condemnation of homosexual acts.

### *The MCC and I Corinthians 6*

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 is part of the larger textual unit of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 in which Paul chastises the Corinthians for bringing disputes between Christian brothers before pagan courts. The text says:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters nor adulterers nor *male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders* nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. (NIV)

The MCC argues that using the word “homosexual” in translating this passage is actually a sign of homophobia. They also suggest, much like their interpretation of the Levitical passages, that if Paul is prohibiting homosexual behavior, he is only prohibiting it in the context of prostitution, and not a loving, committed relationship. Much of the MCC argument flows from the flawed argumentation of John Boswell; he contended that *malakoi* may or may not refer to homosexuality. Similarly, the word *arsenokoitai* may simply mean “males who have intercourse” and is thus, according to Boswell, used here merely to refer to male prostitutes in general. According to Boswell, “The argument that in I Corinthians 6:9 the two words ‘μαλακοι’ and ‘αρσενοκοιται’ represent the active and passive parties in homosexual intercourse is fanciful and unsubstantiated by lexicographical evidence.”<sup>45</sup>

Are modern translations of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 homophobic? Two words occur in the vice list which have specific relevance to the issue of homosexuality: *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*: a nominative, plural, masculine adjective from *μαλακός*) and *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*), the fourth and fifth words in the list respectively. The way modern English Bibles translate these words gives one some idea of the nature of debate surrounding the meaning of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, the way they relate to each other in this list, and their relevance for modern ethical

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<sup>45</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, 341.

debates about human sexuality. The following chart shows different translations of these words:

	<u>μαλακοι (<i>malakoi</i>)</u>	<u>αρσενοκοιται (<i>arsenokoitai</i>)</u>
CEV	Pervert	Behaves like a homosexual
ESV	Men who practice homosexuality <sup>46</sup>	
HCS	Male Prostitutes	Homosexuals
KJV	Effeminate	Abusers of themselves with mankind
NASB	Effeminate	Homosexuals
NET	Passive homosexual partners	Practicing homosexuals
NIV	Male Prostitutes	Homosexual offenders
NJKV	Homosexuals	Sodomites
NLT	Male Prostitutes	Homosexuals
TNIV	Male Prostitutes	Practicing Homosexuals

What are we to make of these two terms? Which translation best captures their meaning? *Μαλακοι* is the plural form *μαλακός* a word literally meaning “soft”. Luke 7:25 is a good example of how the word was used in reference to inanimate objects when Jesus talks about people dressed in “soft [*malakois*] robes.” This basic meaning is why some English versions translate *malakoi* as “effeminate.” Modern English translations which do so are picking up on the secondary use of *μαλακός* in the ancient world. The BAGD lexicon notes that when *μαλακός* was used in reference to a person in the ancient world, it was equating the idea of soft with an “effeminate” male or a catamite, especially of men and boys who allowed themselves “to be misused homosexually.”<sup>47</sup> Gordon Fee is one Evangelical commentator who suggests a similar understanding of *μαλακός* and proposes what I consider to be an unnecessarily narrow interpretation of *malakoi* in 1 Corinthians 6:9. Emphasizing the term’s connection to young boys, he says, “It [*malakoi*] also became an epithet for men who were ‘soft’ or ‘effeminate’ [KJV], but most likely referring to the younger, ‘passive partner’ in a pederastic relationship – the most

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<sup>46</sup> The English Standard Version translates the two different words in question by this one phrase.

<sup>47</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. “μαλακός,” 488. A catamite is a young boy kept by a pederast. A pederast is a man who practices anal intercourse especially with young boys.

common form of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world.”<sup>48</sup> Fee then says “male prostitutes” is the best translation and most likely has reference to a consenting youth.<sup>49</sup>

I do not think either of the terms “effeminate” or “male prostitutes” are the best translation of *μαλακοι* in 1 Corinthians 6:9. In modern usage, the term “effeminate” is a broad idea and can be used as an adjective to describe men who are thoroughly heterosexual in behavior, but do not have overtly masculine traits. Furthermore, “male prostitutes” can be misunderstood by some people to be a reference to men who sell sexual favors to women. In context, it is clear that homosexuality is in mind. Furthermore, limiting the word to primarily young boys seems unnecessarily narrow. Thiselton notes that the evidence for restricting the term to contexts of pederasty linked with male prostitution is at best indecisive and at worst unconvincing.<sup>50</sup> The proper translation of *μαλακοι* becomes more clear when one examines its use in context with *αρσενοκοιται*.

While the word *μαλακοι* had history of usage prior to the New Testament, I Corinthians 6:9 is the first documented use of the word *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*). The word is a compound of two words: “male” + “intercourse.” A strong case can be made that the background for the term is the LXX of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The LXX renders these two passages as follows:

Leviticus 18:22 (LXX)

και μετα **αρσενος** ου κοιμηθηση **κοιτην** γυναικος βδελυγμα γαρ εστιν

Leviticus 20:13 (LXX)

και ος αν κοιμηθη μετα **αρσενος** **κοιτην** γυναικος βδελυγμα εποιησαν αμφοτεροι θανατουσθωσαν ενοχοι εισιν

Most likely, *αρσενοκοιται* was a word coined by Hellenistic Jews from a conflation of the two Greek words I have highlighted in bold from each verse. The Greek word for male is *αρσενος* and the word for “bed” or “lying” is *κοιτην*. The case for a Levitical background for Paul’s use of *αρσενοκοιται* is strengthened by the fact Paul has just condemned the

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<sup>48</sup> Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 243.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>50</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 449.

Corinthian church for tolerance of incest, a sin strongly condemned as well in Leviticus 18 and 20. Here, ἀρσενοκοιται it is an apparent reference to the “active” partner in male homosexual intercourse. The translations of ἀρσενοκοιται in the early translations of Scripture confirm a general reference to “men having sex with males.” For example, the Vulgate translates ἀρσενοκοιται as *masculorum concubitores* (“men lying together with males”).

One must remember that neither μαλακοι or ἀρσενοκοιται occur in isolation here, but are mentioned together in a vice list weighted towards sexual sin. In this context, μαλακοι most certainly refers to the passive partner in male homosexual intercourse while ἀρσενοκοιται refers to the active or dominant partner in male homosexual intercourse. Thus, the NET Bible’s translation of “passive homosexual partners and practicing homosexuals” seems to come closest to the idea Paul has in mind. David Garland is even more explicit and translates μαλακοι as “those males who are penetrated sexually by males” and ἀρσενοκοιται as “those males who sexually penetrate males.”<sup>51</sup>

Thiselton comments on Paul’s emphasis on the dangers of radical moral autonomy present in this text and says, “What is clear from the connection between 1 Cor. 6:9 and Romans 1:26-29 and their OT backgrounds is Paul’s endorsement of the view that idolatry, i.e., placing human autonomy to construct one’s values above covenant commitments to God, leads to a collapse of moral values in a kind of domino effect.”<sup>52</sup> Paul’s rejection of radical moral autonomy characterized by all the vices in this list is reinforced when he says in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “You are not your own.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 also stresses that homosexual acts can be forgiven by God’s grace. Just as certainly as God forgives people who commit adultery or steal, he forgives homosexual behavior. Furthermore, one mark of being a disciple of Christ is the dramatic change that Christ brings in one’s life. This includes cessation from homosexual behavior.

On closer inspection, the MCC/Boswell interpretation is a case of “divide and conquer.” Gordon Fee comments on Boswell’s argument and states, “What may be true of the words individually is one thing. But here they are not individual; they appear side by side in a vice list that is heavily weighted toward sexual sins.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the MCC has strained the text to a point of impossibility. D. F. Wright comments: “[*Arsenokoitai*] denotes (males) ‘who lie or bed with males’ (not, as

<sup>51</sup> David Garland, *I Corinthians*, 214.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>53</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 244.

Boswell argues, ‘males [prostitutes] who lie with’ [males or females], which linguistically is impossible). Whether Jewish or Christian—even a Pauline—neologism, the term picks up the Levitical ban, which did not have pederasty in view. Even if what Paul has chiefly in mind is pederasty, his choice of this word, at best very rare, depicts it as sinful in the generic context of males having sex with males.”<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

The interpretations of Scripture suggested by the MCC are grounded in a theology based on a defective view of human sinfulness, a hopelessly flawed hermeneutic and penchant for logical fallacies. The MCC’s specific interpretations of biblical passages pertaining to homosexuality are flawed by a selective use of evidence, incomplete references to background material, sloppy handling of the lexical background of words and grammar, and, at times, a complete disregard for context. MCC apologists frequently engage in arguments *ad hominem* (everyone who disagrees is a homophobe) and an unfortunate tendency to favor false dichotomies.

A clear reading of Scripture indicates that homosexual acts in both their male and female expressions are contrary to the will of God. While violence against anyone simply because of their sexual behavior is clearly antithetical to the New Testament, we are in fact mandated to call people involved in homosexual behavior *along with all other forms of sexual immorality* to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. A sign of surrendering to the rule of Jesus Christ in one’s life is separation from homosexual behavior.

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<sup>54</sup> D. F. Wright, “Homosexuality,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 414.

# **Matthew's Two-Age Eschatology: Toward Bridging Systematic Theology and Biblical Studies**

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## **Abstract**

This article surveys Matthew's use of two-age eschatology. Particular attention is given to the passages that reference "this age" or the "age to come." It is argued that a comparison of the synoptics indicates that Matthew had a unique theological agenda in his use of two-age language. After surveying his use of this eschatological framework it is argued that Matthew's two-age eschatology is characterized by an unrealized dualism. However, this unrealized dualism acts in concert with an inaugurated Kingdom eschatology. Both eschatological schemas are present at once and work together to engage the implied reader.

## **Introduction**

While most agree that Matthew's gospel is characterized by an inaugurated eschatology, addressing the "here and now," it is not clear how Matthew's repetition of two-age eschatological language fits into his view of history and time.<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of answering this question is compounded by the nature of the secondary literature. On the one hand, many biblical studies are too atomistic and lose a canonical and redemptive-historical perspective. On the other hand, systematic studies often presuppose that all biblical corpora are using the same theological notion, making it difficult to find a way to develop the diversity of the biblical material or to focus on a particular author's distinctives. In addition, there is a visible lack of engagement between systematic theologies and Matthean studies. This study seeks to re-examine Matthew's two-age eschatology from the perspective of Matthew as

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<sup>1</sup>Carl G. Vaught, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Theological Investigation* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2001), xii.

historian and theologian.<sup>2</sup> While this necessarily weakens the focus of the study to some degree, the interaction between the disciplines is aimed at broadening the range of implications.

### Two-Age Eschatology in Systematic Theology

Two-age eschatology plays an important role in the context of systematic theology because of the movement of dispensationalists and covenantalists toward each other in the area of inaugurated eschatology.<sup>3</sup> Although the recognition that the New Testament Kingdom motif is characterized by already /not yet eschatology, there are those from the covenantalist side who aver that an inaugurated two-age eschatology is antithetical to, and eliminates the possibility of, a future chiliastic (Millennial) Kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

Covenantalists such as Kim Riddlebarger, Robert Reymond, and Don Garlington deny a literal, earthly Millennium is possible because of the overarching structure of two-age eschatology.<sup>5</sup> While also denying the possibility of a dispensational-type Millennium, Robert Reymond is an exception to Riddlebarger and Garlington's position on the nature of the two-age schema. Reymond argues that Mt 12:32 demonstrates there is no "overlap" or inaugurated eschatology between "this age" and the "age to come."<sup>6</sup> Ironically, Reymond, Garlington, and Riddlebarger draw on the inaugurated Amillennialism in the classic work by Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*.<sup>7</sup> While all three move from Hoekema's position toward denying the plausibility of an earthly Millennium, covenantalist Vern Poythress uses Hoekema's inaugurated eschatology

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Senior, "Directions in Matthean Studies," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, ed. David Aune (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 4; also 61, 150, 156.

<sup>4</sup> All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> Don Garlington, "Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium," *Reformation and Revival* 6:2 (1997): 66; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 66; Kim Riddlebarger, *The Man of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 65; Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1008.

<sup>6</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 1008 n43.

<sup>7</sup> Hoekema has been described as "trailblazer" in Reformed theology for appropriating the inaugurated (already/ not yet) eschatology of G. E. Ladd. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 15-20; Russell D. Moore, 46.

to arrive at an opposite conclusion. Poythress states that it may be a “comparatively minor dispute as to whether this renovation of earth, following the Second Coming, comes in one stage or two, that is, in a one-thousand-year millennium followed by a fuller renewal or by total renewal all at once.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, two-age eschatology is being used, with varying success, to turn back the clock on a consensus for an evangelical inaugurated eschatology that can be appropriated by dispensationalists and covenantalists alike. But it is clear that not all covenantalists agree that two-age eschatology can achieve what some amillennialists would like. This position on two-age eschatology is marked by methodological and theological problems.

Methodologically, this view of two-age eschatology is unsound. There is no warrant given for absolutizing one eschatological schema to the exclusion of another. Garlington explains, “Once the overarching pattern of salvation history has been determined, it follows that only with some difficulty can there be another time period which effectively amounts to a third epoch or phase in the outworking of God’s purposes.”<sup>9</sup> However, the methodology of systematicians who want to use a two-age eschatological framework to eliminate the possibility of a future millennium may be winning too much. If a two-age eschatology eliminates the possibility of a millennial “dispensation” wherein the Kingdom takes on an “earthly” character, such a method would also apply to the past as well as the future. This would eliminate all the contours of the history of redemption except for the two “ages” within the two-age schema. Such a pattern would eliminate the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, as they would introduce other epochal structures. This absolutizing methodology also turns back the clock on the work by covenantalists such as Geerhardus Vos who sought to integrate the contours of redemptive history.

Theologically, the character of an inaugurated eschatology (already/not yet), is by definition marked by progress. Whereas Garlington argues that, “it is the ‘already’ which defines and delineates the ‘not yet’ of the eschatological timetable,” he does not take into account the implications of “overlapping” between the two ages.<sup>10</sup> To argue from the basis of inaugurated eschatology that there can be no further development in the

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<sup>8</sup> Vern Poythress as quoted by Moore (2004, 52).

<sup>9</sup> Garlington, “Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium,” 66.

<sup>10</sup> Garlington, “Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium,” 54-5.

history of redemption is paradoxical. The very idea of eschatological overlap is crucial to G. E. Ladd's contention that there will be an earthly millennial age.<sup>11</sup> Those covenantalists who understand the promise of a "new earth" to mean that the eternal state will be characterized by new bodies that reflect the resurrection of Christ's body should agree that eschatological overlap and development cannot (as Poythress notes) preclude an earthly millennium.

Charles Scobie makes an important move that is distinctive from Garlington and Riddlebarger. Scobie contrasts *prophetic eschatology* from the OT (anticipating a series of ends within history) with *apocalyptic eschatology* in the NT (looking for the end of history).<sup>12</sup> His distinctive move is to qualify apocalyptic eschatology by stating, "It expects God to act in judgment and salvation in one great future event (or series of events) that will bring history as we know it to an end."<sup>13</sup> For Scobie, a series of ends is different from a series of events. Indeed, Scobie notes, "the NT looks forward to various events that will happen *within* history and prior to the *end* of history."<sup>14</sup> Whereas Garlington and Riddlebarger absolutize the two-age schema, effectively eliminating other epochal events and redemptive contours, Scobie allows for such.

This overview of two-age eschatology has sought to locate its importance in the grid of systematic theology. The two biggest issues are unwarranted absolutizing of the two-age schema and, correspondingly, a flattening out of the contours of redemptive history. This overview has been necessary to demonstrate that there is a need to hear the distinctive voices of the New Testament authors before moving to a theological synthesis. If Russell Moore is correct, that an inaugurated eschatology is essential for an eschatology that both covenantalists and dispensationalists can embrace, then both parties have a stake in pursuing the objections of Reymond, Riddlebarger, Garlington, and others. The Gospel of Matthew is an ideal place to begin a study of two-age eschatology because the narrative uses theology to "schematize history."<sup>15</sup> The book contains a clear reference to a two-age schema and refers to it several times throughout the gospel.

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<sup>11</sup> G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 680.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 124.

<sup>13</sup> Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 124.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 179. Emphasis his.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 13.

## Two-Age Eschatology in Biblical Studies

The discussion of Matthean eschatology is worlds-apart from its locale at the forefront of amillennialism in systematic theology. To be fair, there is little interaction with systematic theologians by those who specialize in gospels. Furthermore, within biblical studies there is a lack of a consensus about the nature of two-age eschatology in Matthew. Most would agree with James Dunn that αἰῶνες in the NT denotes time and is understood as part of a sequence of ages.<sup>16</sup> Attempts at more specificity are fraught with disagreement, resulting in approximately three views.

### *Defining the Ages*

The first view is relatively technical and is primarily seen within both exegetical and systematic contexts. The period of “this age” begins with the inauguration of the Kingdom by Jesus and continues until the inauguration of the “age to come” at his return. Put another way, “this age” is composed of the *inaugurated* Kingdom while the “age to come” is the *fullness* of the Kingdom. This position is based on an already/not yet schema. For Jesus to announce the nearness of the Kingdom “was to signal the initiation of the end events.”<sup>17</sup> This is the position taken by Garlington who states, “By distinguishing ‘this age’ and ‘the age to come’ (e.g., Matt. 12:32; Eph. 1:21; cf. 4 Ezra 7:50), it informs us that God has acted in His Son at the ‘end of these days’ (Heb. 1:2) to bring to fulfillment the promises made to the fathers.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, for Edward E. Anderson, “this age” is not an evil age so much as it is an eschatological age begun by the coming of Christ and his Kingdom.<sup>19</sup> David Hill’s position differs only slightly, arguing that “this age” is the period from “the Resurrection and enthronement of Christ till the final consummation.”<sup>20</sup> For Hill, “this age” is the Church age or the “era of

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<sup>16</sup> James Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 119.

<sup>17</sup> I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 202.

<sup>18</sup> Garlington, “Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium,” 56.

<sup>19</sup> Edward E. Anderson, *St. Matthew's Gospel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909), 92.

<sup>20</sup> David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 362.

the Church's life and mission."<sup>21</sup> This, however, is anachronistic and does not take into account the usage of two-age eschatology before the church had been fully constituted (Mt 12:32). Furthermore, Matthew characterizes "this age" as sinful. It is a period when the disciples will need the presence of Jesus in order to carry out their mission (Mt 28:20). The problem with this view is that it denies that a real sense of dichotomy exists between the ages such as appears in two-age logion of Mt 12:32. If this view is applied to the two-age logion Mt 12:32, it would destroy the rhetorical pattern characterized by radical opposites.

The second view, taken by Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder, is characterized by "this age" and the "age to come" coexisting but representing "different directions."<sup>22</sup> This too is an already/ not yet approach. The period of "this age" begins at the fall and is characterized by sin while the "age to come" was inaugurated with Christ's coming but will ultimately be consummated when all of God's will is accomplished in the eschaton. As Hauerwas states, "The new age has yet to reach consummation, but it has clearly already begun to supersede the old."<sup>23</sup> This view suffers from the same difficulty the first view faces in that it posits too much continuity between "this age" and the "age to come."

The third view presents Matthew's two-age eschatology as referring to "this age" (past, present, and future) as an evil age inaugurated at the fall (creation) and anticipating a change in the future that will usher in the "age to come."<sup>24</sup> Leon Morris calls "this age" the "whole time of life on earth."<sup>25</sup> Although "this age" is characterized by sin, it is not a time of judgment. Because this period begins at the fall (creation), it can be described as a "vast period of time marked by the form and the condition of the things that now fill it."<sup>26</sup> In the context of Mt 12:36-37, it is clear that "day of judgment" (ἡμέρα κρίσεως) and the time of justification (δικαιωθήση) and condemnation (καταδικασθήση) will be in the future – in the "age to come." This would comport with the intertestamental worldview that posited a former age, which began with the fall and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 87, cf. 122.

<sup>23</sup> Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 87.

<sup>24</sup> David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (SNTSMS 88; Cambridge/NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35.

<sup>25</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 320 n82.

<sup>26</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1943), 483.

would end with a “direct intervention by God within history.”<sup>27</sup> Norman Perrin notes that, “The ‘age to come’ occurs regularly in the apocalyptic literature as a designation of the end time, e.g. Enoch 71.15; Slav. Enoch 65.8; Syr. Bar. 14.13; 15.8; II (4) Ezra 4.27; 7.13; 7.47; 8.1.”<sup>28</sup> This interpretation views Matthew’s two-age logion in 12:32 as directed toward the *Sitz im Leben* of the Pharisees who saw themselves as still within the “former age” or “this age” which did not recognize the presence of the kingdom (12:28). Matthew would have wanted to appropriate this “strict dualism” to the Matthean audience who expected an “end-time” apostasy (Matt 24:9-10).<sup>29</sup> This view differs from the former views by denying that (at least in this logion) the entrance of Jesus has changed the status of the “ages.” Harvie Branscomb argues that Jesus spoke in this instance (Mt 12:32) in a way that was axiomatic for himself and “for others of his day.”<sup>30</sup> This position views two-age eschatology as beginning “this age” with the fall and looking toward “the age to come” when God will act with judgment in the second coming of Christ.

Larry Helyer agrees that the eschatological framework of Second Temple Judaism and the NT is composed of two ages. The period of “this age” begins with the fall after creation and the “age to come” begins with “the mighty intervention of God and his holy angels at the great Day of the Lord.”<sup>31</sup> Helyer goes on to say, in agreement with the second position cited above, that “the age to come has already begun for believers in Jesus the Messiah.”<sup>32</sup> This may indeed be true for other New Testament and first century writers, but the crucial question is whether this is compatible with Matthew’s presentation of two-age eschatology. The third position seems to be the best option for precisely this reason: the Pharisees whom Jesus is addressing (such as in the two-age logion of 12:32) refuse to accept presence of the Kingdom and thus they continue to operate in the typical dualism of Second Temple Judaism. However, this cannot explain the role that dualism plays as Matthew writes not to

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<sup>27</sup> J. Julius Scott Jr., *Customs and Controversies: Intertestamental Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 272.

<sup>28</sup> Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1963), 164.

<sup>29</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20* (trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 249.

<sup>30</sup> Harvie Branscomb, *The Teachings of Jesus* (NY/Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1931), 133.

<sup>31</sup> Larry Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 88.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

blaspheming Pharisees, but to the implied reader. This aspect is discussed below in the section entitled “Two-age Eschatology and Kingdom Eschatology.” This study argues that the best view of two-age eschatology in Matthew keeps the two ages in “opposition” to each other.<sup>33</sup> Not only does this interpretation keep the *Sitz im Leben* intact, but it also does justice to the literary structure of the gospel.<sup>34</sup>

### *Approaching a Complex Eschatology*

The structure of Matthew forces two-age language into broader questions of eschatology including the nature of the *Parousia*. The last occurrence of two-age language occurs in the Great Commission passage of Mt 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος).”<sup>35</sup> Janice Anderson cites 28:20 as part of Matthew’s narrative web which includes the commission to proclaim the Kingdom as Jesus and John the Baptist (3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7) and the instruction to go into the cities and villages of Israel (10:11; 23).<sup>36</sup> Anderson finds that the only discontinuity of 28:20 with these prior mission passages lies in its reference to “teaching.”<sup>37</sup> This suggestion may help to locate the reference to two-age eschatology within the narrative plot, but it also introduces a host of issues related to broad issues of eschatology and the long-standing debate over the nature of the *Parousia*.

For example, in 10:23, the mission of the disciples is connected to an eschatological event, “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” The question is whether there are parallels between the mission that will end with the coming of the

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<sup>33</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1943), 484.

<sup>34</sup> This is not to argue that Jewish eschatological expectation was uniform in nature, but that the Pharisees would have rejected the notion that Jesus brought about a change in the two-age schema. For a discussion of the variegated nature of Jewish eschatological expectation and extra-biblical literature see Dale Allison Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 25.

<sup>35</sup> All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>36</sup> Janice Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again* (JSNTSS 91; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 151.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web*, 151.

Son of Man in 10:23 and the mission that will end with the close of the “age” in 28:20. If one begins with the assumption that these two passages are parallel in meaning, the conclusion one makes about the nature of the *Parousia* will have some determination in understanding the nature of “this age” and the “age to come.”

Hagner suggests, due to the history of interpretation and the difficulty this poses for understanding Matthew, that each passage must be handled independently.<sup>38</sup> In other words, it is precarious to begin with a different aspect of Matthew's eschatology and then try to make references to two-age eschatology match it. While not denying the unity of Matthew's gospel, a text-by-text examination of Matthew's eschatology will carry the weightiest conclusion.

### Matthew's Distinct Two-Age Schema

A text-by-text examination of Matthew's two-age eschatology will demonstrate that his appropriation of this eschatological framework is distinct. The two-age eschatological schema appears in several other NT books, including Romans and Hebrews. But whatever source Matthew used (M, Q, etc) or, redacted or whatever Gospel priority one holds to, it is clear that his two-age language is distinctly his contribution.

The first distinctive feature of Matthew's two-age eschatology is that he includes it where other synoptic parallels do not. Not even the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas appropriates the language of two-age eschatology. The two-age logion in Mt 12:32 occurs within the Beelzebul controversy of Mt 12:22-37 and does not occur in the Lukan parallel (Lk 11:14-23), the Markan parallel (Mk 3:29), or even in The Gospel of Thomas' version of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (44).<sup>39</sup> It is unlikely that the two references in Mt 13:39-40 redacted any Markan passage although Gundry considers it a conflation of Mk 4:26-29 and 4:3-9.<sup>40</sup> Regardless, two-age vocabulary does not appear in the two Markan passages suggested by Gundry, highlighting the fact that Matthew had his own

<sup>38</sup> Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13, vol 33a* (WBC; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 278.

<sup>39</sup> George Aichele, “The Fantastic in the Discourse of Jesus,” *Semeia* 60 (1992): 57. The Gnostics replaced Matthew's chronological dualism with a spatial dualism of heaven and earth. Harvey McArthur, “The Gospel According to Thomas,” in *New Testament Sidelights: Essays in Honor of Alexander Converse Purdy*. Ed. Harvey McArthur (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1960), 72.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 382.

source and his own distinct agenda. In addition, the Gospel of Thomas' reference (57) to this parable in Mt 13:39-40 does not use Matthew's "age" vocabulary.<sup>41</sup> Matthew 24: 3 mentions two-age eschatology while the parallel passages in Mk 13 and Lk 21 do not.

The second distinctive feature of Matthew's two-age eschatology is his peculiar expression. The *locus classicus* of two-age eschatology in Matthew, indeed in the synoptics, is Mt 12:32: "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι) or in the age to come (ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι)." Although both ages are mentioned elsewhere (e.g. Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30), this passage is the only close juxtaposition of both ages in the synoptics and perhaps reflects a formulaic usage. Likewise, the phrase "close of the age" in 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3, 28:20 is unique to Matthew.<sup>42</sup> The redundancy of two-age language strengthens the idea that Matthew is appropriating two-age eschatological formulae.

### Two-Age Eschatology as Unrealized Dualism

Dale C. Allison Jr. finds that, while Matthew contains an "already and not yet" eschatological pattern, compared to Mark, it falls on the "realized" end of the spectrum.<sup>43</sup> While this is true of Matthew's inaugurated Kingdom eschatology, it does not comport with his two-age eschatology which is characterized by an unrealized dualism between "this age" and the "age to come." Indeed, one could argue that because Jesus does not presently alter the stereotypical schema of Second Temple Judaism, it is, in one regard, at the opposite end of the spectrum as Allison suggests.

#### *Matthew 12:32*

The *locus classicus* of two-age eschatology in Matthew, indeed in the synoptics, is Mt 12:32 "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will

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<sup>41</sup> James M. Robinson ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (NY/Leiden: Brill, 1996), 132.

<sup>42</sup> Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 319; Robert H. Smith, *Matthew* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 177.

<sup>43</sup> D. C. Allison Jr. "Eschatology," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 535.

not be forgiven, either in this age (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι) or in the age to come (ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι).”

Matthew's point in the pericope is singular: it is possible to misunderstand, albeit innocently, the Son of Man but to assert that the source of his power is demonic (an evil spirit) rather than God (the Holy Spirit) is inexcusable.<sup>44</sup> However, the epochal framework for the comment cannot be dismissed as it plays a role in establishing the main point. Martin Emmrich indicates that the main verb of the clause is a future passive (ἀφεθήσεται) and concludes that this is “not meant to declare what is *forgivable* (or rather *unforgiveable*), but what *will happen* (i.e. οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται, ‘will not be forgiven,’ indicative).”<sup>45</sup> While Emmrich demonstrates the importance of the time element, a dichotomy between *when* and *what* does not follow because if there were no single, definable sin in view, the rhetorical weight of this statement would be lost to the original hearers. In addition, as Robert Gundry notes, the future tense of ‘will be forgiven’ is an imperfect tense in Galilean Aramaic, taking on a “virtual rather than future meaning.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, “what is forgivable” and “what will happen” should be kept together. As Douglas Hare observes, Matthew's redaction of attaching the blasphemy saying to the Beelzebul controversy achieves a certain “polemical force.”<sup>47</sup>

This pericope contains several epochal dimensions that need to be held together. First, the kingdom is present and has been inaugurated by Jesus.<sup>48</sup> As the “Son of Man,” Jesus is addressing the Pharisees with divine authority. There is indeed an already/ not yet perspective present in this text. Second, there is a two-age schema that does not rely upon any overlapping of the “ages” and achieves its rhetorical force by contrast. The parallelism or contrast of the two negative phrases in 12:32 (οὔτε ... οὔτε ...) adds a “judgmental tone” to Jesus' rhetoric.<sup>49</sup> This two-age imagery serves as a way to heighten the warning that words will lead to condemnation or justification in verses 26-27. This reflects

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<sup>44</sup> Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1983), 55.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Emmrich, “The Lucan Account of the Beelzebul Controversy,” *WTJ* 62:2 (2000): 276. Emphasis his.

<sup>46</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 237.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1993), 140.

<sup>48</sup> Contra Margaret Davies who differentiates between “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven,” and argues that the “kingdom of heaven” is entirely in the future. Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 96.

<sup>49</sup> Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 382.

Matthew's eschatological pattern that stresses an "imminent expectation of the end."<sup>50</sup> Third, Matthew indicates that a time will come when Jesus will no longer be *physically* present on earth, doing miracles that attack the kingdom of Satan and demonstrate he is operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Beelzebul controversy of Mt 12:22-37 cannot be used to isolate one epochal framework to the exclusion of the others.

In sum, the entire literary structure from 12:30-37 is based on a pattern of strong contrasts. With Reymond we can agree that it is simply not possible to read an already/not yet structure into Matthew's two-age logion. The eschatology of the two-age logion in 12:32 presents a dualism with no overlap. However, contra Reymond, this does not mean that there are no other eschatological dimensions or perspectives within Matthew's gospel.

### *Matthew 13:22*

Besides the two occurrences in 12:32, the third occurrence of "age" (αἰών) is in the parable of the sower in Mt 13:22, "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world (τοῦ αἰῶνος) and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." This passage possibly reflects a redaction of Mark 4:3-20, especially v.19 ("but the cares of τοῦ αἰῶνος..."). It is important to keep in mind the context of the original parable. As Jesus is calling people to discipleship through his word or "seed," people are responding or rejecting his call to "absolute commitment."<sup>51</sup> This is significant because the central issue is the individual's response to the "message of the kingdom."<sup>52</sup> The primary eschatological framework is one of inaugurated eschatology: the kingdom is present, and those who hear the call to discipleship must respond. This is significant because of the presence of "two-age" vocabulary.

G. E. Ladd's reference to Mt 13:22 in his discussion on eschatological dualism helps to frame the issues surrounding this verse as they related to two-age eschatology. Ladd's paragraph is as follows:

The character of this age is such that it stands in opposition to the Age to Come and the Kingdom of God. This is shown in the parable of the soils. The sower sows the seed, which is 'the word

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<sup>50</sup> Vicky Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (SNTSMS 97; NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13, vol 33a* (WBC; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 381.

<sup>52</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 381.

of the kingdom' (Mt. 13:19). The word seems to take root in many lives, but the cares of the age (Mk. 4:19; Mt. 13:22) choke out the word and it becomes unfruitful. From this point of view, this age is not in itself sinful; but when the concerns of the life of this age become the major object of interest so that people neglect the message about the Kingdom of God, they become sinful.<sup>53</sup>

On the one hand, "this age" is in "opposition" to the "age to come" but at the same time, Ladd states, 'this age is not in itself sinful.' This is similar to the tension expressed in the cliché, "in the world, but not of the world." In this instance, the use of the word "age" (αἰών) does not imply a rigorous black-and-white contrast as it did in Mt 12:32. The reason why the "cares of this world" choke the word is that they do not always appear to be antithetical to the kingdom of God. As Bruce Barton states, this danger is "subversive."<sup>54</sup> In both Mark and Matthew, this passage is best understood as referring to "cares brought on by life in the world."<sup>55</sup> Ladd's exposition finds discontinuity in the "opposition" (or dualism) of "this age" and the "age to come" as well as continuity because of the inaugurated Kingdom.

The eschatology of Mt 13:22 is multi-dimensional. The contrast or discontinuity is implied because the cares of the "age to come" will be nothing like the cares of "this age." With Jesus' *Parousia* comes total provision and the elimination of the possibility of creating idols out of the things of this world. In this sense there is a strict dualism with benefits unrealized in this age. Thus, the notion of "possibility" is not due to two-age language but to Kingdom language. It is *possible* to live out the values of the Kingdom in this world but it is also possible to let the cares (e.g. money or materialism) of the world choke out the word of God. The parable of the seeds presents a Kingdom that has begun and is in the process of growing through the spread of the gospel. As William Hendrickson points out, the "sowing and at a later time fruit-bearing, both of which are mentioned in this parable, presupposed a gradual and time-consuming process of development."<sup>56</sup>

The parable of the sower uses two intertwined eschatological frameworks. First, the central point of the parable is the need to "understand" and not just "to hear" the word of Jesus and the call to discipleship. It is possible to resist the message of the Kingdom. However, because the Kingdom is in the "not yet" stage, it is not

<sup>53</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament, revised ed.*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Barton, *Matthew* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1996), 264.

<sup>55</sup> Holtz, "αἰών," *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament* 1:46.

<sup>56</sup> William Hendrickson, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973), 557.

characterized by triumphalism. The two-age framework is subsidiary to the Kingdom framework and functions as a basis to demonstrate the fact that “this age” is a time of possibility.

*Matthew 13:39-40*

The next references to two-age eschatology occur in the explanation of the parable of the “weeds of the field” in Mt 13:24-30; 36-43. The two two-age references are in Matthew 13:39-40, “and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age (ὁ δὲ θερισμὸς συντέλεια αἰῶνός ἐστιν), and the reapers are angels. [40] Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age (οὕτως ἔσται ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος).”

This parable is the second in a series of seven parables about the Kingdom. The phrase “close of the age” (συντέλεια αἰῶνος) is unique to Matthew and the reference to a “harvest,” “angels,” and “fire,” point to an epochal framework.<sup>57</sup> The parable of the “weeds of the field” deals the concern raised by the fact that the inaugurated Kingdom that Jesus is preaching is not characterized by triumphalism. Hagner suggests that the question about the continuing existence of evil was related to the continuing “Roman rule over the people of God.”<sup>58</sup>

In this instance, Matthew places his Kingdom eschatology next to his two-age eschatology to illustrate God’s exclusive role in judgment over evil amongst the people of God. The inauguration of the Kingdom has come with Jesus. Likewise, the inauguration of “this age” is implied in the comments proleptic of its close – the disciples of Jesus are living in “this age.” However, it is not clear when “this age” was inaugurated. Outside of any indication to the contrary, it should be assumed that, although the explanation was directed to the disciples, at this point they understood “this age” to have begun at the fall or creation. As far as a point of inauguration, there is no explicit intersection of “this age” and the Kingdom. However, Matthew’s point of juxtaposing these two eschatological schema is to create an intersection of the two-age schema and the Kingdom schema in the future.

The “Son of Man” has sowed the “good seed” (v.37) and the enemy has sown “weeds” (v.38). Both sowings occur during the Kingdom and during “this age.” But a “tension” exists.<sup>59</sup> While judgment is coming,

<sup>57</sup> Arthur Sloman, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1889 reprint; London: Macmillan, 1912), 107.

<sup>58</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 382.

<sup>59</sup> Douglas Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1993), 155.

both good seeds and weeds must be allowed to grow together, “Let both grow together until the harvest” (v.30a). By using two-age eschatology and “stark” language, Matthew is able stress patience (v.30a) and the immediateness of the future judgment.<sup>60</sup> This is reinforced by the language of the “harvest” at the end of the age which would have resonated with the Jewish hearers familiar with similar biblical and extra-biblical texts (Jer 51:33; Hos 6:11; 4 Ezra 4:28; 2 Bar 70:2).<sup>61</sup>

Like the two-age reference in chapter 12, the force of the references to two-age eschatology in 13:39-40 rests upon a strict dualism between the ages. There is overlap with regard to the Kingdom but there is no overlap with regard to the ages. In this pericope, patience characterizes “this age” while judgment characterizes the “age to come.” Any overlap between the ages would totally negate the command to be patient and the existence of future judgment.

Hill argues that the Kingdom of the Son of Man in 13:41 that needs to be cleansed is the visible church on earth.<sup>62</sup> However, as Luz points out, this is not possible from a literary standpoint, as the church is not “definitively constituted.”<sup>63</sup> The “Kingdom” in this context does not equal the church but refers to the sovereign reign of Jesus.<sup>64</sup> The Kingdom is inaugurated and will continue into the second age or “age to come.” There is both continuity and discontinuity in Matthew’s eschatological structure. The period of “this age” will “close” (v.39,40) but the Kingdom will continue into its fullness when the “Son of Man will... gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers (v.41).

### *Matthew 24:3*

The mentioning of the “end of the world” (AV) or the “close of the age” (ESV) opens what some call the “small apocalypse” of Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21.<sup>65</sup> Matthew focuses on Jerusalem more than Mark or Luke by omitting the story of the Widow’s mite (Mk 12:41-4; Lk 21:1-4) and, with Mark, locates the discourse on the Mount of Olives,

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1997), 155.

<sup>61</sup> David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 236.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>63</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 268.

<sup>64</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 222.

<sup>65</sup> Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 318.

perhaps echoing the eschatological scene of Zech 14:4.<sup>66</sup> In Mark 13:4, the pericope opens with “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished (συντελεῖσθαι)?” In Luke 21:7, the pericope opens with “And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” However, Matthew 24:3 introduces two-age vocabulary, “As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the *close of the age* (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)?”<sup>67</sup>

The beginning of chapter 24 indicates that when the disciples marveled at the Temple (cf. Lk 21:5), they proved they did not understand Jesus’ judgment of the Temple and Jerusalem, as described in chapter 23. Neil D. Nelson Jr.’s literary-critical analysis is helpful in pointing out that the rebuke of the disciples (in 19:13) for turning away children and the request by the mother of James and John in 20:20 prepares the implied reader to “anticipate misunderstanding on the part of the disciples and a corrective response on the part of Jesus in chapter 24.”<sup>68</sup>

Contra Douglas Hare, who finds the destruction of the temple the “basic question,” both issues of the temple and the second coming stem from the previous discourse.<sup>69</sup> The questions of the disciples are inverted as they relate to the order brought up. Jesus first brings up the issue of his second coming in 23:39 and the Temple in 24:2. However, the disciples first ask about the Temple, referring to “these things” and then to the second coming. While there appears to be three items, there are only two interrogatives (πότε [when] and τί [what]). In addition, it is unlikely that the “close of the age” should be considered separately because there is no definite article in the phrase “and of [the] close of the age” (καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). The result is a consensus that both questions (or the three items) from the disciples (the Temple and the *Parousia*) are about one thing: the end of history.<sup>70</sup> Yet the ability to draw a main point

<sup>66</sup> Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 318-9.

<sup>67</sup> David Sim argues that Matthew redacts the Markan version of the return of the Son of Man at the end of the age and “intensifies it” Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 95.

<sup>68</sup> Neil D. Nelson, Jr. “‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective.” *JETS* 38:3 (1995): 372.

<sup>69</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, 274.

<sup>70</sup> Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 319; Thomas G. Long, *Matthew*. Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1997) 268; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 352.

from the discourse does not negate the fact that several issues are engaged. Darrell Bock suggests that the “third question” Matthew’s reference makes the “eschatological force explicit.”<sup>71</sup> In this reading, the function of two-age eschatology is to direct the focus of the questioning. The interpretive challenge of this pericope is that Matthew overlays two different eschatological schemas. The first schema is an inaugurated eschatology wherein the coming of Christ has implications for the Temple (24:2) and for a second coming (24:3). In this schema, the first coming of Jesus has clearly begun a series of eschatological events. At the same time, Matthew introduces a second schema. The language of a two-age schema from the disciples identifies “the close of the age” with the second coming. In this two-age schema, there is no eschatological overlap or inauguration. The first coming of Jesus does not eliminate or destroy the two-age eschatological pattern by creating a third or fourth epoch. Thus, “this age” is a time of evil and waiting for the “age to come.”<sup>72</sup> What is introduced in this pericope is not another epoch or another division of time but the identity of the event that will close this age and usher in the “age to come.” In this two-age schema, there is no inauguration of Jesus’ second coming or a present inauguration of the “age to come.”

Both eschatological schemas are referenced when Jesus answers the question regarding his second coming in 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” First, Matthew references Kingdom eschatology. This schema is characterized by an inauguration of Jesus’ first coming. Second, Jesus identifies the “end” as coming in the future (with a future tense), “then the end will come” (τότε ἔξει τὸ τέλος). The end of “this age” will come only at his second coming. It is only when this particular day arrives that the “day of the Lord” will “close” this age and begin the “age to come.”<sup>73</sup>

### *Matthew 28:20*

The last occurrence of two-age language occurs in the Great Commission passage of Mt 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

<sup>71</sup> Darrell Bock, *Luke, Vol. 2: 9:51-24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 1663.

<sup>72</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, vol. 2* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), 353.

<sup>73</sup> Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, vol. 2*, 353.

Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)." <sup>74</sup>

In the climactic portion of Matthew's gospel (chapter 28), two-age language functions as a way to bind together themes of the authority of Jesus, discipleship failure, and his presence amongst the New Covenant community he has created. <sup>75</sup> The authority of Jesus theme is present already in the direction given to the disciples in 28:16. As David Bauer notes, because Jesus does not depart in Matthew, he remains the ever-present speaker. <sup>76</sup> This literary technique strengthens the last appearance of the exalted Christ to the disciples and gives a sense of enduring presence to the implied readers who come after them. The theme of discipleship failure appears in 28:17, "but some doubted." The doubt of the disciples is a problem associated with "this age" due to its evil nature. For Matthew, "this age" contains many other eschatological changes such as progression, fulfillment, and the growth of the church. However, these events do not change the basic character of the age in question. Only the radical renewal brought about by the *Parousia* and the close of the age will remove the need to address the "doubts" of the disciples.

The "reassurance" given to the disciples strengthens the idea that "this age" should be understood as an evil age that is filled with suffering and hardships that will be even harder for the disciples to endure when Jesus is no longer with them physically. <sup>77</sup> Yet, in Jesus' ascension, Jesus becomes present with them through the Holy Spirit, being free from the "bonds of time and space." <sup>78</sup> Davies suggests that in spite of discipleship failure, this promise provides both a "foundation for the mission of Jesus' covenant community" and a sense of imminence regarding the end of the age. <sup>79</sup>

Dale Allison Jr. argues for an inaugurated eschatology in 28:16-20, stating that, "The Parousia, which will coincide with 'the end of the age'

<sup>74</sup> Robert H. Smith notes an explicit connection with Mt 13:39. Robert H. Smith, *Matthew* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 341.

<sup>75</sup> David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. JSNTSS 31; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 141.

<sup>76</sup> Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, 141.

<sup>77</sup> Davies, *Matthew*, 208.

<sup>78</sup> Theodore H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), 237.

<sup>79</sup> Davies, *Matthew*, 209.

(28:20), will only make manifest on earth a fact already established in heaven.”<sup>80</sup> An inaugurated eschatology that recognizes that Jesus has already “received authority in heaven” should not be denied.<sup>81</sup> However, this inaugurated eschatology that points to an enthronement is part of the Kingdom eschatology. There is no already/ not yet change within the two-age schema. The period of “this age” is inclusive of the church age but is not changed by it and thus is still characterized by sin. The sinfulness of this age necessitates both the promise and the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit before Jesus’ second coming.

This reference to two-age eschatology is also interwoven with an inaugurated eschatology. The nature of the two-age eschatology in the Great Commission is not inaugurated or overlapping. Once Jesus returns in his *Parousia* there will be no need for mission or for the Spirit to comfort the disciples. However, it is also clear that Matthew has another eschatological schema in mind. This Great Commission is a development of the mission that once was exclusive to Israel (10:5-6) but now must go to all the nations (28:19).<sup>82</sup> An eschatological schema of development is used in conjunction with a two-age eschatology that has no inaugurated aspects.

### **Two-Age Eschatology and Kingdom Eschatology**

Central to this study of Matthew’s eschatology is the thesis that his gospel contains more than one eschatological framework. To use the term “eschatology” is not to focus exclusively on the future. Indeed, there is little distinction to be made between Matthew as a historian and Matthew as a theologian. This closely follows Georg Strecker’s suggestion that Matthew is a historian in the same sense that Luke is.<sup>83</sup> A multi-perspectival eschatology posits that Matthew’s gospel, as a corpus, approaches time in more than one way. Two of the dominant leitmotifs that provide both a narrative-literary function and an eschatological function are Kingdom eschatology and two-age eschatology. Most significantly, Kingdom eschatology in Matthew is an inaugurated eschatology, the arrival of Jesus has altered history and his presence and ascension have ushered in the “end of times.” In

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<sup>80</sup> Dale Allison Jr., 1985, 49.

<sup>81</sup> Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Davies, *Matthew*, 167.

<sup>83</sup> Georg Strecker, “The Concept of History in Matthew,” in *The Interpretation of Matthew*. Ed. Graham Stanton. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 71.

contradistinction from this, two-age eschatology is characterized by unrealized dualism.

The result of the two intertwining eschatologies is that the implied reader – the disciple – is both comforted and discomfited by Matthew’s gospel.<sup>84</sup> The familiar language of two-age eschatology in Second Temple Judaism would have allowed the reader to feel at ease. The redundancy of the two-age eschatological language helps to facilitate this comfort. It reinforces the reader’s assumptions and allows him or her to feel at home in a world dominated by apocalyptic dualism.<sup>85</sup> The fact that Matthew does not change the two-age schema vis-à-vis an inaugurated eschatology indicates an attempt to draw in the reader into an eschatology that awaits the arrival of “end of the age” which will dramatically change Israel’s (and the world’s) condition.<sup>86</sup> This eschatological schema finds no realization in the presence of Jesus – only in his *Parousia*.

At the same time a Kingdom eschatology is operating. This eschatology confronts the implied reader with the presence of Jesus. For example, chapter 28 does not record Jesus ascending, thus leaving the reader in his presence. Two-age eschatology retains continuity with the world of the reader while inaugurated eschatology introduces “massive reorientations in history.”<sup>87</sup> As two-age eschatology creates a sense of anticipation, the disciple must now choose a stance in light of the presence and inauguration of Jesus as king of an enduring kingdom. These two eschatologies operate simultaneously and both employ semantic redundancies that cannot be pulled apart.

### Conclusion

We may now offer a brief summary of the conclusions regarding two-age eschatology in Matthew.

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<sup>84</sup> “The implied reader of the New Testament has a personal stake in the truthful reference of what it asserts.” Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 69.

<sup>85</sup> Howard C. Kee *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective: Methods and Resources* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 47.

<sup>86</sup> Fred W. Burnett, “Prolegomenon to Reading Matthew’s Eschatological Discourse: Redundancy and the Education of the Reader in Matthew,” *Semeia* 31 (1985): 94.

<sup>87</sup> Scot McKnight, “Matthew, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 535.

1. The polemic goal of systematicians, particularly amillennialists, has flattened out the unique eschatological textures in Matthew's gospel. Likewise, many exegetes have focused on an inaugurated eschatology and have ignored the possibility of multiple layers or perspectives. However, it is not appropriate to follow Moltmann who "regards chiliasm (oriented toward a messianic age) and apocalypticism (oriented to eternity) as the two antithetical poles that must be dialectically related in order to avoid either utopian extremism."<sup>88</sup> Following Michael Horton's critique, such a move as Moltmann's would assume a Matthean eschatological schema devoid of the synthesis it actually has.<sup>89</sup> But acknowledging Matthew's synthesis does not mean absolutizing a single part of his variegated eschatology. A student of two-age eschatology in Matthew must be willing to hear everything he has to say about time and epochs without an *a priori* assumption or absolutizing of a theological notion without textual warrant.
  
2. The already/ not yet aspect of the Kingdom (inaugurated eschatology) works together with an unrealized dualistic eschatology at once to settle and to challenge the implied reader. Two-age eschatology is a schema devoid of change because of Jesus' presence. The second coming is the only event that will bring about a change that will usher in the "age to come." This allows Matthew to maintain an unrealized eschatology and a strict dualism between "this age" and the "age to come."
  
3. In agreement with Georg Strecker, who suggests that Matthew is a "historian" in the sense that Luke was, we agree that Matthew uses "periodicizing" to present history.<sup>90</sup> However, Matthew *also* uses two-age eschatology to present a schema wherein the nature of "this age" remains sinful and unchanged until the *Parousia*. In sum, it is better to see two-age eschatology in Matthew as part of complex tapestry of salvation history that he is weaving with his gospel.

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<sup>88</sup> Moltmann as quoted by Horton. Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 2002), 38.

<sup>89</sup> Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 38.

<sup>90</sup> Strecker, "The Concept of History in Matthew," 71, 74.

## **Above & Beyond: Malachi's Marriage of Ethics & Missions**

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### **Abstract**

The book of Malachi rhetorically and powerfully intertwines the ethics of God's people with their missionary task of reaching the nations with the knowledge of God. This study examines the macrostructure of Mal 1:1-2:17 with the goal of defining the rhetorical strategy of these verses.

### **Introduction**

For a couple decades now there has been a trend in Old Testament scholarship to investigate Malachi not as an individual book, but rather as one part of a larger collection. Many scholars study Malachi as the closing unit of the Book of the Twelve, a perspective which views all twelve Minor Prophets as one cohesive work.<sup>1</sup> Others more narrowly discuss Malachi as part of a Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus, focusing on affinities and resonances among those three books.<sup>2</sup> Still others have even more narrowly viewed Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi as a distinct literary grouping of three small works, all beginning with an "oracle of the word of YHWH" (Zech. 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1).<sup>3</sup> So, the trend in scholarly treatments of the book has been a move away from simply

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. James Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (BZAW), vol. 217, ed. Otto Kaiser (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 97, ed. D.J.A. Clines & P.R. Davies et al (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990). House titles the Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus "Hope for Restoration." Note that he discusses this corpus as part of his larger work on the Book of the Twelve, which demonstrates how these various investigations usually overlap.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, Old Testament Library, ed. J.L. Mays et al (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), esp. 1-3. Petersen divides his commentary into "The First 'Oracle,'" "The Second 'Oracle,'" and "The Third 'Oracle.'"

investigating “Malachi” towards understanding its relationship with and contribution to larger units and collections in the Hebrew Bible.

Although all three of the above perspectives have merit and have proven fruitful and thought-provoking in biblical studies, Old Testament scholarship must not abandon the study of Malachi as an individual, cohesive, and coherent book. Its message is simply too important, its theology too relevant. Moreover, one merely has to scan the commentaries, special studies, and articles on the book to see that many interpretive issues lack consensus. One such issue is Malachi’s rhetorical strategy. By rhetorical strategy I am referring to both the intent of the book and its organization around that intent. In other words, what is the purpose of Malachi? How does its structure accomplish its purpose?

The following is a rhetorical investigation of Mal 1:1-2:17. The goal of this study is not to provide a thorough exegesis of each pericope comprising these verses, but rather to shed light on their larger organization and rhetorical strategy. Malachi displays purposeful organization and an intentional strategy aimed at moving God’s people toward an actualization of God’s ethical demands, as well as their greater mission to reach the world. Mal 1:1-5 establishes the priority of covenant faithfulness as a driving force in the book. Mal 1:6-2:17 displays how a breakdown in ethics (i.e. covenant unfaithfulness) renders the people of God incapable of carrying out their task of missions. Finally, Malachi’s marriage of ethics and missions has drastic implications for God’s people today.

### **Malachi 1:5 – *Above or Beyond?***

Interpreters tend to agree that Mal 1:1-5 establishes a covenantal theme for the entire book.<sup>4</sup> Verse 1 serves as a superscription, or title, while verses 2-5 give the first of several disputations in Malachi. Here YHWH states His love for Israel only to have His people dispute that claim. In turn, YHWH reminds His post-exilic people that He has both hated and desolated Edom (*Esau* in the text), Israel’s longtime antagonist to the southeast, and will never allow Edom to rebuild. In other words, the very fact that Israel has returned from exile and rebuilt anything serves as hard evidence that God has been and remains faithful to His covenant and to Israel, a sort of exhibit A in this disputation.

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<sup>4</sup> For a lucid discussion of Malachi and covenant see S.L. McKenzie and H.N. Wallace, “Covenant Themes in Malachi,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45.4 (Oct., 1983), esp. 555-57 on 1:1-5. For a thorough and technical discussion see Andrew Hill, *Malachi*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 25D, ed. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 41-45, 145-170.

While scholars tend to agree that there are covenantal undertones in Mal 1:1-5, some disagreement comes concerning Mal 1:5, which reads: “And your eyes will see and you will say, ‘May YHWH be honored *above* the territory of Israel.’”<sup>5</sup> I emphasize the word *above* for a reason – the vast majority of translations render the Hebrew form מַעַל as *beyond* or something similar.<sup>6</sup> Commentators tend to do likewise.<sup>7</sup> This translation choice looks ahead in Malachi to YHWH’s concern for being worshiped among the Gentiles, in *every place*, and among the nations (1:11, 14) and recalls other prophetic passages which envision the nations recognizing the rule of YHWH (e.g. Isaiah 2:1-4).

Still, *beyond* is not the best translation of מַעַל in Mal 1:5. The form is a combination of two prepositions, מִן (from, out of) and עַל (over, concerning, unto), occurs quite often in the Hebrew Bible, and can have the sense of *away from* or *out from*, especially when something or someone is departing.<sup>8</sup> It also, however, quite frequently means *above* or *over* in the spatial sense,<sup>9</sup> particularly in texts discussing the proximity of one object to another. Moreover, Verhoef has demonstrated that when מַעַל is followed by the preposition ל (as in 1:5), it nearly always means *above/over*.<sup>10</sup> Thus in Gen. 1:7 God separates the waters below the expanse from the ones *above* it; in 1 Sam. 17:39 David girds his sword *over* his armor; and, in Jon. 4:6 the plant grows up *over/above* Jonah and is able to provide shade.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> All translations are the author’s own unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. RSV, NASB, HCSB, NKJV, NEB, etc. Also, note the KJV’s precedent, *from the border of Israel*, which undoubtedly has influenced more contemporary translations.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Petersen, 167, 173; Ralph Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32, ed. D.A. Hubbard et. al. (Waco: Word, 1984), 304-06; and recently E.R. Clendenen, *Malachi*, New American Commentary, vol. 21A, ed. E.R. Clendenen et al (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 258-59.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Gen. 13:11, Exod. 40:36.

<sup>9</sup> See *HALOT*, s.v. עַל II.8, as well as *BDB*, s.v. עַל IV.2.e. מַעַל ל, which interestingly suggests *over* or *above* for the occurrence in Mal 1:5.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R.K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 194, 206. Verhoef accordingly translates מַעַל as “above,” as does Hill, *Malachi*, 145, 161-62.

<sup>11</sup> See also Gen. 7:17, Ezek. 1:25, Neh. 12:31, 37, 2 Chr. 13:4. Verhoef rightly gives 2 Chr. 24:20 and 26:19 as “possible” exceptions (p. 206). A quick look at the uses of מַעַל, even without a following ל, will show how regularly the form means “above/over.”

Mal 1:5 clearly uses the term in the same spatial sense as it describes exactly where YHWH will be honored in proximity to Israel's territory.<sup>12</sup> Also, and perhaps most convincing, the Septuagint translates מַעַל in 1:5 with the Greek word ὑπεράνω, meaning over or above.<sup>13</sup> The external evidence clearly suggests that Mal 1:5 reads, "And your eyes will see and you will say, 'May YHWH be honored *above* the territory of Israel.'" So, after YHWH uses the example of Edom's destruction to demonstrate that He has indeed loved Israel, 1:5 looks forward to a time when His people will recognize it (*see* in the text) and realize that they must honor their God above their own borders.

The question remains, however, whether or not context supports translating מַעַל as above in Mal 1:5. As mentioned earlier, in the book of Malachi YHWH does indeed look to a time when He will be worshiped in every place among the nations (1:11, 14), and translating מַעַל as beyond in 1:5 is indeed an attractive option for evangelicals with a missionary impulse. As I will demonstrate, however, using above in 1:5 in no way robs Malachi of its message for missions. To the contrary, it expands that message as it intertwines this task of missions with YHWH's ethical demands.

### Rhetorical Strategy in Malachi 1:1-2:17

As mentioned from the outset, Mal 1:1-5 establishes a covenant theme for the entire book. YHWH has shown and will continue to show covenant faithfulness towards His people; put otherwise, He will continue to *love* them (1:2). Although Israel questions God's love and covenantal fidelity, the people will take notice of Edom's destruction and call for the honoring of YHWH above the territory of Israel (1:5). However, the next unit of Malachi – 1:6-2:16 – contains three sections giving undisputable proof that Israel is in fact dishonoring YHWH *above* its territory. The following overview will briefly demonstrate this rhetorical strategy in Malachi while leaving more technical elements to the finer commentaries.<sup>14</sup>

First, 1:6-14 displays that the priests are dishonoring God in worship. Unlike a son who knows to honor his father, or a servant who knows to

<sup>12</sup> The word for "territory" is גְּבוּל, sometimes translated "border" but with the same sense.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly Clendenen notes this fact but still renders מַעַל as "beyond." Clendenen, *Malachi*, 259, footnote 70.

<sup>14</sup> Hill, *Malachi*, is an essential tool, unquestionably the most thorough and informed resource in English dealing specifically with Malachi.

do the same for his master, the priests of Israel *despise* YHWH's name by offering defiled and inadequate sacrifices (1:6-8). As a result, their entreaties and their worship are in danger of being rejected (1:9-10). This rejection runs contrary to God's plan to have His name great among the nations, who will some day honor and fear His name in every place (1:11, 14). God's people are profaning worship and complaining about it (1:12-13), which occasions a curse from YHWH.<sup>15</sup> Thus Mal 1:6-14 gives undisputable proof that Israel is dishonoring YHWH above the territory of Israel.

Next, 2:1-9<sup>16</sup> discusses covenantal punishments for the priests and elaborates on their unfaithfulness. God will curse the priests (2:2) and humiliate them with their own pathetic offerings (2:3). The very language of curses and blessings in this passage has everything to do with the concept of covenant, with rewards (i.e. blessings) for covenant faithfulness and punishments (i.e. curses) for covenant unfaithfulness.<sup>17</sup> The passage continues by contrasting the priests in Malachi's day with the ideals of the Levitical covenant: they fail to reverence YHWH, speak truth, instruct the people, walk with God, or serve as capable messengers of the Divine (2:4-7).<sup>18</sup> In fact, the priests were so unfaithful they were

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<sup>15</sup> The use of "curse" (Heb. אָרַר) in this verse connotes the warnings and punishments an Ancient Near Eastern suzerain would mete out to his vassals, in this case YHWH unto Israel. The relationship between a suzerain and a vassal (i.e. a larger, powerful empire and a smaller, dependent city or nation, respectively) was a covenant one, reinforcing the claim here that Israel, as a vassal of YHWH, is failing to honor Him above its own borders. See Robert P. Gordon, "אָרַר," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 1, ed. W.A. VanGemeren et al (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 524-26.

<sup>16</sup> Although I am taking 1:6-14 and 2:1-9 as two distinct sections against the priests, the reader should be aware that many interpreters take 1:6-2:9 as one section, e.g. R. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, who accordingly calls 1:6-2:9 "the longest section in the book of Malachi" (p. 310). This organizational issue is minor and does not really affect interpretation. It is either one long section against the priests or two distinct ones. I personally see it as the latter. See also James Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, vol. 218, ed. Otto Kaiser (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 182-86.

<sup>17</sup> See McKenzie and Wallace, 557-60, and Verhoef, 236-54.

<sup>18</sup> Although some theorize that "priests" and "Levites" are labels for different groups in Malachi's day, O'Brien convincingly argues against finding support for such a theory in the text of Malachi. See Julia M. O'Brien, *Priest and Levite in Malachi*, SBL Dissertation Series, vol. 121, ed. D.L. Petersen (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), esp. 47-48.

actually managing to lead others away from YHWH, functioning as the very antithesis to what priests of God should be (2:8-9), as well as the antithesis of what God meant Israel to be. Thus Mal 2:1-9 gives undisputable proof that Israel is dishonoring YHWH above the territory of Israel.

Finally, 2:10-16 displays how all the people of Israel (not just the priests) characteristically lack faithfulness. They *break faith*<sup>19</sup> with one another and, collectively, with YHWH (2:10-11). Because of blatant unfaithfulness, especially in worship, YHWH threatens to cut them off from Jacob (i.e. Israel) and disregard their offerings and emotional pleas (2:12-13). As further evidence of Israel's general, characteristic unfaithfulness, YHWH presents the fact that the men even break faith with their wives (2:14-16).<sup>20</sup> In short, Mal 2:10-16 gives undisputable proof that Israel is dishonoring YHWH "above the territory of Israel."

Mal 2:17<sup>21</sup> completes the first part of the book (1:1-2:17) with a final estimation of Israel in light of the evidence given in 1:6-2:16: their very words weary YHWH. Israel is failing to honor God over its own territory (1:5) and apparently lacks the spiritual discernment to recognize its spiritual shortcomings. The people are so unfaithful that they accuse YHWH of delighting in evildoers while questioning His justice. Malachi 1:1-2:17 exhibits the evidence and makes the verdict clear: God has been faithful, yet Israel has not. The conduct of His people was dishonoring God's name.

This covenant unfaithfulness has everything to do with ethics, or the lack thereof. What Malachi 1:1-2:17 presents is a complete ethical

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<sup>19</sup> "Break faith" or "deal unfaithfully" is, in context, a better translation of בָּנַד than the typical "deal/act treacherously" (as in NASB, HCSB, NKJV, etc.). Although the meaning might be similar, I follow Hill, Smith, and Verhoef in retaining the language of faithfulness/unfaithfulness in continuity with the overall literary context.

<sup>20</sup> Baldwin rightly acknowledges the linguistic and conceptual difficulty of these verses. The best that interpreters can do with these verses on divorce is simply regard them as more proof that Israel is characteristically unfaithful in its dealings, even one person with another (going back to 2:10). See J. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D.J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), 239-41.

<sup>21</sup> Although the vast majority of commentators take 2:17 as the beginning of the second major division of Malachi (thus 2:17-4:6), I regard it as a bridge verse which ends the first division and begins the second one (thus 1:1-2:17 AND 2:17-4:6). In this respect I agree with Clendenen who, although clearly in the minority, treats 2:17 as a distinct section which answers the previous section and prepares the reader for the next section. See Clendenen, *Malachi*, 370-72, 382.

breakdown in Israel from top to bottom. Here I am referring to the addressees within the basic organization of the text. God first addresses the nation of Israel in 1:1-5. Each of the next three sections within 1:6-2:16 essentially evaluates conduct. Mal 1:6-14 ends with a cursing of the priests for being swindlers and breakers of vows. Also, 2:1-9 ends with the priests as corrupters who show partiality. Finally, 2:10-16 deals with the faithlessness of the common person and concludes with a warning for anyone who “covers his garment with wrong/violence.” The nation, the priests, and the common people display a thorough, top to bottom, national, cultic, and individual breakdown of ethics. Truly the Israel of Malachi’s day was incapable of honoring YHWH above its own borders and within its own territory.

Malachi’s rhetorical strategy is to look forward to a time when Israel will realize it must honor YHWH *above* its own borders (1:5), offer three sections of proof that Israel in the present is failing to accomplish this purpose (1:6-14), and then supply a final evaluation of Israel (2:17). Unfortunately the predicament does not end here. The purpose of God’s people in the world is not simply to walk virtuously amongst themselves within their own territory. Living ethically and morally upright has a further purpose; but, an ethical failure like Israel’s in the book of Malachi runs contrary to that purpose.

### **From Above to Beyond: The Marriage of Ethics & Missions**

So, Malachi 1:1-5 sets the tone for the entire book: “And your eyes will see and you will say, ‘May YHWH be honored *above* the territory of Israel.’” As the book proceeds to demonstrate how Israel is most certainly not honoring YHWH above its own borders, the very next section hints at a greater purpose than simply walking upright. Mal 1:6-14, a section dealing with ethical failures of the priests in worship, strategically provides two statements which clearly go beyond the mere scope of Israel’s borders.

The first is Mal 1:11, where YHWH says, “Indeed, from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations; and, in every place incense will be offered to My name, as well as a pure grain offering. For my name will be great among the nations’ says YHWH of Hosts.” The context is telling here. In the previous verse (1:10) YHWH, in response to the priests’ failings, calls for an immediate halt of Israel’s worship, and the following verse (1:12) gives a clear explanation: “But you are profaning it.”

Mal 1:11, couched in between these verses, informs the reader of what is ultimately at stake – the knowledge of Israel’s God among the nations! The phrase “from the rising of the sun even to its setting” (i.e. from east to west) continues the spatial dimension of Malachi’s conceptual framework begun in 1:5, obviously expanding it beyond Israel. Moreover, the anticipation of international offerings in every place further condemns the priests’ pathetic ones at the temple in Jerusalem. In short, Israel’s failure to honor God in covenant faithfulness at home endangers its wider mission to reach the world. So, Mal 1:5 calls for honoring YHWH *above* Israel, but 1:11 stretches that scope and reveals a further purpose of Israel’s faithfulness – honoring YHWH *beyond* Israel.

The other verse is Mal 1:14, where YHWH says, “‘Cursed is the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and even vows it, but sacrifices a blemished one to the Lord; for I am a great king’ says YHWH of Hosts, ‘and My name will be feared among the nations.’” The previous two verses (1:12-13) emphatically characterize Israel as profaning and scorning sacrificial worship. Mal 1:14 closes the section and demonstrates the overall point of this study by simultaneously condemning Israel’s ethical conduct in worship while looking *beyond* the borders of Israel to the fear of the Great King YHWH among the nations. Again, Mal 1:5 calls for honoring YHWH above Israel, but 1:14 (like 1:11) stretches that scope and reveals a further purpose of Israel’s faithfulness – honoring YHWH beyond Israel.<sup>22</sup>

Although the conduct of God’s people in the post-exilic, insignificant Persian province of Yehud<sup>23</sup> may have seemed inconsequential on the international scale, it certainly had larger ramifications than the people realized. As the prophet indicated, God had abandoned neither His people nor His covenants, although His people in fact were unfaithful to Him. God’s covenant with Abraham looked forward to a time when all the families of the earth might be blessed, and His covenant with a

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<sup>22</sup> A few interpreters have suggested a sort of universalistic or syncretistic meaning of 1:11 and 1:14, meaning they see the verses referring to legitimate worshippers of YHWH in the pagan religions of other nations in Malachi’s day. Sane exegesis, however, recognizes that the Hebrew Bible is full of references to Israel’s role to reach the other nations with the knowledge of the true God, YHWH. See Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, esp. 313 for summary of various interpretive positions.

<sup>23</sup> I.e. the name of the Persian, post-exilic community in central Palestine which was much smaller and more insignificant than the Israel which existed before the Babylonian invasion and exile; see Hill, 51-76 for a detailed introduction to historical situation of Malachi.

fledgling Israel anticipated the nation's unique role as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" in the world – a world of which YHWH claims, "all the earth is Mine."<sup>24</sup>

In Malachi's day the prophet had to remind the people of their multifaceted calling to both be holy and to reach the world with the knowledge of God. In other words, the book of Malachi endeavors to refocus the people of God above and beyond, concerning both their ethical conduct at home and the worldwide scope of their mission, "from the rising of the sun, even to its setting."<sup>25</sup> This duality in focus further demonstrates the necessity of correctly translating מַעַל as above in Mal 1:5. The next unit – Mal 1:6-2:16 – hinges on the above concept and, via 1:11 and 1:14, expands its implications to beyond.

The remaining material in Malachi (3:1-4:6) is beyond the scope of this discussion, but a word concerning 3:1-4 is appropriate. In these verses we see that, ultimately, ancient Israel would never be ethically whole or completely pure in its worship, and thus never fully capable of drawing the nations to the Holy One. But we also see that, ultimately, God will address that dilemma too. He will intervene. God will send His special messenger to clear the way, and God Himself will come and purify His people. Only then could the people of God be whole.

### **Conclusion: Going Above AND Beyond**

This rhetorical analysis of Mal. 1:1-2:17 demonstrates that the text intertwines the ethics of God's people with their missionary task of reaching the nations with the knowledge of God. By taking מַעַל in 1:5 as *above* (contra the usual *beyond*), we see that the organization of the following verses (1:6-2:17) demonstrates that Israel was most certainly not honoring God above its own borders. This breakdown of ethics and covenant unfaithfulness ran contrary to Israel's calling to be holy and to reach the nations with the knowledge of God, for YHWH is in fact the Great King of the entire world. Mal. 1:1-2:17 calls God's people to live faithfully to Him in two spheres – both above AND beyond.

The prophet's timeless message cuts like a razor for North American churches today. In our quest to be relevant, up-to-date, attractive, and effective in reaching the larger culture, churches must be careful. As new

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<sup>24</sup> See Gen. 12:1-4 and Exod. 19:1-6.

<sup>25</sup> Although he does not emphasize מַעַל as I have in this study or translate it as "above," I appreciate Froese's conclusion: "Malachi's theological underpinning, concerning Yahweh's revelation to the world, is the obedience of his people, whom he never forgets." See Brian Froese, "Approaching a Theology of the Book of Malachi," *Direction* 25.1 (Spring, 1996), 14-20.

church paradigms emerge, we must withstand temptations to leave high ethical standards on the ash heap of yesterday's traditions. One difficulty will continue to be sorting out legalism from ethics, or deciding what really matters and what does not. This task will be painful, and perhaps quite a long one, but God's people do not have the luxury of abandoning the challenge and sacrificing biblical ethics on the altar of relevancy simply for the sake of convenience. The things of God are not convenient.

But also, and as noted above, the purpose of God's people in the world is not simply to walk virtuously amongst each other. The church has a beyond dimension: taking the message of the one true God to the world. Churches will face tough questions and hard decisions, as they always have. Will they talk to the ones beyond the church about felt cultural needs such as wellness, entertainment, success, etc. at the expense of informing them about the gracious God who sent Christ to redeem the lost? What will churches do if the message of God fails to garner a sizable hearing? Or perhaps, when the last embers of Christian ethics lose their spark and turn to ash, will we make room on the altar of relevancy for our witness to God as well?

## Book Reviews

*Righteous: Dispatches from the Evangelical Youth Movement.* By Sandler, Lauren. New York: Viking, 2006, 272 pp, \$24.95.

Another Great Awakening is about to roll across America and you should be afraid, very afraid. Thus self-described atheist Lauren Sandler warns her fellow secularists in *Righteous*. After traveling the country investigating, she stands convinced that the evangelical youth movement is more extensive, more radical, and more powerful than most people realize.

She calls them the “Disciple Generation”—people between fifteen and thirty-five for whom the Christian faith is an actual lifestyle. Many of them are outside-the-mainstream radicals. In an Illinois field, Sandler discovers them at Cornerstone, one of thirty-five Christian music festivals in 2005 that drew more than 5,000 youths (x). Among the 50,000 at Cornerstone she meets an army of passionate pro-lifers who promote their message through “Rock for Life” concerts. Traveling to Seattle, she finds them flocking to Mars Hill Church to hear Mark Driscoll, whom she calls the Jonathan Edwards of the approaching awakening. Viewing the Mars Hill phenomenon as a movement with far-reaching impact, she states, “To say that Mars Hill is just a church is to say that Woodstock (or Cornerstone) was just a concert” (45). In Iowa, Sandler connects with a group of poor, itinerant skateboarders who passionately and unselfishly bring love and the message of Jesus to forgotten children. Their sincerity touches her as much as the superficiality of a “Hollywood version” skateboard ministry repulses her.

Others in the evangelical youth movement seem more mainstream, but are just as committed to changing the culture. Across the country in Atlanta, the manipulation of prosperity teachers nauseates Sandler. Yet tens of thousands of young African-Americans flock to hear them. Fifty miles from Washington, D.C., she walks the halls of Patrick Henry College where former homeschoolers study, plan, and work to take over the United States government. She notes that homeschoolers number two million, their numbers are growing by ten percent a year (160), and homeschooled kids are fourteen times more likely to work for a candidate or a political party (174). From what she learns at a university in Virginia, Sandler exposes what she believes is the sinister plot behind the Intelligent Design movement—the promotion of divine creation. Finally, in Colorado Springs she discovers that three-fourths of the Air Force Academy cadets are evangelical Christians and one-fourth of them attend New Life Church whose pastor at the time, Ted Haggard, had a weekly scheduled telephone call with the White House (213–15). Interviewing several military leaders there, she is horrified to learn that

they believe the U.S. military presence in the Middle East is helping to open doors for the Great Commission and ultimately to bring about Christ's return.

As expected, Sandler's presuppositions rest on anti-supernaturalist foundations. She describes conversion as an emotional response to the crisis of loneliness and purposelessness. Spiritual awakenings emerge out of "widespread cultural disorientation and anxiety" (11). The current pre-awakening results from a desperate seeking of certainty in absolutes which arises from an uncertain, ever-fragmenting, chaotic world.

Two arguments run beneath Sandler's larger thesis that the evangelical youth movement is about to bring a Great Awakening. First, she argues that the movement is largely a rebellion against traditional American church culture. This is the youth rebellion of the sixties revisited, only this rebellion turns not toward sin, but toward a Savior who was not afraid to engage the culture. Second, Sandler argues that the failure of secularism has given rise to the Disciple Generation. Her frustration grows when she sees secularists offering no clear guidance, no community, and no agape love. She writes, "Until secular America strengthens its own front lines by developing strong communities and a culture that uplifts rather than invalidates, this army will have no viable opponent" (16).

Despite secularism's entrenched failures, Sandler ends her book with a stirring appeal to the Left to rise up and oppose the Disciple Generation. For her, the apocalypse is not the possibility of Armageddon, but the possibility of fundamentalist Christians controlling the culture. She calls on secularists to develop propagandizing concerts like Cornerstone, teaching communities like Mars Hill church, mission-driven schools like Patrick Henry College, even skateboarding itinerant secular preachers like those she met in Iowa. She concludes, "It's time for our own secular Great Awakening" (247).

In a surprising turn of events, an atheist has written a deeply significant book on what could indeed be the beginnings of a new Great Awakening. Sandler has provided important insight on spiritual awakening, the evangelical youth culture, and the church. As in previous times when an awakening was needed, the traditional church today has developed a fortress mentality and refused to engage the culture, instead developing its own subculture. To walk into many churches today is to walk into a museum displaying the culture of a forgotten era. So today's evangelical youth movement is taking Christianity outside the four walls of the traditional church to engage the culture. In doing so, it is imitating Whitefield and Wesley's field preaching during the Great Awakening. It is following the pattern of the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening and the prayer meetings in secular places of the Awakening

of 1857-8. As a result, the traditional church criticizes them, just like the “old lights” criticized the “new lights” in the Great Awakening, just like Finney’s “new measures” were criticized in the revivals of his day. Though not intentional, Sandler’s analysis implies that instead of criticizing, traditional churches should encourage the Disciple Generation and learn from them how to engage the culture.

Sandler’s sociological analysis intrigues her readers. She reveals stunning, even shocking information about the evangelical youth culture. The interaction of an atheist and that radical culture provides engaging tension and drama. Sandler is disarmingly frank about her ambivalent feelings toward these followers of Jesus—drawn by their love and commitment, repelled by their beliefs. She even describes a moment when she started weeping uncontrollably and almost put her faith in Christ. This page-turner just might help turn the church around and help it face the culture.

Jim Hardwicke  
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*Women Leading Women*, by Jaye Martin and Terri Stovall. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009, 241pages, \$29.99 Hardback.

*Women Leading Women* establishes the framework for a women's ministry, but more importantly focuses on the ministry from the perspective of a leader and the role of a woman in church leading other women. This book was written by Jaye Martin (Dean of the Women's programs at Southern Seminary and creator of HeartCall, a women's evangelism ministry) and Terri Stovall (Dean of the Women's programs and associate professor at Southwestern Seminary) in a four part framework with each author contributing based on her field of study and experience. Stovall authors part one of this book establishing the biblical foundation for why women lead other women as well as discussing the role of women in church by evaluating the complementarian and egalitarian viewpoints. The second part of the book written entirely by Martin, focuses on the leader of a women's ministry and standards of leadership. The third part of the book, a shared effort by both authors, delves into the five tasks of women's ministry which are grounded in the five functions of the church. The last part of this book, written by both authors, summarizes all the foundational information into a praxis for women's ministry.

The book states that the purpose of *Women Leading Women* is to “paint a picture of what women's ministry should look like based upon Scripture” (xiii). This book is a biblical model for doing women's ministry within the local church and a straight forward attempt at

creating a foundational resource for women in leadership. This book is not a step by step process of how to accomplish women's ministry. A brief summary of each section of the book will give more insight into the portrait the authors intend to paint.

Stovall in section one of this book gives a survey of biblical manhood and womanhood. She begins her discussion from the Garden of Eden with the creation of woman (Genesis 1:27) and the roles that women have in the body of believers. She gives a brief survey of women throughout Scripture to show how God has used women of faith. In chapter two, she examines two views of women in ministry: egalitarian and complementarian. She evaluates both views with an obvious leaning towards complementarianism which she supports at each stage of her evaluation. The author and this reviewer realize there is little room in one chapter to completely discuss each viewpoint in depth. Through the complementarian lens, Stovall gives guidelines for determining appropriate areas of service for women in leadership positions such as "if it looks like Sunday morning then it should be men in leadership rather than women" (23). The last part of this section gives a theology of the church and how women's ministry can help fulfill the mission of the church.

Martin in part of two of this book uses three chapters to discuss the character and actions of a leader. In chapter four, she uses God's character to establish the standard of leadership and summarizes this chapter by stating "follow-ship becomes the great challenge. We need leaders who will follow the *Leader*" (60). In the next chapter, Martin uses what she taught about God's character as the standard to then evaluate the character of those in leadership. The last chapter of this section is reserved for how one serves alongside men in ministry stressing the differences between men and women and how one relates with someone of the opposite sex. As a point of disagreement with the authors, this reviewer sees this as an unnecessary and rather cliché look at men and women. There are underlying assumptions placed on a whole gender population. Although Martin seeks only to share her experiences through this chapter, it seems more in line with cultural stereotypes rather than biblical truth and the insights could be as easily applied to men working with other men.

The third section of this book reveals the task of women's ministry. Both Martin and Stovall contribute to these five chapters with each chapter explaining a different task and how that task is accomplished. The first task is reaching women for Christ which parallels the evangelism function of the church. "Evangelism is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. Mission is where you take the sharing of the good news"

(99). Using this definition, Martin explains a process that must take place within a women's ministry to be intentional about sharing the good news but also being on mission to take the good news. The second task, nurturing, parallels the discipleship function of the church. Stovall presents a biblical basis for creating disciples and teaching what Christ has commanded. She conveys tips for nurturing women in their faith. The third task of women's ministry is involving women in the work of the church. The foundation for this chapter is clearly stated by Stovall, "you can stand and try 20 different pieces in one spot before you find the one that fits perfectly. And when all the pieces are perfectly connected and no piece has been lost or forgotten, a beautiful picture is complete" (132). Finding the right women for the right job is time consuming but necessary. The fourth task, engage, speaks directly to the Titus 2 model to mentor those who are younger in the faith. This task parallels the ministry function of the church. This chapter, written by Stovall, establishes the why and how of girl's ministry. The last task of women's ministry is support. Martin stresses the important role that women's ministry plays in supporting the pastor, the staff, the church family, the ministries of the church, and the functions of the church. It is not nor shall ever be a stand alone ministry.

The last section of this book answers the question of how women's ministry is practiced. This section, shared by both authors, is a management style approach to women's ministry dealing with issues such as strategic planning, team enlistment, conflict resolution, and excellence in ministry. Each one of these topics is covered in depth in the last four chapters of this book. Stovall writes the last chapter of the book on excellence and summarizes all the information into specific guidelines for success in ministry.

*Women Leading Women* is for women in leadership who seek a better understanding of the Church and the role, function, and task of women's ministry within it. It serves the purpose of painting a portrait for the reader of the joy found in ministering to women with a focus on Christ and an understanding of the biblical foundation for women leading women.

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*Engaging Deconstructive Theology*. By Ronald T. Michener. Burlington: Ashgate, 2007, 259 pp., \$99.95.

Dr. Ronald T. Michener has written an interesting and engaging presentation on how evangelical theology can open a discussion with postmodernism, specifically academic postmodernism. The work stems

from Dr. Michener's doctoral dissertation and is entitled *Engaging Deconstructive Theology*, and is part of the Ashgate Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies series. The goal of the book is to open a dialog with postmodern thinkers in order to offer an apologetic for Christianity that pulls from multiple sources, including Scripture, experience, literature, and the imagination.

This book is neither for the faint of heart, nor for those who have little or no familiarity with the writings of the major postmodern thinkers of our time. It is a book that delves deeply into the works of Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Taylor, Rorty, and Cupitt. If those names are not familiar to you then you may find this book to be quite confusing. If however, you are aware of these writers and their positions, then this is a book that you might find worthwhile reading. Let me give a brief overview of the book before offering a few concluding observations.

The book starts with a brief history lesson on the rise of postmodernism. Michener does a nice job of summarizing the rise of the postmodern movement from Francis Bacon to the six modern writers he investigates. He also lays out the various postmodern theologies that currently exist, from restorationist theology through liberation and process theology, to deconstructive theology, which is the focus of his book. Michener defines deconstructive theology as a "theology that attempts, through subversion, to bring about the self-destruction of the modern worldview into a non-worldview through its denial of objectivity" (11).

Having setup the history of postmodern thought, Michener then moves to investigate 6 representatives of deconstructive theology. The first writer he enters into dialog with is Jean-François Lyotard, and his call for the end of the metanarrative. Michener's interaction with Lyotard will serve as an example of how he treats the other five authors he treats. After outlining Lyotard's position on the elimination of the metanarrative Michener concludes that while Lyotard's position is helpful in some ways, such as helping us see how the metanarrative can take on a life of its own and be used to foster oppressive systems, that in no way should make us reject the idea of metanarratives *in toto*. Christianity presents a metanarrative and as such, evangelicals must not reject its metanarrative, but can allow Lyotard's position to allow us to question the metanarrative in order to make sure we have understood the narrative correctly. Lyotard's position can also help us to be humble in our acceptance of the Christian metanarrative. Michener employs the same technique as he dialogs with the deconstructionism of Derrida, the rejection of the Enlightenment Self in Michel Foucault, the nihilism of Mark Taylor, the pragmatism of Richard Rorty, and the theological necrophilia of Don Cupitt.

After presenting each writer's position, he then gleans from those writers what is useful for evangelical theology, but rejects those positions that conflict with the evangelical position. I am not sure if this constitutes a dialog as such, for it would seem that his rejection of the foundational position of the six writers with which he interacts would cut off dialog. It would be more accurate to describe Michener's work as a raiding party sent into the postmodern camp in order to carry off those things that are useful, but having carried them off to use them for a purpose that fits Michener's evangelical position. Michener argues that postmodernism has valid insights that evangelicals can employ as we seek to work out our own apologetic with the postmodern world. This is ultimately his purpose in writing the book. He wants to open a discussion with those who have embraced postmodernism, but he does not wish for a one-sided dialog. He seeks to step into the postmodern camp and insert an evangelical response to the postmodern worldview. Michener's response is based on a "soft foundationalism" that seeks to remain humble in our quest for truth and not let our quest for certainty be a substitute for the Truth.

Rustin Umstatted  
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