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# Contents

# The presence of the shepherd: a rhetographic exegesis of Psalm 23

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**Abstract**

*Interpreters have rightly put the immensely comforting power of Psalm 23 to its depiction of the personal care and attention that Yahweh, the Shepherd provides His people. It is also widely accepted that the movement and pilgrimage theme in the psalm adds to the effect of encouraging the weary, fearful or dispirited believer. One aspect of the Psalm, whose contribution remains to be investigated however, is the role of the various locations within which the personal care and attention is provided, as well as the changing spatial positions between the Shepherd and the psalmist. Using the Bible Study method of rhetography, this paper delineates how these spatial dimensions in Psalm 23 contribute to its celebrated effect. It concludes by encouraging song writers and worship leaders to include the rhetographic aspects of the psalm in their song writing.*

## 1. Introduction

One advantage of the burgeoning diversity of Bible study methods is that they enable the re-examination of various aspects of familiar passages which have hitherto not been fully explored. One such category of methods which has already shown significant promise in this direction is the socio-rhetorical method (e.g. Witherington 2006; De Silva 2000; Loubser 2005:127-140; Robbins 1996a; Watson 1998:67-115; Oosthuizen 1997:64-91; Adams 1995:381-384; Ledbetter 1993:289-301). Improving on its parent specialty of rhetorical criticism, the basic assumption of the socio-rhetorical method is that biblical texts were written for the purpose of persuading their first readers and hearers and so change their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and behaviour. In this regard, and given the literary, socio-historical, and cultural

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contexts of the inspired authors and their first readers, the method analyzes how the text was rhetorically designed to achieve the purpose for which it was written. Questions as to the historical and formational value of the text to their first recipients, as well as their place in the biblical canon for the people of God at large, are thereby also answered.

Clearly, the Spirit-inspired nature of Scripture implies that though this basic assumption concerning the rhetorical design of the text is correct, it is an inadequate premise for studying the Bible. In addition to the above, it must also be assumed from the beginning that the text achieves its effect, not just through its rhetorical strategies, but also by the simple fact that it is God's word, which proceeds from Him 'like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces' (Jer. 23:29).[2] The power of the word thus resides not in its ability to manipulate the reader/listener, but in the Spirit's effective ministry of transformation. In this sense, the idea proposed by Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century AD that the Word and the Spirit are the two hands of God by which He changes and moulds believers is worth upholding (Irenaeus 1997).

That said, however, there is also significant mileage in investigating aspects of how the Spirit's power of persuasion and transformation is achieved through the manner in which the text is rhetorically designed. Such knowledge arms the twenty-first century interpreter, expositor, and practitioner of the word with significant expertise in partnership with the Spirit of God. When the socio-rhetorical method is viewed in that context, it has great potential for uncovering the communicative power of Scripture and enriching its application in the modern contexts.

The initial application of the method focused mostly on the *logos* (rational appeal), *pathos* (emotional appeal), and *ethos* (ethical appeal) of the passages, in parallel with how such lines of persuasion were similarly employed by other contemporary literary sources of the era (Robbins 1996b; cf. Bloomquist 2002:61-96; Porter and Olbricht 1993; Bloomquist 1999:173-209; Witherington 1995; Czachesz 1995:5-32; Hester 1992:27-57). The primary tool in this rhetological approach to socio-rhetorical studies is to outline the linguistic and cognitive patterns of the text within its historical context, and establish the means by which the argument of the text would have persuaded the first readers and so achieved its formational purposes. This approach has yielded significant rewards in New Testament studies, especially in the study of the letters.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

Recently, however, and with the postmodern re-appreciation of the role of the imagination in shaping human understanding, feelings, attitudes, and behaviour, and the important function that the spatiality of a text plays in determining this imagination, a sub-specialist application of the socio-rhetorical method has been proposed. This method, called rhetography, predominantly focuses on the manner in which the spatial dimensions of the text contribute to its rhetorical and imaginative effect on the readers and hearers (cf. Black and Watson 2008; DeSilva 2008:271-98; Dennis 2010; Webb 2009). When employing this method, the task of the interpreter is to establish how the text would have shaped the imagination of the readers and hearers so as to influence their thoughts, emotions, and attitudes, and so inspire their decision making and volitional actions. This method is clearly most suited for those texts in which spatial language and metaphors are prominent.

With this background information in mind, we may now proceed to the task at hand. The aims of this article are threefold. Firstly, since the method is not well-known, the article will describe the rhetographic approach to exegesis and give examples of its application. Secondly, to demonstrate some of its benefits, the paper will apply the method to a familiar text (Ps. 23) to highlight some aspects of the psalm which have hitherto not been adequately emphasized. Finally, it will be observed that a benefit of this application to Psalm 23 is how the knowledge could enhance the manner in which song-writers and worship leaders develop hymns and songs of worship based on the psalm.

## 2. The rhetographic method of Bible studies

The term rhetography was first used by Vernon Robbins (2008a:81) to describe 'the graphic images people create in their minds as a result of the visual texture of a text'. When employed as a Bible study method, it examines the manner and strategies by which the text, both in its written and spoken form, may have influenced the imaginations of the first readers/hearers, and so persuaded them to take a course of action. 'Rhetography communicates a context of meaning to a hearer or reader. A speaker or writer composes, intentionally or unintentionally, a context of communication through statements or signs that conjure visual images in the mind which, in turn, evoke 'familiar' contexts that provide meaning for a hearer or reader' (pp. 81-82).

As a method, rhetography is based on three main fundamental tenets. Firstly, it takes for granted that there is a strong causal link between human imagination

and their feelings, attitudes, and inspired behaviour (Belaj 2005:119-44; Vermeir 2004:561-91; Hays 1999:391-412). And this applies to both virtues and vices, so that where imaginations are correctly shaped, appropriate feelings, attitudes, and behaviour result. Accordingly, how the language of the biblical passages, which at their basic level were designed to form and transform their readers and hearers, shapes their imagination must also be regarded as a vital area for investigation (cf. Ryken 1990:387-98; Loader 2007; Dykstra 2008:26-31; Harvey 2007:450-58). What this implies is that the Bible student must ask the question as to what particular imageries the writer of the text intended to evoke in the imagination of the first readers through the manner in which he has chosen to articulate his words. This is the task of rhetography.

Secondly, rhetography takes seriously the ancient Mediterranean concept of *ekphrasis*, which is immortalized by Aristotle's instructions to ancient rhetoricians, that to persuade the hearer successfully, he 'must be made to see things' (*Rhetoric*, 3.11). *Ekphrasis* was a rhetorical term that was used to denote 'descriptive language, bringing what is shown clearly before the eyes' (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata*, 46). Thus even when no explicit statement is made in the text regarding the author's intention, it would be safe to assume, at least in Greco-Roman literature, that deliberate care and attention has gone into the author's descriptions and narration with the intention of generating the kind of pictorial imagination suiting his purposes (Mitchell 1994:11-34; Miles 1996). The least a Bible student ought to do is to take seriously the manner in which pictorial images are formed by the text.

At this stage, it is a moot point as to whether ancient near eastern and Hebrew rhetoricians shared similar views as the Greco-Roman rhetoricians and Aristotle for that matter. At its basic level, human nature, regardless of the era and cultural background, reacts to imaginative language in similar fashion, if even to different degrees (cf. McElhanon 2006:31-81; Martin 2007:37-55; Brauch, Lipphardt, and Nocke 2008). Accordingly, rather than pressing for differences between the ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek perceptions and conceptions of images, what matters is the appreciation that in all cultures, textual depictions are aimed at generating certain images of relevance to those cultures. It is when the specific relevance is in view that the distinctions between the Hebrew and Greek rhetoricians become an issue. In any case, Brinkman's (1992:252) conclusion, after examining the perception of space in the ancient near east is worth pondering: 'people in the ancient near east perceived space in a way similar to that of modern Western people'. The task of rhetography, therefore, is to assemble the images that the text creates and

the relevance of the images to the socio-cultural and religious context of the first readers and hearers.

Thirdly rhetography assumes that a significant component of the text's ability to evoke influential imagination in its reader and hearer derives from the text's spatiality (cf. Flanagan, Gunn, and McNutt 2002; Flanagan 1999:15-43). Modernist understanding of the key role of spatiality in the cognitive and social functions of society was epitomized by Immanuel Kant's maxim that space and time are the two *a priori* concepts or subtexts that allow humans to structure, systematize, and understand their experiences (2002:22). Stephen Toulmin (1990:116-17) expresses this more vividly by describing spatiality as the 'intellectual scaffolding' on which societies frame their understanding of the world around them. Similarly, David Harvey (1996:316) opines that places play a central social role in society by being 'the focus of the imagination, of beliefs, longings, and desire' of people. With postmodernity, the critical role that spatiality plays in human social and geo-political behaviour has been described by authors such as Michel Foucault and Robert Sack (cf. Asumang 2005:63-83). Furthermore, the strength to which the spatiality of a text influences human cognitive functions and imaginations has become a fruitful area of research as demonstrated by writers such as Yuri Lotman (1977), Hayden White (1973), Henry Lefebvre (1991), and Edward Soja (1995).

As a result of this appreciation of the importance of the spatiality of the text in evoking the imagination, and of the imagination to affect human behaviour, much of the consideration in rhetography focuses on the rhetorical effects of the spatiality of the text. In other words, rhetography is a multidisciplinary method of biblical research which combines insights emanating from socio-rhetorical criticism and critical spatiality to examine the text. For example, Vernon Robbins's (1996a) approach to rhetography blends ideas from critical spatiality with his systematic method of socio-rhetorical investigation in which the text is examined at five levels: inner texture, inter-texture, socio-cultural texture, sacred texture, and ideological texture. Depending on the genre of the text at hand, Robbins then argues that there are six rhetographic styles of argumentation, called rhetorolects. These rhetorolects are labelled as apocalyptic, prophetic, miracle, wisdom, pre-creation, and priestly (Robbins 1996c:353-62). Rhetographic rhetorolects are enthymematic[3] styles of generating pictorial imaginations in the reader/hearer in such a manner as to be easily understandable in the socio-cultural contexts of the first readers/hearers.

[3] An enthymeme is defined as a statement of an argument whose premises are not articulated because the speaker assumes their common knowledge by the hearers. For a recent treatment of the role of enthymemes in the New Testament, see Debanné (2006).

Thus rhetorolects act as heuristic devices through which the intended rhetorical effect of the text may be identified and examined (cf. Robbins 2008b; Robbins 1996c:353-62; Kennedy 1984).

When employing Robbins's method of rhetographic examination, the student will first have to isolate the type of rhetorolect in the text, examine the nature of the image that it evokes, and then determine the intended effects of the rhetorolect on the reader/hearer. In other words, for Robbins, rhetorolects are the dialect of rhetography. So, for example, in a rhetographic study of the Sermon on the Mount, the piece is categorized as a prophetic rhetorolect with emphasis on the kingdom of God. The picture that the sermon evokes is one of a Kingdom or sphere over which God reigns, with its boundary markers, ethos, rules of citizenship, and pride of belonging (Robbins 2008a:93). Similarly, a wisdom rhetorolect, such as Luke 11:33-36 evokes the image of a household in which parents teach their children the rudiments of the godly life and how to project this faithfully to the outside world. Likewise, in his examination of 1 Peter, Robert Webb (2007) identifies the predominance of apocalyptic rhetorolects in that epistle and uses them to show how the letter reshapes the imagination of its first readers/hearers to enable them reinterpret their persecuted statuses and so continue in the faith.

Though innovative, Robbins's rhetographic approach of identifying rhetorolects in the text remains to be tested. It is, therefore, perhaps prudent to reserve judgment at this stage. There are reasons, however, to believe that the approach might require further refinement. Firstly, the procedure for classifying a passage as a rhetorolect before subsequent examination of its rhetographic features has the potential for creating circular reasoning with its inherent problems.[4] Secondly, the blending and bending of literary genres in the Bible as a whole and the New Testament in particular makes research procedures which concentrate on isolating the specific genre of a passage, rather than the broad generic outline, fraught with significant difficulties (cf. Attridge 2002:3-21; Bhatia 2002:3-19). Thirdly, and most importantly for the present project, in Robbins's procedure, the spatiality of the text is not adequately foregrounded in a manner as to enable the secure investigation of the rhetographic effects of the images.

An alternative approach that may well help avoid some of the above problems may now be proposed. In *Unlocking the Book of Hebrews* (Asumang 2008), I have described a multidimensional procedure for the examination of the

[4] The procedure also has a hint of form-critical approach to New Testament study, which even though should not be dismissed in itself, has its well-known drawbacks.

spatiality of the text. This procedure involves four investigative steps: (a) identification and analysis of the nature of the spaces in the text, (b) examination of the spatial interactions between the 'characters' and the identified spaces, (c) examination of how the spatial relationships between the characters within each space are portrayed, and (d) reflections on the semiotic and intertextual representations of the spaces in their socio-cultural and religious context (pp. 39-79). Application of this procedure to the Epistle to the Hebrews yielded some new insights on its rhetorical and rhetographic[5] design, which also has important implications for the appreciation of the epistle's pastoral effectiveness in its original as well as modern contexts.

I propose that this procedure for the examination of the spatiality of the text could be combined with Robbins's systematic socio-rhetorical procedure in performing a rhetographic exegesis of passages. Such a procedure will most likely expose certain dimensions of the passage which were designed by its author to influence the theological imagination of its first readers. I shall now test this proposal on a familiar text—Psalm 23.

## 3. A rhetographic exegesis of Psalm 23

The enduringly, powerful, and comforting effects of Psalm 23[6] are borne out by the numerous studies, monographs, devotionals, hymns, and songs which are based on it (cf. Rogal 2006; Bosetti 1993). At its core is the manner in which it focuses on the personal attention and care that Yahweh, the Shepherd, provides His flock. Scholarly interest in the psalm has tended to focus on (a) the religious and socio-cultural background of the shepherd imagery (e.g. Freedman 1980; Wilson 1951; Rice 1995:71-78), (b) the possible socio-historical circumstances of its writing (e.g. Stern 1994:120-25; Smith 1988:61-66),[7] (a) its literary structure, especially given the apparent break in the scenery from verse 4 to verse 5 (e.g. Tappy 1995:255-80; Foley 1988:363-83; Marlowe 2002/3:65-80; Cooper 1986:107-14), (d) its intertextual theological roles both in the Old and New Testaments (e.g. Milne 1974/5:237-47; Barré and Kselman 1983:97-127; Bellinger and Arterbury 2005:387-95; Tanner 2004:267-84; Neyrey 2001:267-91; Milne 1974/5:237-47), (e) the circum-

[5] The term rhetography was not used in the book, even though the investigative procedure can now be characterized as rhetographic.
[6] It is assumed that Psalm 23 was written by David during his later years but based on his experience as a shepherd, both in terms of occupation and as a king.
[7] Four different possible times of David's career has been proposed—(a) during his early days as a shepherd, (b) while being pursued by Saul, (c) while being pursued by Absalom, and (d) in later years while retrospectively reviewing the care of Yahweh during his lifetime.

stances of its religious use in ancient Israel (e.g. Lundbom 1986:5-16; Merill 1965:354-60), and (f) its genre (Miller 1986:112; Kraus 1988:305).

The concentration by interpreters on these areas of the psalm, together with the oft emphasized centrality of the relationship between Yahweh and the sheep as key to the psalm, are well founded. William VanGemeren's (1991:251) comment regarding the extraordinarily personal tone of the psalm is worth noting: 'The temptation in ancient Israel was to speak only about "our" God (cf. Deut. 6:4), forgetting that the God of Israel is also the God of individuals. The contribution of this psalm lies, therefore, in the personal, subjective expression of ancient piety'. Furthermore, it is perhaps correct that regardless of the exact setting of its writing, the psalm strongly featured in the pilgrimage celebrations of Israel's temple cult in later years. Accordingly, suggestions that it contains echoes of the Exodus and Israel's wilderness wanderings may well be correct. In its detail, the Shepherd's considerate care and extravagant affection for the sheep lends the psalm the well-deserved sense of comfort that it provides the people of faith (cf. Craigie 1983:209). The eventual climax of the psalm with the believer in the house of the Lord, despite clearly relating to Israel's cultic worship, nevertheless rightly appears to also allude to the believer's eschatological hope of dwelling in the presence of the Lord forever.

Notwithstanding the above, the concentration on the relationship between the Shepherd and the flock does not adequately convey the full rhetographic effect of the psalm (Trudinger 2009:139-42). A focus on the spaces evoked by the psalm alone shows a change of scenery from the open environment in the first part of the psalm (23:1-4) to the sheltered environment in the second part (23:5-6). And within each section, there are still differences in the spatiality from verse to verse. How do these changes in the spatiality contribute to the powerful effects of the psalm?

### 3.1. The places of the Shepherd's care

As the psalm is written based on the knowledge of a shepherd, even though the sheep is at its centre, it is perhaps right that the description of the Shepherd's care and attention includes several different places where the Shepherd takes his flock. In Philip Keller's (2007:15) examination of this psalm, he notes that the psalm accurately depicts the Palestinian shepherding arenas where sheep are reared. Likewise, Artur Weiser (1962:227) believes that, while worshipping before Yahweh, the writer remembered, the various arenas in which he had previously cared for the sheep in his youthful days and now projects them unto Yahweh as the true Shepherd of Israel.

Though these reflections are correct, the question that a rhetographic examination of the psalm attempts to answer is what specific images these spatial descriptions or 'arenas of care' may have evoked in the minds of the first readers and hearers of the psalm. As the following discussions show, there are important intertextual resonances, which may guide such a reflection, even in the absence of adequate socio-historical information on ancient pastoral practices. Table  indicates that the psalm describes the care of the psalmist in six different arenas—on green pastures, by still waters, at confusing crossroads, in the valley of the shadow of death, in a banquet area and in the house of the Lord. Each of these bore important socio-rhetorical and imagistic functions in the ancient near east and the Old Testament.

*Table : The spatial dimensions of Psalm 23*

| Verse | Place or Arenas of Care | Movement of Sheep | Orientation of the Sheep |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2a** | On Green Pastures | Lie down | Follows Shepherd |
| **2b** | Beside Still Waters | Slow walking | Follows Shepherd |
| **3** | Confusing crossroads | Righteous paths | Re-oriented by Shepherd |
| **4** | Valley of death's shadow | Walk | Beside Shepherd |
| **5** | Banquet area | Seated or reclined | Shepherd serves sheep |
| **6** | House of the Lord | Dwells (or returns) | Shepherd follows sheep |

The idea of green pastures evoked the image of luxury and extravagant provision, although such vegetation was rare in many places in the original setting. Accordingly, William Barnes (1913:179) has noted that in its geographical setting, 'the grass is short-lived under an Eastern sun, and to stand still is to lose the flock.' In this view, Barnes opines that the greenness expresses the guidance of the Shepherd to locate for the sheep provisions that are often hard to come by. Similarly, Ron Tappy (1995:258; cf. Dahood 1966:145) identifies the main imagery of the green pastures as representing food, whereas the water represents drink. Other interpreters draw parallels of this abundant provision with the description of Boaz's benevolence towards Naomi in Ruth 4:15 (e.g. Goulder 2006:469).

For most of David's first readers and hearers, however, the greenness of the pastures would have conveyed additional notions of newness, productivity, revitalization, and regeneration. References in the Old Testament to the colour green tend to associate it with productivity and freshness of plants.[8] The likely rhetographic effect of reading or hearing about green pastures in David's socio-cultural milieu is, therefore, not just the finding of abundant provision in

[8] Gen. 9:3; 30:37; Lev. 2:14; Deut. 12:2; Ps. 52:8; Song 1:16; 2:13; Isa. 15:6; Jer. 11:16; 17:8; Hos. 14:8.

the midst of lack but more so of the experience of revitalization and regeneration which comes with it. Thus the feeling of contentment which 'lying down' evokes blends in with the sense of revitalization and reinvigoration that green pastures suggest.

This rhetographic image explains Psalm 23:3a, 'He restores my soul'. Interpreters have often wondered about the role of this piece in the stanza, since it appears to interrupt the enumeration of material blessings by the psalmist (cf. Goulder 2006:466). Foregrounding the rhetographic effect of the 'green pastures', as well as 'still waters', helps explain this restorative aspect of Psalm 23:2. Accordingly, Timothy Willis's (1987:104-106) proposal that the action of the shepherd in Psalm 23:3a indicates the gathering in of the strayed sheep is clearly inadequate.[9] The sentiments represented by 'He restores my soul' is not just the completion of the feeding and watering of the sheep, but more so the perpetual revitalization of the sheep by the Shepherd (cf. Mittmann 1980:5-7; Jenni 1968:25).

The idea of still waters follows a similar line of rhetorical imaging. The water describes the Shepherd's provision of drink; but, it is a good question as to why it needs to be still waters, if all that was meant was drinking. Patrick Wilton helpfully explains that the idea here is for the sheep to be 'able to drink the waters without predators disturbing him' (1994:125, n. 13; cf. Tomback 1982:93-96). Rhetographically, however, the imagery has wider resonance than the idea of drinking in safety that Wilton implies. *Menūḥāh*, translated as 'still' by the NIV, is a spatial word often associated with 'rest', in contrast to chaos or destruction (e.g. Pss. 95:11; 132:8, 14).

Furthermore, the idea of Psalm 23:2b is one of movement *beside* the still waters, and not just the drinking of the water, though clearly, the waters in verse 2b match well with the green pastures in verse 2a as drink matches with food. Bratcher and Reyburn (1991:232) are therefore correct: 'This is not a stagnant pool, but a place where the fresh water flows gently, making it easy for the sheep to drink it'. Indeed, the idea of still waters has Sumero-Akkadian[10] and Old Testament parallels that explicitly contrast them with floods and destructive acts of water (cf. Polak 1995:69-74; Polak 1982:231-50). Accordingly, the rhetographic effect of the 'still waters' of Psalm 23:2 is one of stability and tranquillity. Yet this is a dynamic stability, for whereas the sheep lie down in green pastures, the imagery of still waters is one of slow

[9] Willis's interpretation might appear to suit direct translation from the LXX which uses *epestrepsen* (return) for Hebrew, *shûb* (restore) in Ps. 23:3a. Even so, *epestrepsen* also has the connotative meaning of restoration as in Isa. 49:5.
[10] e.g. In table XI of the Gilgamesh Epic 1.131 (cf. Bailey 1989:168).

movement, allowing the sheep to stroll alongside the waters without fear of danger. For the believer, the relationship with Yahweh is depicted as a relaxing gentle walk as He feeds and cares for His loved one.

The dramatic change of arena from verse 2 to verses 3-4 would have produced a spectacular change of mood in the original reader/hearer. The abundance, revitalization, tranquillity, and security of verse 2 are immediately replaced by a sense of confusion at crossroads and gloominess in a valley. In addition to the translation problems associated with *b$^{e}$gê' ṣalmavet* in Psalm 23:4,[11] the language also appears to stray from the dangers that a sheep might face, to depict the sense of darkness, foreboding, and gloom that would accompany a lonely traveller through a confusing maze. A rhetological exegesis alone might force the interpreter to choose between a sheep and a human traveller. Hermann Gunkel (1929:99), for example, chooses the former and so suggests that it depicts the sheep's fear for thieves around the ravines. John Eaton (1986:38), who believes that the psalm describes the life of Israel's king, suggests that it depicts the king's reflections on the nature of death in general and the difficulties of decision making.

A rhetographic exegesis of the passage would focus on the places in verse 3, regardless of whether it is the sheep's dangers or human peril which is being portrayed. The imagery of the valley in the Old Testament represents a place of gloom (e.g. Deut. 21:6), danger (e.g. 1 Sam. 15:5; 2 Sam. 5:18-25; 2 Kgs 3:16) and decision making (e.g. Joel 3:14). This is intensified in the passage with the depiction of dark shadow, a presentation commonly associated with death in the Old Testament (e.g. Job 3:5, 10:21-22; Ps. 44:19; Isa. 9:2). Perhaps the association with crossroads of decision-making, together with the gloom of death and danger, favours the travel of a pilgrim. Even so, any reader in the socio-cultural milieu of the time would also have noted that the psalm indicates the ever present protection and guidance of Yahweh in the worst of places and circumstances. Michael Goulder's (2006:469) suggestion that the psalm may well have been written after David's victory in the Valley of Baal-Perazim and subsequent anointing as king in 2 Samuel 5 may well be correct. Yet, for the competent reader of the time, this psalm equally speaks to their own periods of uncertainties, fear, and sense of gloom conveyed by the spatiality of the text. The comfort Yahweh the Shepherd gives transcends all places and circumstances that His loved one goes.

[11] The choice is between 'deep ravine', 'valley of deep darkness' and preferably, 'valley of the shadow of death' (cf. Eaton 1986:38).

The spatiality of the psalm moves from the ragged outside to a comfortable environment and atmosphere of a banquet in verse 5. Here, any attempt to interpret the psalm in terms of the life of a Palestinian sheep falters; for, the description is one of a human being lavishly feasted and served by Yahweh, while his enemies look on astonished at such largesse. The verse epitomizes a prominent Old Testament concept which depicts Yahweh as a benevolent Host (e.g. Pss. 39:12, 104:10-15, 136:25, 145:14-16, 146:9; Prov. 9:1-6).[12] Here, the image is even more extraordinary as Yahweh is portrayed as serving and anointing His loved ones (cf. Eccl. 9:8; Ps. 92:10). The presence of enemies who would otherwise hurt the psalmist, but are now rendered as powerless onlookers witnessing the amazing outpouring of the Shepherd's graces, only heightens this sense of celebration and utter safety.

*Table : The rhetographic effects of the places in Psalm 23*

| Place or Arena of Care | Rhetographic Effect | Intertextual References |
|---|---|---|
| Green Pastures | Abundant provision, revitalization | e.g. Gen. 9:3; Lev. 2:14 |
| Beside Still Waters | Dynamic stability, tranquillity | e.g. Pss. 95:11; 132:8, 14 |
| Confusing pathways | Uncertainty and confusion | e.g. Joel 3:14 |
| Valley of death's shadow | Fear, insecurity and comfort | e.g. 2 Sam. 5:18-25 |
| Banquet area | Celebration, utter security | e.g. Pss. 146:9; Pr. 9:1-6 |
| House of the Lord | Worship | e.g. 2 Sam. 12:20; 92:13 |

Yet, without focusing on the place, and hence the rhetographic image, the verse would appear to return to the luxurious feeding on green pastures of verse 2. However, there is a difference in verse 5. The environment, even if it were outdoors—banquets could certainly be held outdoors—nevertheless is one which is less open in the wilderness of verse 2. The banquet here occurs in an environment of celebration, with tables being laid, cups of wine overflowing, and heads being anointed. The hint of derision in the psalmist's tone, at the envious and powerless observing enemies, adds some hilarity to the rhetographic image. The change of environment thus forces another dramatic change of the mood of the psalm, from the sense of fear and confusion to a combination of security and joyful celebration. Rhetographic

[12] The idea first appears in Gen. 1 where God is depicted as the benevolent Creator who welcomes the first humans into His creation and makes 'every plant yielding seed … every tree with seed in its fruit... you shall have them for food' (Gen. 1:29). God also plants a garden for the first humans and 'freely' makes available to them every tree as food for His guests, apart from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:8-17). Other human agents portrayed as receiving hospitality from God include Hagar in Gen. 21:19, the elders of Israel in Exod. 24:1-11, Israel in the wilderness in Exod. 16-17 and Deut. 8:2-5, the alien and homeless in Deut. 10:17-18, and Elijah in 1 Kgs 19

exegesis shows how foregrounding the spatiality of the verse highlights the imagination and socio-rhetorical effect intended by the author.

The change in scenery reaches its pinnacle as the psalmist enters the house of the Lord.[13] Here the rhetographic feature is at its enthymematic best, for there is no indication at all of how the psalmist felt, except his promise to dwell in (or return to) God's house. Clearly, the assumption is that the reader, who shares the religious faith and commitment of the psalmist, would also share the same mood that the psalmist experiences as he enters the house of the Lord. The various moods in the psalm, such as abundance, satisfaction, security, fear, loneliness, confusion, comfort, celebration, and utter safety, are all rolled into the one mood of *worship* before Yahweh in His special presence in His house. Thus as Table  shows, a rhetographic exegesis of the places covered by the psalm reveals several different human emotions evoked in the first reader/hearer by the psalm. Their climax is one of worship and submission to Yahweh in His special presence.

### 3.2. The movements and orientations of the psalmist

Just as the places and arenas in the psalm evoke several influential imaginations, the changes in the movement and orientation of the psalmist also have a number of rhetographic implications. The psalm begins with the sheep led to a carpet of green pastures on which he is made to lie in deep satisfaction. This is then followed by the image of gently moving waters. Even though there is an implied parallelism between verse 2a and 2b, since they both refer to provision and in terms of word length are similar (cf. Bratcher and Reyburn 1991:232; Goldingay 2006:349), there is also an inherent contrast in the verse with regard to the rhetographic imagery they evoke. As noted above, the idea in verse 2b goes beyond just drinking, for *mayim* (waters) is in the plural and so the rhetographic image is one of gently moving waters to which the sheep, led by the Shepherd, moves in tandem. Accordingly, verse 2b combines the idea of guidance to refreshing drink with safety as well as the provision of the drink itself, all in one image (cf. Goldingay 2006:344; Kidner 1973:110). So, whereas Psalm verse 2a is an almost static rhetographic image (the sheep is brought to a stop as it is made to lie down), there is dynamic, albeit slow, movement in 2b (the sheep is slowly led beside peaceful waters). The two together paint a picture of stable progress in the formational relationship between Yahweh and the psalmist.

[13] This clearly did not refer to the temple but the ancient Hebrew concept of God's cultic presence as His house.

This stability of progress is manifested by the positions and orientations between the sheep and the Shepherd in verse 2. Rhetographically, the Shepherd is depicted in front of the sheep, searching for and finding the best place with abundant provision for the sheep. The sheep is equally depicted as utterly dependent on the Shepherd as it trustingly follows the Shepherd to the extravagant supply of these provisions. Accordingly the guidance—and therefore pilgrimage—motif appears quite early in the psalm. This becomes explicit and intensified in verse 3 where the rhetographic picture is of a human agent[14] at the confusing crossroads of decision making. Here, the guidance relates not just to physical provision, but also to spiritual and ethical guidance. Of crucial note is the sphere in which the moral and ethical decisions of the palmist are to be made—'for His name's sake' (v. 3b).

The role of Yahweh the Shepherd in this instance is to re-orient the psalmist, that is, He guides. But His actual spatial position in relation to the psalmist, whether in front of or behind, is at best ambiguous. As the Guide in the paths of righteousness, Yahweh is sometimes depicted as leading while the believer follows (e.g. Isa. 42:16). On the other hand, He provides His guidance by pointing in the right direction through navigational instructions which the believer then obeys in order to arrive at the correct destination (e.g. Isa. 45:13). Thus the lack of clarity regarding the relative positions of the Shepherd and the psalmist in verse 3b does not hamper the idea that He guides the psalmist in paths of righteousness. In fact, it enhances the rhetographic effect, for ambiguous rhetographic images have very powerful rhetorical effects on the reader/hearer (cf. Franzosi 1997:135-44; Lagerwerf 2002:244-60). They invite the reader/hearer to complete the picture in their imaginations and in the process place himself in the act of formation. In this particular case, the ambiguity draws on the spiritual and emotional commitment of the first reader or hearer to remain dependent on Yahweh as he seeks ethical and moral direction. Finding the paths of righteousness becomes dependent solely on the relationship between the Shepherd and the sheep, and not in a 'moral vacuum' without the pre-requisite relationship with Yahweh.[15]

The movement theme established in verse 3 continues in verse 4 as the psalmist walks through the gloomy, intimidating, and dangerous environment of the valley. Here, the orientation to Yahweh is clear—He is *with* or beside

[14] Amos Hakham's idea that the sheep is still in view in Ps. 23:3 and that the phrase 'paths of righteousness' refers to paths in the wilderness along which the sheep should not stray is not fully convincing (Hakham 2003:170). If even this were so, the references to 'righteousness' and 'His name's sake' reduce the impact of the metaphor of sheep.

[15] Jesus would say this more plainly in John 14:6 when He insists that it is He who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

the believer. The rhetographic image also contains other elements that reassure the believer in an environment otherwise filled with gripping loneliness and fear. The Shepherd is depicted as a fellow Traveller, very close at hand, and with His staff and rod to fend off predators and enemies. The dominant idea of movement through this shadowy environment also indicates the temporal nature of the condition. Regardless of the foreboding and threatening tone of the condition, it still is a 'walk through', and more so with Yahweh the Shepherd alongside the believer. His presence and company as a fellow Traveller is what transforms the believer's emotions of loneliness and fear into courage, comfort, and hope.

The movement theme slows down again to a resting situation, either seated or reclining at a banquet, and eventually dwelling in the house of Yahweh in verses 5-6. The word *râdaf* (follow) in verse 6 is better translated as 'pursue', and is used elsewhere in the Old Testament for the pursuit of enemies (e.g. Gen. 35:5; Deut. 19:6). Thus the twin attributes of Yahweh—goodness and mercy—are here depicted as pursuing the psalmist. Given its use to describe Saul's pursuit and persecution of David (e.g. 1 Sam. 24:14; 25:29; 26:18), the positive spin on it here to depict the manner in which the divine graces pursue the psalmist is remarkable (cf. Goldingay 2006:352).

Where did David get this idea from? The divine virtues of the goodness and loving kindness of Yahweh are depicted in Exodus 34:6 as accompanying the train of Yahweh as He passed in front of Moses in a theophany. Thus in the ancient Hebrew conceptualization these divine graces follow after and come behind Yahweh. It could be that this is where David has derived the idea of the virtues pursuing him. Michael Goulder has also suggested a link between the goodness and mercy of Yahweh and the idea of the Ark of the Covenant accompanying God's people in their travels. He explains, 'Goodness and mercy are thought of here as angelic beings, such as formed the base of Yahweh's throne over the ark in the Temple: 'Righteousness and judgement are the foundation of your throne; mercy and truth go before you' (Ps. 89:15; cf. 96.6)' (Goulder 2006:465). Accordingly, if, as it is most likely, David was familiar with these ideas of the movement of the divine attributes, then it may well be that the rhetographic image of Yahweh being with the psalmist in verses 4-5, automatically led him to reflect on how the divine virtues would follow in pursuit behind the believer.

Reflecting on the overall changes in the orientations between the Shepherd and the psalmist in the psalm, there is an apparent choreography in the rhetographic image. In terms of orientation, the psalm begins with Yahweh ahead of the sheep or the psalmist (v. 2). This is followed by ambiguity in the

Shepherd's position (v. 3b), before He comes to the psalmist's side in the valley (v. 4), and then serves him at the banquet (v. 5). The psalm then finishes with Yahweh pursuing the psalmist with His attributes from behind. These changes in orientation between Yahweh and His loved ones is commonly depicted in the Old Testament, in relation to the Exodus where God's angel and the pillar of cloud went ahead and behind His redeemed people (e.g. Exod. 14:19; 23:20-23; 32:34). It is also depicted in the 'new Exodus' where Yahweh goes ahead (e.g. Isa. 42:16; 43:19; 45.13; 52:12), with (Isa. 51:9-11; 52.7-8), and at the rearguard (e.g. Isa. 52:12) of His people to Mount Zion.[16] Accordingly, the view among sections of scholarship that the psalm has strong links with Israel's pilgrimage tradition is well founded.

Considerable debate surrounds the interpretation of *yâšab* (dwell) in verse 6b. The issue is well stated by Bratcher and Reyburn (1991:235-36): 'The verb appears in the Masoretic Text as a form which means 'I shall return'; but the Hebrew consonants can be read with other vowels (following the Septuagint) to mean 'I shall dwell,' which is done by most commentators and translations.' Among interpreters who opt for 'return', some base their decision on the view that the psalmist was a shepherd, and not a Levite or priest (e.g. Köhler 1956:233). Yet, the psalm is really not describing the shepherd's movement as much as that of the worshipper's experiences, desires, and longings. Hence the occupation of the psalmist is the least important consideration when judging how to translate *yâshab.*

The argument that the genre of the psalm is one of passage or pilgrimage may support the rendition of *yâšab* as 'I shall return', in which case the psalmist is making a pledge to return to Yahweh's house another time, and repeatedly keep making the house of the Lord the centre point of his religious orientation. Goulder (2006:466) also believes that his hypothesis that this psalm was sung on behalf of the whole nation, rather than the individual worshipper, makes 'return' more suitable as expression of Israel relationship with Yahweh. Yet, the personal tone of the psalm would suggest that though it may well have been sung at corporate worship, the individual worshipper is the one making the pledge, and not the whole nation. A number of interpreters who wish to retain 'dwell' as the best translation propose that the psalmist may have been a Levite (e.g. Schmidt 1934) or a priest (e.g. Kraus 1988; Barnes 1913:177-185). This approach however appears to take 'dwell' in a rather too literal sense than what the psalmist meant. Others draw attention to the manner in

[16] A similar picture is depicted in Mark 11:9 where during His triumphal entry to Jerusalem Jesus is said to be in front as well as behind sections of the crowd.

which the preposition *kol y$^{e}$mê ḥayāy* ('all the days of my life') appear to support 'dwell' (cf. Goldingay 2006:345).

A rhetographic exegesis of verse 6b, however, diminishes the problems posed by the translation of *yâšab*. In either case, 'dwell' or 'return', the rhetographic idea is one of a constant attractive pull in the relationship between Yahweh and the worshipper with His house as the centre point—the source of the religious life and place of re-orientation and reinvigoration of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the worshipper. Though the notion of 'dwelling', as in a constant revitalizing relationship with the Lord, is much more suited, the idea of a repeated intermittent return to the same relationship is in effect no different. Returning to the house implies a religious commitment, dependence, and affiliation to the life of Yahweh (cf. Craigie 1983:208). The psalmist could return, only because His affections and hopes 'dwell' with Yahweh and in His house. As the psalm has already emphasized from its beginning, the presence of the Lord is with the psalmist wherever he has been. In the end, therefore, dwelling within God's benevolent hospitality is the ultimate hope of God's people, now, always, and forever.

## 4. Summary, implication, and application

In a summary, the preceding rhetographic study has demonstrated an aspect of the mechanisms by which the Spirit designed the twenty-third psalm to achieve its rhetorical effect on the first readers. The main focus of the psalm is no doubt on the extraordinarily personal care and attention that Yahweh, the Shepherd, provides for His covenanted people. Yet, it is when the places where this deluxe care is provided, and the movements and orientations between Yahweh and the believers are foregrounded and analyzed, that the comfort and blessings that the psalm in itself gives God's people become evident. Rhetography enables this foregrounding and analysis to be done in a systematic manner.

The changes in the mood of the psalm have been highlighted—from the emotions of contentment and security, through revitalization and restoration, and the sense of confusion needing divine re-orientation in the 'paths of righteousness', and of fear and loneliness ameliorated by the divine presence, to a setting of joyful celebration and abandoned security, then finally to worship in the presence of the Lord, with Him as the divine host. All these moods combine to shape the manner in which the relationship between the people of God and Yahweh is built and fortified. Similarly, the movement and orientation motif strengthens the sense of guidance in the presence of the Lord, as well as the assurance that He surrounds His beloved.

Though, clearly, not all biblical passages would be amenable to this method of exegesis, the above exercise has demonstrated the utility of the rhetographic method of study in ensuring a disciplined and systematic examination of texts in which spatial language and metaphors are prominent. It certainly does suggest that exegesis of Psalm 23 which downplays the rhetographic elements is unlikely to adequately uncover the original intentions of its writer, as well as the effect it had on its first readers.

In addition, the demonstration of the above method supports the suggestion that a combination of a systematic examination of the spatiality of the text with the socio-rhetorical method may be achieved in a simple and straightforward manner. Here, the spatiality of the text is examined by focusing on the spaces in the text, the relationships between the spaces and the 'characters' mentioned in each space, and the semiotic and intertextual interpretation of the spatial dimensions, as well as references to movement and orientation of the 'characters'. This is then followed by a socio-rhetorical examination which reflects on how such findings would have influenced the first readers/hearers in their religious, socio-cultural, and ideological settings.

With regard to the findings of the above exegesis, one important application could be in the area of song writing. Because of the ability of the imaginations to transcend people and shape their emotions, attitudes, and behaviour, a rhetographic understanding of the text is likely to influence how hymn and song writers transpose the message of biblical texts into songs and hymns for the worship of the people of God. The countless number of songs and hymns based on Psalm 23 testifies to its versatility. Most of the songs with which I am familiar, however, focus on the relationship between Yahweh and the believer that the psalm beautifully portrays, but to the exclusion of the immensely rich messages that the spatiality and imageries evoke in the reader. The above rhetographic exegesis shows that there is yet more in the powerful psalm to be explored and applied for the edification of the people of God. It is these and other advantages which make rhetography another commendable Bible study tool at the service of biblical scholars and ministers of music.

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# Those who are persecuted because of righteousness, are those who pursue righteousness: an examination of the origin and meaning Matthew 5:10

Charles R. Day[1]

**Abstract**

*Standard renderings of the eighth beatitude, Matthew 5:10, such as the NIV's 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven', fail to convey the subtlety of Jesus's point adequately. In Aramaic, that saying contains a pun based on the fact that the Hebrew/Aramaic word for 'persecute' also means 'pursue'. The article begins by attempting to reconstruct the beatitude in Aramaic, and then draws on evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Targums to support the contention that Matthew 5:10 contains allusions to Deuteronomy 16:20 and Isaiah 51:1. The key to understanding and translating the beatitute lies in appreciating the double meaning of the Hebrew verb* רָדַף*, which helps us to appreciate that being persecuted for righteousness' sake is the result of pursuing righteousness. The idea can best be captured in translation by paraphrasing the verse, such as 'Blessed are those whose pursuit of what God requires causes them to become persecuted, for they receive the kingdom of heaven.'*

## 1. Introduction

The beatitude of those persecuted for righteousness must be understood as an allusion to both Deuteronomy 16:20 and Isaiah 51:1. Jesus is making a pun based on the fact that the Hebrew/Aramaic word for 'persecute' also means 'pursue'.

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## 2. Reconstructing this Beatitude in Aramaic

Let us start by reconstructing the Greek text of Matthew 5:10 into Aramaic.

Greek: μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Aramaic: טוּבִיהוֹן דִּרָדְפִין לְקוּשְׁטָא דְּדִלְהוֹן מַלְכוּתָא דִּשְׁמַיָּא

### 2.1. Reconstructing ἕνεκεν

For reasons of accent, Burney (1925:168), in his reconstruction of the Beatitudes, suggested that οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης goes back to דִּרְדִפִין לְצִדְקָא. He also theorized that the original beatitude was addressed to those 'who pursue righteousness' and that the לְ prefix was 'misunderstood in the sense "for"', causing the active participle רָדְפִין ('pursue') to be understood as רְדִפִין (pursued, persecuted). In this he, may have been half right.

### 2.2. Reconstructing δεδιωγμένοι

One thing all the ancient Aramaic versions agree on is that the word δεδιωγμένοι should be rendered in Aramaic using the verb רְדַף. A quick look at BDB (1999, s.v. רדף) reveals that there are several scriptures that combine the word 'righteousness' with this verb. The two most important ones will be examined here.

### 2.3. An allusion to Deuteronomy 16:20

The first is Deuteronomy 16:20, which reads: צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה וְיָרַשְׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ ('Righteousness, righteousness, you must pursue, thereby you will live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you').

The themes found in Deuteronomy 16:20 fit in well with the Beatitudes. If it were suggested that the command to 'pursue righteousness' were changed to the statement 'you will be persecuted because of righteousness', the altering of the wording would bring out an eschatological interpretation very useful for a community experiencing persecution.[2] It would indicate that those formerly commanded to 'pursue righteousness' are now in the present dispensation

[2] That this beatitude was created for a community going through such crisis has been suggested (e.g. Derrett 1978:195)

‘persecuted (pursued) because of righteousness’, and by staying true they win the reward of eternal life, they ‘inherit the kingdom of heaven’.

The lack of direct allusion to the Pentateuch mitigates against Deuteronomy 16:20 being the sole inspiration of this beatitude. All previous Old Testament allusions in the Beatitudes come either from Isaiah 61 or another scripture from Isaiah used in conflation with Isaiah 61. So, the question is: is it possible to find an allusion from Isaiah that both fits this beatitude and could also be considered an allusion to Deuteronomy 16:20? This is a tough enough problem, but to this must be added the criterion that such an allusion must also show that it has in some way been joined or linked with Isaiah 61 in ancient times.

### 2.4. An allusion to Isaiah 51:1

A possible candidate which meets the criteria above is Isaiah 51:1. This verse reads: שִׁמְעוּ אֵלַי רֹדְפֵי צֶדֶק מְבַקְשֵׁי יְהוָה הַבִּיטוּ אֶל־צוּר חֻצַּבְתֶּם וְאֶל־מַקֶּבֶת בּוֹר נֻקַּרְתֶּם (‘Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn’, NIV).

It is possible that the use of רֹדְפֵי צֶדֶק by Isaiah is an allusion to Deuteronomy 16:20, but there is nothing in the context to prove it. Nonetheless, the specter of Deuteronomy 16:20 may have ‘hovered’ over this idiom in the minds of first-century Jews, thus allowing an allusion to Isaiah 51:1 to also be an allusion to Deuteronomy 16:20.

Aside from an allusion to Deuteronomy 16:20, is there evidence that this chapter (particularly the mention of the רֹדְפֵי צֶדֶק in verse 1) was linked by ancient Judaism with Isaiah 61? Like Isaiah 61, chapter 51 concerns the final consummation in which the salvation and judgment of God are both revealed.

### 2.5. Evidence from 4Q298

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, a definite allusion to Isaiah 51:1 can be seen in 4Q298. The text begins in a normal Hebrew script, but after the address[3] changes to a cryptic script (Eisenman and Wise 1992:165). The allusion to Isaiah 51:1 comes at the start of this cryptic script. It amounts to an enlargement and expansion of the first half of this verse.

[3] The first words of line one are, ‘The words of the Maskil (Teacher) that he spoke to all the sons of Dawn’ (Eisenman and Wise 1992:165)

*4Q298 1:1b-2*

1. האז[נו לי כ]ול אנשי לבב
2. [ורו]דפי צדק חבי[נ]ו במלי ומבקשי אמון ש[מע]ו למלי

1. Listen to me all men of heart,
2. and those who pursue righteousness: understand my words! And those who seek Faith: hear my words!

That speaking of the רֹדְפֵי צֶדֶק may also have brought to mind Deuteronomy 16:20 can be concluded by the fact that later in this text those termed אנשי אמת ('men of truth') are told רדפו צדק ('pursue righteousness') (4Q298 3:7). In addition, the third line on the first column (which is so fragmentary that very few whole words are found at all) has an admonition to 'obtain a long life'[4] (Eisenman and Wise 1992:164), which fits nicely with Deuteronomy's 'you will live'.

### 2.6. רָדְפֵי קוּשְׁטָא = רֹדְפֵי צֶדֶק

Knowing that there is precedent for the use of רֹדְפֵי צֶדֶק as an allusion to Isaiah 51:1 allows a certain amount of confidence to proceed. Targum Jonathan translates Isaiah 51:1's רֹדְפֵי צֶדֶק as רָדְיפֵי קוּשְׁטָא. In this Jonathan is being consistent with the targumic tradition surrounding Deuteronomy 16:20. Observe Deuteronomy 16:20a:

- Hebrew: צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף
- Onkelos: קוּשְׁטָא קוּשְׁטָא תִּרְדֹּף
- Neofiti: קושטא קושט׳ תהוון רדפין
- Pseudo-Jonathan: דין קשוט ודין שלם בקשוט תהי רדיף[5]

At no time do any of the targums suggest that it is צִדְקָא which must be pursued; it is consistently קוּשְׁטָא that is to be pursued, and this becomes the basis for the reconstruction of this beatitude.

Burney suggested that the words 'those who pursue righteousness' were somehow changed into 'those who are pursued because of righteousness'. It is unnecessary to suggest that this beatitude arose from misinterpretation, mispronunciation, or haplography. It would have been possible to take the words טוּבֵיהוֹן דְּרָדְפִין לְקוּשְׁטָא and interpret them to mean both 'Blessed are those

[4] The reconstruction of these words presented by Eisenman and Wise (1992:164) is השינ[ו אורך] חיים.

[5] 'A judgment of righteousness (or: a true judgment) and a judgment of peace (or: a perfect judgment) in righteousness you will pursue.'

who pursue righteousness' and 'Blessed are those whom they pursue because of righteousness'. This ambiguousness would allow the active Aramaic participle to be translated in Greek as a passive.

A theoretical example of the way an ambiguous sentence can be taken two different ways can be demonstrated by the difference between Matthew's and Luke's versions of (what seems to be) the same Aramaic words. Notice the similarities and differences between the following half verses.

Matthew 5:12b: οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τούς προφήτας τούσ πρὸ ὑμῶν ('For thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you').

Luke 6:23b: κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ γὰρ ἐποίουν τοῖς προφήταις οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν ('For thus their forefathers did to the prophets').

Both could have been a reasonable translation of the Aramaic words: דְּכְדֵן עֲבָדוּ לִנְבִיֵּיא דְּקַדְמָיֵיא. The word קַדְמָיֵיא literally means 'those who preceded', and can not only refer to the prophets, but can also be construed to mean 'forefathers'. The דְּ prefix can be taken not only as a relative pronoun (i.e. 'which'), but can also denote a genitive (i.e. 'those belonging to'). In the latter case, דְּקַדְמָיֵיא is then the subject of the verb עֲבַד, producing 'thus those of the forefathers did to the prophets'. It is the nature of translators faced with something indistinct in one language to seek a translation which clarifies the ambiguity. Matthew's use of διώκω reflects a need to make the somewhat ambiguous verb עבד more specific.

### 2.7. Reconstructing δικαιοσύνης

The Targum to Isaiah clearly prefers to use the word קוּשְׁטָא[6] to either צַדְקָא or צַדְקוּתָא when translating the Hebrew word צֶדֶק. Why is this important? It is because the word קוּשְׁטָא means not only 'righteousness' but it also means 'truth'. Jesus exploits the fact that קוּשְׁטָא can take in the meanings of both Hebrew צֶדֶק and אֱמֶת when he gives application to this beatitude. The dual use of this word can be demonstrated, appropriately enough, from the Targum to Isaiah 61. The word קוּשְׁטָא is used (to translate צֶדֶק) in verse 3. In verse 8, the similar קְשׁוֹט is found as a translation of אֱמֶת ('truth').

### 2.8. An allusion to David

The concept of pursuing/persecuting those who are righteous was often connected to the story of Saul and David. David asks Saul (1 Sam. 24.15): אַחֲרֵי

[6] Also written קְשׁוֹט. Jastrow (1992:1429) considers these to be two spellings of the same word.

מִי אַתָּה רֹדֵף ('against whom are you pursuing/persecuting').[7] Saul also confesses to David (1 Sam. 24.18): צַדִּיק אַתָּה מִמֶּנִּי ('you are more righteous than I am'). Combining both the theme of *pursuing righteousness* and David, *Midrash Tehillim* to Psalm 58 quotes David as asking Saul and his men: בצדק רדפתם אחרי ('In righteousness did you persecute me?'). Thus, David was considered to be an example of one who was persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Ancient Judaism recognized that God cares for those who are persecuted. Ecclesiastes 3:15 says: יְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נִרְדָּף ('He (God) will seek the persecuted'). Commenting on this verse, Leviticus *Rabba* s 27 says that the Lord always demands the blood 'of the persecuted from the (hands of) the persecutors' (הנרדפין מן הרודפין). Similarly, Sanhedrin 72b suggests that God will save the life (blood) of the persecuted at the expense of the persecutor (Jastrow 1992:312).

The promise of the kingdom of heaven is given to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness just as it was for the poor in spirit. This is not merely for literary style. Each beatitude has a promise in its apodosis which has been suggested by a certain logic. Perhaps the story of David and Saul has suggested this apodosis. Consider how David, the persecuted, is promised a kingdom in 1 Samuel 24.21: כִּי מָלֹךְ תִּמְלוֹךְ וְקָמָה בְיָדְךָ מַמְלֶכֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל ('For you will surely be king and the kingdom of Israel will be established by your hand').

In this way, the eighth beatitude has brought together the imagery of the saints receiving a kingdom in Daniel 7 and identified them with David. Jesus uses David as a type in his teaching on life, privilege, and authourity in the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 12:3-4 (referring to David and his companions eating the shew-bread in 1 Sam. 21:1-6).

## 3. Jesus's commentary on the eighth Beatitude

Goulder (1974:280) is undoubtedly correct in supposing that Matthew 5:11-12 is part of the explanation Jesus gives to the eighth beatitude. Being persecuted ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης ('for the sake of righteousness') is equated with being persecuted, and lied about. ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ ('for my sake'). Jesus speaks, not of David, but of τοὺς προφήτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν ('the prophets who were before you'). One reason for this may be to cause the disciples to infer that their

[7] This comes out in the story of the conversion of Paul. Jesus appears to him as he is on his way to Damascus and says: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' When Paul asks him who he is, he replies: 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.' In this last line, Jesus appears to be quoting 1 Sam. 24.15.

commitment to Jesus includes a call to be willing to pay the price of martyrdom. As opposed to David, who was not persecuted to death, some of the prophets were killed by their persecutors. Not the least of these was Isaiah who was popularly believed to have been sawn in half by Manasseh while he hid in a tree (cf. Heb. 11.37).

That Jesus has addressed those who are רְדִפִין לְקוּשְׁטָא (rather than לְצַדְקָא רְדִפִין) is demonstrated by the fact that (as mentioned earlier) קוּשְׁטָא can mean either ‘righteousness’ or ‘truth’. Thus, we see in the comments on this beatitude in Matthew 5:11-12 that the persecution to be expected includes people speaking falsely. The contrast is not only between δικαιοσύνη and πονηρός, but between δικαιοσύνη and ψευδόμενος. In like manner, Luke, in the parallel passage (6:22-23, 26) contrasts the treatment given to the προφήται as opposed to the ψευδοπροφήται.

Jesus’s comments about salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16) are also applied to the persecuted. The first (Matt. 5:13) is an admonition to faithfulness despite the persecutions involved. The idea that those who fall away will not be able to be readmitted into the kingdom is suggested by the question asked, rhetorically: how will salt which has lost its flavour become salty again? Salt losing its saltiness is also a figure known from other rabbinic passages. Thus, *Bechoroth* 8b says: מילחא כי סרי, ‘when salt becomes unsavory, wherewith do they salt it?’ (Jastrow 1992:788).

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus speaks to those who want to be secret disciples. The illogic of such a situation is brought out by the similes of a city on a hill being unable to be hidden (5:14) and the uselessness of a lamp put under a basket (5:15). Jesus ends by commanding them to ‘let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven’ (5:16, NIV). This last clause, καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (literally, ‘glorify your Father in heaven’) is a euphemism for ‘they may repent’ (cf. Rev. 11:13). It represents the Hebrew idiom שִׂים־נָא כָבוֹד לַיהוה found, for example, in Joshua 7:19, in which Joshua tells Achin to repent and confess his sin. This idiom is found throughout Jewish literature. Thus, for example, even in the Testament of Naphtali (8:1) we find: ‘Do what is good, my children. Then men and angels will praise you and God will be honored among the heathen’ (Newman and Stine 1988:125).

A possible reference to the story of David and Saul may be lurking in the background here. This possibility should not be pressed too heavily, but in 1 Samuel 24.20 Saul blesses David for his good deed of sparing his life, saying: ויהוה יְשַׁלֶּמְךָ טוֹבָה תַּחַת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָה לִי (‘So may the LORD reward you with

good for what you have done to me this day', RSV). Two chapters later, David again spares Saul's life, stealing his spear and water jug instead. When presented with this evidence of David's good deeds Saul repents, saying, חָטָאתִי ('I have sinned', 1 Sam. 26.21).

## 4. How is this Beatitude to be understood?

This is one of the beatitudes which is not so much misunderstood as not fully understood. The lack of acquaintance with the allusions involved (particularly Deut. 16:20) causes a failure to appreciate that being *persecuted for righteousness' sake* is the result of *pursuing righteousness.* This goes beyond translations, such as Today's English Version, where *for righteousness' sake* is translated as 'because they do what God requires'. This translation has correctly emphasized that in this context righteousness is related to right actions and godly living. But, 'doing' is not a strong enough verb to help readers grasp the inherent play on words here. A better word to use in translation would be 'pursuit'. A more accurate understanding of what this beatitude is supposed to mean can only come from wording which expresses the double meaning of the Hebrew verb רָדַף. Perhaps, a translation is not as helpful as a paraphrase of this beatitude, such as, 'Blessed are those whose pursuit of what God requires causes them to become persecuted, for they receive the kingdom of heaven.'

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# Ruth 1:1-5: an exegetical and expositional proposal

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**Abstract**

*The book of Ruth makes for many excellent expositional, narrative sermons. The theology is rich, the story is compelling, the themes are significant, and the cultural mores are fascinating. Therefore, much is gained from an intense study through Ruth. This journal article sets out to demonstrate exactly how rich and detailed this story is, as exemplified from the opening pericope of Ruth 1:1-5. Part of the exegetical task is to uncover many great morphological puns and ironic elements which are so eloquently placed within. There is also an inherent tension growing throughout the Old Testament between the dynasties of Saul and David that is partly played out in the setting of Ruth. This tension helps to express one of the primary purposes for the book of Ruth—a political advertisement for the house of David. This article will also demonstrate the necessary bridge that preachers must cross from exegesis to exposition through a suggested homiletical outline from the opening pericope.*

## 1. Introduction

It can be difficult for expositors to bring applicable data out of foundational material such as the setting of a narrative. Ruth 1:1-5 is an example where the setting may be glossed over but not preached as its own pericope. This is rather unfortunate in such a highly theological narrative as Ruth. Its Messianic/Davidic significance as well as its soteriological undertones create an outstanding resource for sermons. And the love story alone makes for some good practical marital sermons. Yet this author believes that there is more going on in Ruth 1:1-5 than is indicated through the neglect of its use in many pulpits. This paper intends to employ a thorough exegesis of Ruth 1:1-5,

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highlight central themes found within the introductory paragraph, and propose a homiletical outline for an expositional sermon of this text.

## 2. Exegesis of Ruth 1:1-5

### Verse 1: And it happened in the days when the ones judging judged, there was a famine in the land; and a man went from Bethlehem of Judah to sojourn in the fields of Moab—he and his wife and his two sons.

This story starts with a typical narrative introductory word וַיְהִי (*vayehiy*, 'and it was')[2] Usually this expression is modified by a temporal phrase or clause as is the case here in verse one (BDB 1996:224).[3] It is very much like the equivalent to the fairytale expression, 'Once upon a time'. However, here in Ruth it is explaining something historically factual not mythological. Even further, the phrase וַיְהִי בִּימֵי (*vayehî bîmê*, 'and it was in the days') is used often to indicate a specific time period that is well known to the readers (cf. Gen. 14:1, 26:1, Judg. 15:1, 2 Sam. 21:1, 2 Chr. 26:5, Esth. 1:1, Isa. 7:1, and Jer. 1:3.). The time period is unmistakably during the period of the judges. In fact, the writer of Ruth[4] emphasized this point by using an unusual grammatical structure and word repetition. The phrase שְׁפֹט הַשֹּׁפְטִים (*shefōṭ haššōṭîm* ) conveys little doubt as to when the setting of the story occurs—'And it was in the days of the judging of the judgers'. The infinitive construct שְׁפֹט is acting as a genitive (GKC 2006:347) or an 'infinitive construct after a word in the construct state' (Williams 2007:82). The substantival participle הַשֹּׁפְטִים ends the construct chain. A more functional translation would be, 'And it happened in the days when the judges judged' or even 'when the judges ruled'. This puts the story of Ruth somewhere in the timeline after the conquest of Canaan and during the time period of the judges.

[2] See Gen. 6:1, 11:1, 22:1, 38:1, Lev. 9:1, Num. 7:1, 11:1, Josh. 1:1, Judg. 1:1, 1 Sam. 1:1, and 2 Sam. 1:1 for some obvious examples.

[3] It is translated 'come to pass' in BDB, which explains how it is 'followed by [a] substantive (subject) clause almost always modifying (usually temporally) a clause or phrase' (cf. I. 2.). This fits the opening phrase of Ruth 1:1 exactly, where וַיְהִי is followed by a temporal clause 'in the days when the judges judged'.

[4] Likely it was Samuel based on style and the content of David's lineage not continuing to Solomon in Ruth 4:17-22 (cf. Geisler 1977:101-102). The authorship of Samuel would lend itself to the political theme interpretation of Ruth. Samuel, who spent all of 1 Samuel detailing why Saul should not be king and David should be, would take advantage of a historical situation like that found in Ruth. This would also place the time of writing of Ruth between the anointing and crowning of David.

It is uncertain exactly where Ruth falls into the timeline of the book of Judges. Based on the genealogy of Boaz,[5] his inference of being up in age in Ruth,[6] as well as the sojourning in Moab, it may be ascertained to fall somewhere around or after the time of Israel's oppression under King Eglon of Moab in Judges 3:7-30. Certainly, however, many scholars point to later places in the time when the judges judged in Israel.[7] Thus it is likely impossible to conclusively determine exactly where Ruth falls into during the book of Judges.[8]

The fact of a famine in the land would also be reminiscent of Israel's cyclical pattern of sin and punishment. Though there is not a famine mentioned in the book of Judges, it is typical to expect a result of foreign invasion and besiegement to induce famine. This is certainly taught in Deuteronomy 28:49-57, especially in verses 49 and 51-52.[9]

> The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar. … Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout

[5] Boaz was the son of Salmon and the prostitute Rahab. This would set Boaz's birth somewhere after the conquest of Canaan and early into the Judges period.

[6] cf. Ruth 3:10. The inference that Boaz is up in age can be made by the fact that Boaz sets himself apart from both the poor and rich 'young men' (הַבַּחוּרִים, *habbāḥūrîm*).

[7] Keil and Delitzsch (2006) and Loken (2008:99) suggest the famine took place during the time of Judges 6, the Midianite oppression, and Gideon's deliverance. Gill (2009) points out: 'Josephus places it in the government of Eli, but that is too late for Boaz, the grandfather of Jesse, the father of David, to live. Some Jewish writers, as Jarchi, say it was in the times of Ibzan, who they say is the same with Boaz, but without proof, and which times are too late also for this history. The Jewish chronology comes nearer the truth, which carries it up as high as the times of Eglon, king of Moab, when Ehud was judge; and with which Dr. Lightfoot pretty much agrees, who puts this history between the third and fourth chapters of Judges, and so must belong to the times of Ehud or Shamgar. Junius refers it to the times of Deborah and Barak; and others, on account of the famine, think it began in the times the Midianites oppressed Israel, and carried off the fruits of the earth, which caused it, when Gideon was raised up to be their judge; Alting places it in the time of Jephthah; such is the uncertainty about the time referred to.'

[8] Keil and Delitzsch (2006) note on Ruth 1:1 argues that 'by the definite statement, "*in the days when judges judged*," [the story of Ruth] is assigned to the period of the judges generally.' This makes for the argument that the writer did not intend for the time of Ruth within the stories of the book of Judges to be determined.

[9] Judges 6:4 might imply a famine, but it is not explicit. However, it does provide a good example of what was taught in Deut. 28:49-57.

> your land which the LORD your God has given you (Deut. 28:49, 51-52).

And so the inference can be made that sin has entered the land of Israel, and God was indirectly punishing them through a famine conceivably caused by an invading nation. As will be brought out later, Elimelech the patriarch of this family was likely a righteous man though not perfect. If such is the case, a practical truth to be gained is that sin's punishment affects the entire nation even if there remains a remnant of righteous people.

The narrator introduced the readers to the first character with the ambiguously anarthrous אִישׁ (*îsh*, 'man'). Though 'man' is without an article, the understanding is an implied definiteness. It could be translated 'a certain man'. This man is said to have left Bethlehem to go into Moab.

So much has played into the idea of Ruth taking place during the time of the Judges. It explains plainly why famine would enter the land and perhaps even why Elimelech might choose to depart towards Moab. As far as the geographical setting is concerned, it must not be seen as coincidental that Bethlehem was a major focal point in a book that outlines the lineage of David. It also must not be seen as coincidental that Bethlehem appears two other times in the book of Judges, likely to push a pro-David emphasis and perhaps even more convey a negative light on the dynasty of Saul. One might even say that the book of Ruth is a literary political advertisement.

In the Bethlehem trilogy, as it is often called (Kaiser 1998:197)[10] since Ruth is tied to Judges (perhaps as an appendix) and 'Bethlehem … is prominent in all three stories' (Loken 2008:96), the two mentioning's in Judges portray Bethlehem in a very negative light. In Judges 17-18, a story is told of a young Levite living in Bethlehem who became a private priest for an Ephraimite named Micah. This priesthood and religious practice centred around idolatry (Judg. 18:17, 20, 30). Afterwards, this young Levite, later named Jonathan the grandson of Moses (Judg. 18:30), became the hired priest for the tribe of Dan and continued his idolatrous practice. All this wickedness came from a sojourning Levite found in Bethlehem.[11]

[10] Kaiser (1998:197) attributes to the origination of the title 'Bethlehem Trilogy' to Merrill (1987:178). However, Merrill (1985:131) mentioned 'a so-called Bethlehem trilogy' two years earlier. This indicates that Merrill picked up the title from somewhere else and popularized it.

[11] There is some disagreement as to whether this Levite was 'of the family of Judah' in the sense that his father was a Levite but mother a Judean or that he was part of the Levites living in Judah. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (2009) and Clark (2009) espoused the first view,

The second story paints a picture of Bethlehem as less grotesque while the tribe of Benjamin (and the city of Gibeah) as being utterly revolting. The story begins in Judges 19:1 with another Levite. This one however was from Ephraim and decided to take a concubine from Bethlehem to be his wife. In other words, not only was Bethlehem full of wicked Levites but also wicked women. The concubine, however, fled from the Levite back to her home in Bethlehem. The Levite pursued her and sought to return to Ephraim. On their return, they stopped in Gibeah of Benjamin. During the evening of their stay, the men of the city sought to sodomize the Levite but settled for cruelly raping and eventually murdering the concubine.[12]

This story bears close semblance of the two angels and the wicked Sodomites found in Genesis 19. Such reminiscence would evoke an emotional reaction from the readers to make a correlation between Sodom and Gibeah. Gage went so far as to say, 'The close tracking between the two accounts [suggest] that the author of Judges intended his hearer to identify the sin of Gibeah with that of Sodom. Judges 19:22c–23 is virtually the verbatim equivalent of Genesis 19:5b–7. Perhaps the most arresting similarity, however, is that between Lot's offer of his virgin daughters to the Sodomites that they may 'do whatever is good in your eyes' (Gen. 19:8), and the Ephraimite's offer of his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine to the Gibeahites that they may 'do whatever is good in your eyes' (Judg. 19:24)' (Gage 1989:371).

The terrible tragedy aroused all of Israel to rise up against Gibeah. This brought about a civil war between the tribe of Benjamin against the remaining tribes of Israel. The result of this war nearly brought about the annihilation of Benjamin. The few survivors of Benjamin were allowed to take wives from the virgins of Jabesh-Gilead as well as Shiloh near Bethel. Merrill noted, 'This reference to Jabesh-Gilead is not without purpose in the historical scheme of things. The city was no doubt the ancestral home of Saul since it is obvious that his forebears as Benjamites originated from either Shiloh or Jabesh-Gilead in light of the narrative under consideration. That the latter is more likely correct may be seen in the unusual interest Saul had in Jabesh-Gilead … This second Judges narrative thus reflects badly on Benjamin and by implication on the Saulide ancestry and dynasty. The pro-David sentiment is crystal clear' (Merrill 1985:132).[13] Therefore, Saul being linked ancestrally to Jabesh-

whereas Keil and Delitzsch (2006) as well as Rabbi Kimchi (according to Gill 2009) held to the second.

[12] This event made Gibeah look far worse than Bethlehem.

[13] Merrill brings out a very insightful possibility in this article (cf. 133) concerning Rachel, Benjamin, and Bethlehem. 'Does this incident [in Genesis 35:16-19] in which Benjamin is the occasion of the death of the patronymic's favourite wife at Bethlehem anticipate in some way

Gilead as well as having Gibeah twice named his home (1 Sam. 10:26, 15:34) and the city being called on four occasions 'Gibeah of Saul' (1 Sam. 11:4, 15:34, 2 Sam. 21:6, Isa. 10:29); a very negative light is cast on Saul, his lineage as a Benjamite, and his homeland of Gibeah of Benjamin.

The Bethlehem trilogy marks a highpoint in the lineage of David as well as the city of David in the book of Ruth. Where the kingly line of Saul was portrayed as evil and wicked based on its past associations and dealings, the Davidic line was portrayed by virtuous members of Judah like Elimelech and Naomi as well as the two significant figures of Boaz and Ruth. Also, Bethlehem the city of David was pictured as a rough town which bred wicked people (for example, an idolatrous Levite priest for Micah and Dan as well as the concubine). But in the book of Ruth, Bethlehem is seen to be filled with faithful worshippers of יהוה—from Boaz and Ruth all the way down to the servants of Boaz (2:4) and the elders of the city (4:12).

To make this political advertisement really take flight, it is interesting to note that Rachel, the mother of Benjamin (the tribal patriarch bearing his name) died in Bethlehem while giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. 35:16-19). It is also no coincidence that there is much significance in the tribe of Judah and its role in the royal scheme of things (Gen. 49:10). The witnesses to Ruth's redemption in chapter 4 invoked Judah in their blessing to Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:12). This is highly significant to the pro-Davidic theme in light of the fact that the royal sceptre and ruling staff was predicted to never pass from Judah *not* Benjamin. Even more significant, though perhaps strange to twenty-first century western mindset, is that the Messiah would come from Judah the son of Leah rather than Benjamin or Joseph the favourite sons of Jacob from his favourite wife Rachel. Likely part of this is because Leah, in her effort to gain favour with Jacob through bearing children, finally gave up seeking to please Jacob through childbirth and just praised God instead for the birth of Judah (Gen. 29:31-35).

In other words, there has been a steady tension building between Rachel and Leah, Benjamin and Judah, Gibeah (the supposed birthplace and home of Saul) and Bethlehem, Saul and David. That tension climaxes in 1 Samuel where the book clearly lays out why Saul was not fit to be king, and argues why David was. Ultimately, the Davidic line was set up; God made a covenant with David concerning his seed, his throne, and his kingdom; and this plays out in the book of Matthew with the presentation of Jesus as the Davidic

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the Saul-David controversy in which the Benjamite again proves antagonistic to one who has Bethlehem associations?'

Messiah whose genealogy is traced back to Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Boaz, and David.[14] Matthew presents very convincingly that Jesus is the rightful Davidic King of Israel. Though Israel rejected him, Jesus promises them that he will return when Israel acknowledges Jesus as Messiah and proclaim, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (Matt. 23:39). This piece of Jewish political literature named 'Ruth' could not be more appropriate for the Davidic and larger Christological plan in God's eternal administration of the world.[15]

Coming back to Ruth, the first action verb used in this book speaks of a certain man yet unnamed who went (וַיֵּלֶךְ *vayy$^{e}$lek*) from one place to another (1:1). There is poetic irony here emphasizing the truth that the man was going from a place where he belonged to a place that was completely wrong for him. In other words, Elimelech was journeying to a place where he was not meant to be. In reference to the Bethlehem trilogy, Grant said, 'In the first two narratives [concerning Bethlehem in Judges], everyone suffered and everyone lost. By now the idea is fixed in the reader's mind that departure from Bethlehem will probably lead to trouble. This is exactly what one finds in the Ruth narrative' (Grant 1991:426).

The irony is found in the phrase וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה לָגוּר בִּשְׂדֵי מוֹאָב (*vayy$^{e}$lek îsh mibêt leḥem y$^{e}$hūdah lagūr biśdê môʾāb*, 'A man went from Bethlehem of Judah to sojourn in the fields of Moab'). There are a couple of interesting things to highlight. First is the meaning of the word 'fields' (שָׂדַי, *sāday*). The word primarily refers to a 'cultivated field' which is 'yielding food' (BDB, 961). Next is the irony that is found in the meaning of Bethlehem (בֵּית לֶחֶם, *bêt leḥem*) or literally 'house of bread'. Elimelech is said to leave the *house* of bread in Judah to sojourn or 'dwell as a new-comer' (BDB, 157) in the cultivated *fields* of Moab. Further, Elimelech actually left the house of bread of praise (Judah) and dwelt in the fields of Moab, a place of no praise. The infinitive construct 'to sojourn' (לָגוּר, *lāgūr*) is stating purpose (cf. Williams 2007:83; Gesenius 2006:348).[16] It is answering the question why or for what purpose was Elimelech leaving Bethlehem. If the famine was too severe to remain in the land, then it would be the purpose of Elimelech to take his family and travel to a place where survival was possible. Another option for the infinitive is one of result. However this would imply that Elimelech ended up in Moab without prior intentions, an unlikely possibility.

[14] The royal genealogy of Jesus sets the foundation for the theme of Matthew as presenting Jesus as the King of Israel. cf. Matthew 1:1-2 and 5-6.

[15] Concerning Ruth having a political agenda, see Gage (1989:370).

[16] Gesenius remarked of this use of the infinitive construct that 'infinitives with לְ serve to express the most varied ideas of purpose or aim' (italics mine). In this case, it seems best that the aim of Elimelech was to go to the fields of Moab more than just the purpose.

This raises the issue of Elimelech's choice to leave Bethlehem as the right choice. With the irony of leaving the house of bread of Judah (praise) and entering a cultivated field in Moab (no praise), this is definitely a case of going from the place that was intended to a place out of the ordinary. For all intents and purposes, this situation was extremely wrong. Elimelech and family entered a place where they did not belong. Such a move would require that the famine was bad enough that it was assumed survival was only achieved by leaving their home and moving to a foreign land. Another possibility that raises a moral issue was whether Elimelech simply lacked faith that God would provide for his family if he were to remain in the *Promised* Land. Even still, this scenario of leaving the Promised Land for survival is very backwards to the Jewish expectation of redemption and deliverance into the land which was promised to their fathers. The people who formerly lived in temporary dwelling places such as tents finally came into their Promised Land to inhabit and dwell in stationary structure such as houses. Ironically, Elimelech was leaving the Promised Land and the house of bread, Bethlehem of Judah, to live outside again in tents in the fields of Moab. He and his family were essentially regressing back to the days of Israel's wilderness wanderings. This builds a strong case for understanding a move to Moab as sinful and outside of God's perfect will.

**Verse 2: And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife was Naomi, and the name of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilyon, Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah. And they came to the field of Moab, and they remained there.**

In verse 2, the narrator reveals the name of the sojourner to be Elimelech (אֱלִימֶלֶךְ, *ʾelîmelek*) meaning 'my God is king'. The grammatical construction places 'Elimelech' as the predicate nominative. The subject 'the name' is connected with a simple conjunctive *waw*. Considering the time period in which this story occurs, the name bears great significance. The period when the 'judges judged' was often described as a time when 'there was no king in Israel' (Judg. 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). As a result of this lack of righteous royal leadership mediated through a human, 'Everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). It is of significance that the book of Judges ends with this formula to generally characterize this time period. And yet we find a man who through proclamation of his name does in fact have a king—God! Thus it might be implied that Elimelech was a righteous man because he declared by virtue of his name (*nomen est omen*) and reputation that he was striving to be loyal to the theocratic institution that Israel agreed upon through

the Mosaic Covenant (Judg. 8:23, 1 Sam. 8:7; 13:12). Yet even the righteous saint can sin, doubt, and waver.

Naomi's name (נָעֳמִי, *nāŏmî*) is the next to be revealed in verse 2. It is formulated in a similar grammatical structure to that of Elimelech's name. However, Naomi was mentioned in relationship to Elimelech as 'his wife' (אִשְׁתּוֹ, *ištô*). Literally, her name means 'my delight'. Likely it indicates that she is a delight to her husband, Elimelech, by virtue of the way she is introduced as 'his wife'. For a woman like Naomi to follow her husband, leave her family and home, and sojourn in the fields of Moab would definitely imply that she was pleasing to Elimelech as a submitted wife.

However, her name might indicate that God was her delight.[17] Ruth 1:20 explains how Naomi wanted her name to be changed to *Mara* or 'bitterness' (מָרָא, *mārâ*). Based on her opinion of God, that she felt God had dealt with her bitterly in Moab, her original name 'Naomi' may indicate a similar opinion of God as 'my delight' prior to leaving Bethlehem. In other words, God was her delight, but later God dealt with her bitterly. In either case, whether 'Naomi' indicates that she was pleasing to Elimelech or that God was pleasing to her, the name is an honorable one and a 'genuine Hebrew name' (Keil and Delitzsch 2006).

After the naming of the two sons, Mahlon and Chilyon,[18] mention was made of their location for added emphasis. This bears out the idea even more that the writer of Ruth had a political motive behind it. The two sons were said to be 'Ephrathites' (אֶפְרָתִים, *efrātîm*), a title quickly associated with Bethlehem[19] and also bearing great Messianic significance by its mere mention (cf. Mic. 5:2). Again this plays on the tension between the tribes of Judah versus Benjamin and David versus Saul (cf. Gen. 35:19).

Verse 2 ends with a depressing statement, 'And they came *to* the field of Moab, and they remained there.' The emphasis of these past tense narrative *waw*-consecutive imperfects not only displays the logical sequence of events but underscores the grim reality that this family of Bethlehem of Judah

[17] Should this be the case, it would also build an argument that Naomi was an OT saint, and likely Elimelech as well.

[18] Some might seek to find significance in the meaning of the names Chilyon and Mahlon to describe their deaths. Their names mean 'pining' and 'weak' respectively, according to Keil and Delitzsch (2006).

[19] The mention of Ephratah left no doubt for the readers that this was the Bethlehem of Judah, the city of David (cf. 1 Sam. 17:12). This helped to distinguish the Bethlehem of Judah in Ephrathah (cf. Gen. 48:7; Ruth 4:11; Micah 5:2) from the Bethlehem in Zebulon (cf. Josh. 19:15). The author wanted little doubt as of which city was being honored in this story.

remained (וַיִּהְיוּ, *vayyihyū*) in the fields of Moab. Of the use of *hayah* (הָיָה), the writer likely intended to convey permanence and long continuation for the family in Moab.[20] Such a long stay or even an existence in Moab was a grave situation for any devout Jew at this time.

**Verse 3: And Elimelech the husband of Naomi died, and she was left over, she and her two sons.**

After remaining and essentially existing in Moab for an undetermined length of time, verse 3 reveals the shattering news of Elimelech's unexpected death. This time, however, Elimelech is portrayed in relation to Naomi as her husband (אִישׁ נָעֳמִי, *îš nāŏmî*, 'the husband of Naomi').[21] Likely, this shift in perspective takes place to emphasize the importance of the person's role in the story. Elimelech started as the chief character, but in God's economy of things, he passed away and Naomi now becomes the chief character in this story.[22] Thus everything begins to be seen in relationship to her as is demonstrated in the phrases, 'And she was left over, she and her two sons' (Ruth 1:3), and 'And the woman [Naomi] was left over from her two children and from her husband' (Ruth 1:5).

What is also important to note is that the author did not concern the readers with the details of Elimelech's death. It was mentioned as a past tense narrative *waw*-consecutive imperfect (*wayyāmāt*, 'and he died') which displays God's providential plan in his grand scheme of salvation history. One of life's greatest and consequently most difficult lessons is learned from this short phrase in verse 3. Events take place in this life that cannot be understood nor the purpose comprehended. But in all things, God remains in sovereign control. He is working out his plan as was definitely the case in the book of Ruth—the plan of redemption through the Davidic Messiah Jesus Christ. The issue as to how or why Elimelech died is not even addressed to make reference of the truth of God's sovereignty in the good times and bad.

[20] BDB (226) suggests 'abide, remain, [and] continue' for translation when the word is being used 'with a word of place or time'.
[21] Here the phrase, 'the husband of Naomi', is set in apposition to 'Elimelech'.
[22] Though the story does move to Ruth and Boaz as the prominent characters of the story, it does end with Naomi again being the chief character. Ruth and Boaz are last mentioned in the narrative section of Ruth in 4:13. Then in every following verse from 14-17, Naomi is the principal character and focus of attention.

**Verse 4: And they took for themselves wives of the Moabite women. The name of the first was Orpah, and the name of the second was Ruth. And they dwelled there about ten years.**

Verse 4 moves into an interesting situation which is likely a direct result of the death of Elimelech. The marriages of Orpah with Chilyon and Ruth with Mahlon (cf. 4:10) present another question of morality. Should these two Ephrathites have sought to marry Moabite women? If not, why not? Was the lack of male leadership a cause of these wedded unions? What can we learn about God's will in the case of Ruth the Moabitess marrying into this family?

Considering the salvific plan of God brought about in the Davidite Jesus of the lineage of Boaz and Ruth, it seems difficult to understand Mahlon's marriage to Ruth outside of God's will and thus immoral for a Hebrew to do.[23] Yet all fingers point against the idea of the two sons of Naomi marrying Moabite women. First of all, the Jews were cautioned against marrying foreigners for fear that they might be swayed away from the God of Israel (Deut. 7:1-4).[24] Secondly, intermarriage with the Gentile heathens would facilitate national ethnic impurity for what was referred to as 'the holy race' (Ezra 9:1-2). Lastly, Moab and Ammon were especially despised more than the other Gentile nations for their lack of compassion showed to the Jews of the Exodus (Deut. 23:3-4). Also considering the heritage of these two Gentile countries (cf. Gen. 19:36-38), a rejection by nations with such close familial ties to Abraham would prompt Jews to have an ethnic disdain for Moab and Ammon much in the same way that the Jews would later despise the Samaritans. This then would put a damper on any marital relations between Jews and Moabites. Therefore, if God's plan was for Ruth to be a part of the lineage of David and ultimately Jesus, does that justify Mahlon in his marriage to a Moabitess? Such a conclusion is very doubtful. Perhaps this is a good example of God allowing his permissive will to accomplish his ultimate goal, although it seems difficult to see Ruth not as part of God's perfect plan.

[23] The parentage and birth of Solomon would be another similar situation in the Davidic lineage regarding God's permissive will.

[24] Deut. 7:1-4 is a prohibition of marriage for the Gentile Canaan Inhabitants. This was given before the Canaan conquest in order to ensure that all Gentile inhabitants in the land of Canaan would be removed. If marriage was allowed, then there would be a remnant of Canaanites left amongst the people. Thus Deut. 7:1-4 can only be used as a warning against later Jew/Gentile marriage. It was not prohibited, but it was discouraged due primarily to spiritual influences.

**Verse 5: And they both died also, Mahlon and Chilyon, and the woman was left over from her two children and from her husband.**

After a ten year existence in the fields of Moab (1:4), another great tragic event took place in the life of Naomi. Interestingly enough, Chilyon and Mahlon's death is described in the same amount of brevity as was given to Elimelech.[25] The cause of their deaths is not explained likely because it is not relevant to the purpose of the story of Ruth. However, if the lesson of God's providential yet unexplainable plan was not understood with Elimelech from verse 3, it is certainly being reinforced in verse 5. The deaths of the two sons convey the theme of God's sovereign purpose accomplishing what he will have it to accomplish, even through secondary causes such as human mortality. From the famine in the land of Israel, to the unexpected death of Elimelech, to the untimely deaths of Chilyon and Mahlon, God has been bringing Naomi and eventually Ruth exactly to a place that will definitively fulfil his ultimate purpose in the lineage of David and eventually Jesus Christ. And so verse 5 ends with Naomi surviving her late husband and sons.

God's providence is a perpetual albeit subtle theme that is weaved all throughout the book of Ruth (cf. Horst 1983). Later in 2:3, Ruth providentially finds herself in a portion of a field belonging to Boaz. This is not a coincidence. In fact, the verse says that 'her chance chanced *her*' or 'her fate fated *her*' ( וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ, *vayyiqer miqreāh* ; BDB, 899-900).[26] It could be functionally translated, 'God's providence placed her on the portion of the field belonging to Boaz.' It was not just that Ruth happened to come across this portion of land by mere happenstance. It was 'her chance', 'her fate', or 'her fortune' which is implying God's providential guidance of the situation.

Later in Ruth 3:8, God's providence is subtly emphasized yet again. For no reason that is mentioned, Boaz trembled in the middle of the night to find Ruth at his feet. This initiated the redemption process between Ruth and Boaz. Had he not awaken, the entire process would have changed and possibly the outcome. One must wonder what caused Boaz to tremble and turn himself in his sleep.[27] This is doubly true considering the fact that he had been working

[25] It is worth mentioning that in both situations when death has occurred, the writer had previously mentioned a sin on the part of the deceased just before the incident of death occurred. In the case of Elimelech's death in verse 3, he took his family from Bethlehem to Moab in verse 2. In the case of the sons' death in verse 5, they both took Moabite women in verse 4. While it is not directly stated that their death was a direct consequence of some moral failure on the part of these three men, the teaching is still clear—sin has consequences.

[26] It could even be translated, 'her fortune encountered *her*'.

[27] Notice the Niphal stem use to describe how Boaz awoke—'And the man trembled [Qal] … and he turned himself [Niphal]'. The Niphal is likely being used reflexively where Boaz is

all day and night (3:2) making him extremely exhausted. He had also eaten and drank until literally 'his heart was good' (3:7). In other words, this man should by all rights slept very soundly. He had worked all day, he had eaten a great meal, and his mind was free from anxiety. What on earth could rouse a man from such a glorious slumber? Likely it was God, who working this situation out to providentially fulfil his plan. Nothing else in the passage indicates otherwise.

The last bit of providence taught in Ruth is found in 4:13. This is less subtle but the point is still enforced. After the redemption process was completed, and Boaz took Ruth as his wife, 'he entered her'. This is a clear statement that the marriage was consummated and the newly-wed couple had engaged in physical relations. The result of this union was that Ruth conceived a child through the physical relationship with Boaz. But 4:13 explains that it was God who 'gave to her conception' (וַיִּתֵּן יהוה לָהּ הֵרָיוֹן, *vayyiten YHWH lāh hērāyôn*). Verse 13 does not indicate the time period from marriage to conception, but it is presented immediately through the successive *waw*-consecutive verbs. This stands in stark contrast to the 10 years of marriage and infertility between Mahlon and Ruth (Horst 1983:27).

This posits the idea that it was God's intention all along that Boaz and Ruth would cohabitate to reproduce a child of providential significance. In this case, that child would be the grandfather of the beloved king of Israel! Not only does having God as the cause of conception in the ancestral lineage of David build a strong case for the pro-Davidic political agenda behind the book of Ruth, but it also speaks loudly to the fact that God will bring about his ultimate plan since he is sovereignly in control of everything. And this theme of sovereignty and providence began back in Ruth 1:3 and 5 with the unexplained deaths of Elimelech, Chilyon, and Mahlon.

## 3. Expositional outline from Ruth 1:1-5

Certainly, all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. But to be honest, most men who 'preach the Word' will have a difficult time finding relevant and applicable information in introductory sections like that found in Ruth 1:1-5. But the reality is that (a) God intended for this passage of Scripture to affect the lives of believers and (b) there is relevant information in this section that bears great significance to

acting upon himself. However, considering the rest of the story, the result brought about beneficial results for Boaz making the Niphal use very similar to a Middle Niphal (cf. Williams 2007:57-58).

the lives of believers. The most important aspect of an expositional sermon is to make the proposition of the sermon match the theme that arises out of the text. This will be demonstrated in Ruth 1:1-5.

It has already been shown above that two major themes in this passage have been setting the stage for the rest of the book of Ruth. The first theme is that God punishes sin. Sin is a detestable thing to God and contradicts his moral character. Considering God's most notable attribute that he proclaims for himself, *his holiness* demands justice. God cannot and will not allow sin to go unpunished (cf. Prov. 11:21). The second theme in the setting of Ruth is God providentially fulfilling his plan for redemption. By allowing unexplainable events to take place in the life of Naomi, God brought about an outcome between Ruth and Boaz that had an impact that would stretch into eternity. And so we have a beautiful picture of man's plight and God's remedy. Man is a sinner, and he deserves punishment. But God is gracious, and he sovereignly provides redemption to undeserving sinners (cf. Tit. 2:11). With man, there is sin. With sin, there is judgment. But with God, there is grace. And so a homiletical proposition for Ruth 1:1-5 could be, 'Man's sin demands punishment, but God's sovereignty provides redemption'.

To begin with, a sermon from Ruth 1:1-5 would be best if broken into three main points. The first point is 'sin's punishment'. It must be shown how Ruth 1:1-5 emphasizes the sin of man and the resulting punishment. The second point is 'God's providence'. It must be explained how Ruth 1:1-5 emphasizes the providential plan of God and ultimately to bring about redemption to sinners. The third point is 'Christ's provision'. It must described how the above two points are to converge with the grand theme of God's salvation history culminating in Christ, the son of David and Boaz, upon the cross.

Presenting Ruth 1:1-5 will likely be most effective if each main point is mentioned after it is explained. Beginning with point one, sin's punishment, the setting of Ruth brings out some very interesting truths of sin and consequence that can be explained and applied. The fact that this story takes place in the time when the judges judged (1:1) is significant to sin and punishment. After all, the time period of the judges is so cyclical that the theme of judgment following sin is unmistakable. Utilizing passages like Judges 17:6 and 21:25, which explain that the people did right in their own eyes and the result of such behaviour brought national punishment, illustrates this point well. To demonstrate further the idea of sin and punishment, one would only have to pick out the introductory verses to a particular story in Judges which explains Israel's sin and the result of that sin. For example, Judges 3:7 reveals Israel's sin against God through idol worship. Verse 8

explains the punishment upon Israel was an 8 year servitude to the nation of Mesopotamia. A few verses later, in Judges 3:12, Israel again sinned against God. The result of this was a besiegement of Moab and Ammon upon Israel and an 18 year servitude to Moab. Making use of these many passages found in Judges will drive home the point being brought out in Ruth 1:1 of the time when the judges judged.

Also, the fact that there was a famine in the land during the time of the story of Ruth indicates the presence and punishment of sin. Though no sin is specifically cited in Ruth, it is implied based on God's promise to Israel at the Mosaic Covenant. Using Deuteronomy 28:49-57, especially verses 49 and 51-52, a convincing case can be made that Israel had fallen into sin, and God was punishing them through famine in the land.

Then there are the tragic deaths of Elimelech and later his sons Chilyon and Mahlon. A fascinating sequence of events in 1:1-5 is the situations that took place just before their deaths. In verse 2, Elimelech took his family from Bethlehem to Moab because of the famine. In verse 3, Elimelech died. In verse 4, the two sons took two Moabite women for wives. In verse 5, they died. While the passage in Ruth does not state that the deaths of these men are due to their unrighteous acts, the theme of sin and punishment is nevertheless part and parcel to this story. It is clearly illustrated in the actions and subsequent deaths of Elimelech, Chilyon, and Mahlon.

Therefore, in just the setting of Ruth, there is enough scriptural data to explain and illustrate that man is a sinner, and the result of that sin is punishment. It is here that the first point of the sermon outline can be revealed—Ruth 1:1-5 emphasizes sin's punishment.

After transitioning from sin to providence, the same method of explaining the emphasis in Ruth 1:1-5 and then later revealing the point of God's providence would be best. By going through the theme of God's sovereignty in the death of Elimelech, the preacher can begin revealing the idea that events take place in life that leave the question of how or why unanswered. Elimelech's death account in verse 3 was only given four words of explanation in the Hebrew, two of which were simply explaining Elimelech as Naomi's husband. What a powerful way to promote the idea that things happen in life that cannot be understood, but God has a plan and purpose that he will accomplish. Even in tragedy, the truth remains, 'We know that all things work together for good God causes to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28, NKJV).

Continuing the explanation of God's providence, Ruth 1:5 reveals the death of the two sons, Chilyon and Mahlon. In case the audience was not listening to the truths mentioned about the death of Elimelech, there should be no reason for them to miss the point re-emphasized by the deaths of these two men. Once again it is seen that God has a plan which he is going to work out. That plan is infinitely better than anything conceivable in finite human minds. Thus saints can take comfort in that fact despite any tragedy that might take place in their life.

To add to the emphasis of God's providence and sovereignty, the preacher can go through the rest of the story in Ruth and bring out the three other places where God's sovereignty is highlighted by way of illustration. This begins with an explanation of Ruth 2:3 and the statement how '[Ruth's] fate fated *her on* the portion of the field belonging to Boaz'. Next is Ruth 3:8 and Boaz's unexpected trembling and turning in his deep sleep.[28] Last comes Ruth 4:13 and the conception of Obed caused specifically by God himself. All of these events, beginning with the death of Elimelech and ending with the conception of Obed, point to a single truth—God's providence.

Finally, the two main points above must be connected to bring out the climax of the sermon and final point—Christ's provision. Though man is by nature a sinner and deserves punishment, God is gracious, loving, and providentially bringing about his sovereign plan of redemption. This ultimately culminates in the cross of Jesus. The messianic and christological themes of Ruth should be brought out at this point. From the Bethlehem trilogy to the tensions found between Saul and David, Gibeah and Bethlehem, Benjamin and Judah, and all the way back to Rachel and Leah, a great theological point can be made for the culmination of salvation history with Jesus on the cross. The Bible is constantly sowing a christological tapestry of Jesus as the genealogical heir to David, Obed, Boaz, Judah, and Abraham. The larger scope of the book of Ruth points to the great theme of the kinsman redeemer and Jesus Christ as that redeemer. And so the message reaches its pinnacle in presenting the message of the gospel and proposing the proposition, 'Man's sin demands punishment, but God's sovereignty provides redemption'.

## 4. Conclusion

Though oft ignored and scarcely considered, the short pericope of Ruth 1:1-5 contains great theological and sermonic value. There is much to be gained

[28] Literally, 'And it happened in the middle of the night, the man trembled and turned himself. And behold, *there was* a woman lying at his feet.'

from a thorough exegetical study of this narrative setting. There is even more to be gained by preaching this passage expositionally emphasizing sin's punishment, God's providence, and Christ's provision.

The book of Ruth makes for excellent narrative, expositional sermons. The theology is rich, the story is compelling, the themes are significant, and the cultural mores are fascinating. Therefore, much is gained from an intense study through Ruth. This journal article sets out to demonstrate exactly how rich and detailed this story is, as exemplified from the opening pericope of Ruth 1:1-5. This article will also demonstrate the necessary bridge that preachers must cross between exegesis and exposition.

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# Preaching Christ in a pluralistic world: the message and method of the mission to Samaria in Acts 8

Franklin S. Jabini[1]

**Abstract**

*Philip, a Hellenistic Jew, preached the gospel to the Samaritans who were despised by the Jews. The Samaritans were oppressed by evil spirits. They suffered from various kinds of diseases and were in the bondage of Simon the magus. The Samaritans lived in a pluralistic religious community. The confrontation of this community with the gospel produced visible results: people were healed and delivered. Believers were baptized and there was great joy in the city. Transformation took place because Philip preached Christ. This seems to have been the apostolic pattern. The same Christ-centered preaching and communication of the gospel should be followed by ministers of the gospel in today's pluralistic religious world.*

## 1. Introduction

The Christian church started on the day of Pentecost, within a Jewish context. On that day, Peter preached a very strong message to his Jewish audience. The climax of his message was in Acts 2:36: 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.' The focus of the first sermon of the early church was on the person of Jesus Christ. Peter's audience was Jewish people, who knew the Scriptures. It was therefore easy for him to explain what happened based on Old Testament passages that the Jews accepted as God's word. However, it had to be clear in the mind of all those who heard him that Jesus Christ was glorified by God. All the arguments in Peter's message were in support of that fact.

The Jewish leaders did not accept the Jesus–Messiah-centred message of the early church. They responded first by ordering the apostles 'not to speak or

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teach at all in the name of Jesus's (Acts 4:18). Notwithstanding their order, the disciples continued to teach about Jesus. The Jewish leaders therefore 'laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail' (Acts 5:18). The disciples responded by telling them that they had no intention to stop speaking about the Christ. This called for a third kind of response from the Jewish leaders: 'They summoned the apostles and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them' (Acts 5:40).

The fourth and final step went beyond speaking, imprisoning, and beating. Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60). This caused many disciples to flee from Jerusalem. 'All except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. ... those who had been forced to scatter went around proclaiming the good news of the word' (Acts 8:1, 4).

The enemy of the gospel used these leaders to hinder the furtherance of the message of Christ. Instead of preventing it from spreading, God used their actions to further proclaim the good news beyond Jerusalem. Christ ordered the disciples that they should be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth. The apostles, however, remained in Jerusalem. Christ's intention was for them to go everywhere and preach the good news about Him. The persecution that broke out as a result of the death of Stephen caused the believers to flee from Jerusalem.

When they were scattered they 'went around proclaiming the good news of the word'. Beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem, the church encountered a different audience and different problems. In its first encounter the church met Samaritans and was confronted with the problem of magic (Acts 8). These changes did not take place because the church planned them. Problems with the Hellenistic Jews led to changes within the organization of the church. The church appointed seven helpers; most of them came from a Greek background.[2] The move to take the gospel to the regions beyond Jerusalem did not come from the church. A persecution led to the spread of the gospel. And, it was a group of people other than the apostles who took the gospel to the regions beyond Jerusalem. In the case of Samaria, it was Philip. It can be argued that those who left Jerusalem due to the persecution were the Hellenistic Jews. Both Stephen and Philip were leaders of the Hellenistic group. It is therefore amazing that God chose a Hellenistic Jew to take the gospel to the Samaritans. The Palestinian Jews despised both the Hellenistic

[2] They all have Greek names, but were not necessary all Hellenistic Jews. Greek names were common in Jerusalem (Barrett 2004:314-5)

Jews, because of their Greek culture, and the Samaritans, because of their mixed background.

## 2. The context

The Samaritans had parts of the Old Testament. The Jews considered them to be 'schismatics, heretics or half-breeds' (Maynard-Reid 1997, s.v. Samaria).[3] Acts 8 gives us an example of the Christian message in the Samaritan context.[4] Who were the Samaritans? Even though the Samaritans were not considered Jews, they were not pagans. They were descendants of the Jewish nation. Their leaders were taken into captivity by the Assyrians. The Assyrians then brought foreigners to their country (2 Kgs 17:29). When these foreigners experienced problems in their new land, the king of Assyria ordered the return of the priests from among the deportees to the Jewish land. 'He must settle there and teach them the requirements of the God of the land' (2 Kgs 17:27). Therefore the Samaritans worshiped the same God as the Jews. According to Williamson (1982:1052), their creed included:

> Belief in one God, in Moses the prophet, in the law, in Mt Gerizim as the place appointed by God for sacrifice (which is made the tenth commandment in the Samaritan Pentateuch), in the day of judgment and recompense, and in the return of Moses as Taheb (the 'restorer' or 'returning one').

As such, their beliefs were very close to those of the Jews. However, in his encounter with the Samaritan woman, the Lord Jesus referred to their religious ignorance, saying, 'You people worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews' (John 4:22).

What was the reason for this ignorance? Undoubtedly, it was 'their rejection of the whole Old Testament beyond the Pentateuch' (Gooding 1990:140).[5] It was not possible for them to understand God's full revelation without the rest of the Old Testament.

[3] Luke, however, painted a very positive picture of the Samaritans in two instances in his Gospel, i.e. the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33) and the grateful Samaritan (Luke 17:16).
[4] It is not clear if Philip preached in 'the' city of Samaria or in 'a' city of Samaria (Polhill 1992:214).
[5] To be more precise, beyond the book of Joshua, because the Samaritans had the books of Genesis to Joshua.

Besides the rejection of a major part of the Old Testament, the Samaritans also had pagan elements in their religion. Some of the nations that were brought to Samaria by the Assyrians kept their religions.

> But these various groups of foreigners also continued to worship their own gods. In town after town where they lived, they placed their idols at the pagan shrines that the people of Samaria had built. (2 Kings 17:29, NLT).

For this reason the Jews 'refused to allow the Samaritans to participate in the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem' (Gooding 1990:139). Some say that in the latter part of their history they renounced their idolatry.[6]

The danger in a group like the Samaritans is that they have knowledge of some biblical truths. They practice a form of biblical faith, but they are ignorant of the full revelation of God in his word. The problem is worse when they add elements from pagan religions to the biblical revelation. This was clearly the case in the encounter of Philip with Simon, the magician, even though the majority of Samaritans responded favourably towards the message of both Jesus and the apostles (Williamson 1982:1052).

## 3. The case

Simon was practising magic. This makes it clear that his power was not from God.[7] In those days, magicians were seen as people who knew the will of the gods. They possessed and used supernatural knowledge and abilities. Magic in Simon's day was a normal part of religion. Through oracles and dreams religious leaders were able to receive the will of the gods for the people and events.[8] People were willing to pay magicians to find out the will of the gods or to be cured from their sicknesses (e.g. Acts 16:16; 19:23-40). People believed their sicknesses were caused by demons. In the book of Tobit, there is an example of how to treat people who were plagued by demons:

> You burn the fish's heart and liver, and their smoke is used in the case of a man or woman plagued by a demon or evil spirit;

[6] See Anderson (1992) for a Samaritan version of their origin and history. According to the Samaritans, 'they are direct descendants of the northern Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who survived the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BC' (Anderson 1992:941).

[7] See also Delling (TDNT, 4:359) who suggested that Simon 'probably regarded himself as the Taëb'.

[8] See, for example Jos. Ant 10, 195, 216 (Josephus and Whiston, 1987).

> any such affliction disappears for good, leaving no trace (Tobit 6:8).

Simon was able to amaze the people through his magical practices. The influence of this power on the people should never be underestimated. The people saw things happening with their own 'naked' eyes. As such, he had the people under his spell. According to the Bible:

> All the people, from the least to the greatest, paid close attention to him, saying, 'This man is the power of God that is called "Great"'. And they paid close attention to him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic (Acts 8:10).

Simon claimed to be someone great. The people said that he was 'the power of God that is called "Great"' (ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη, *hē dynamis tou theou hē kaloumenē megalē*).[9] This suggests a personal divine being designated as a power of the highest God. According to Page (1886:132), there was a belief in those days that the gods 'were revealed or became incarnate in the person of men. … Simon is described as supposed to be little less than divine'. In Acts 14 the Lycaonians thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods who came down in human form (v. 11). They said this because through these apostles, God healed a man who was lame. The case of Simon was different. He did not ascribe his healing power to God, but to himself. The people therefore confessed that *he was* the power that is called 'Great'. This should not be strange. Their world was one where people believed in the supernatural and gods who dwelled among men in human form. They also believed that various spirits, which needed to be treated in different ways, caused sicknesses.[10] Simon, the Great, the power of god among them, was able to help them.

Simon heard the gospel of Jesus Christ through the preaching of Philip. He believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13). However, his faith was not genuine.[11]

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[9] BDAG, s.v. δύναμις, suggests the following translation: 'what is called the Great Power of God'. The NET is to be preferred because of the repetition of the article before καλουμένη μεγάλη. The idea in both cases is the same, as the NIV demonstrates: 'this man is the divine power known as the Great Power'.

[10] See also the following examples in the New Testament: 'a spirit of infirmity' (Luke 13:11) and 'deaf and dumb spirit' (Mark 9:25).

[11] Stählin, quoted in Barret (2004:409), said that Simon's faith was not genuine, that is, his conversion was not real. He remained a magician ('*sein "Glaube" war kein wahrer Glaube, seine Bekehrung keine echte Bekehrung; er bleibt der Magier*'). Barret (409), however, rightly observed that nothing in the text suggests that Simon's belief and baptism 'was less sincere or in any way a less satisfactory convert than the other Samaritans.' My conclusion in the text is based on what happened in the rest of the narrative. Apparently Luke is here not concerned

He was amazed by the signs and great miracles that God did through Philip. In the past Simon had amazed, ἐξίστημι (v. 9), the people with his magic (v. 11), and now he was amazed (v. 13) by the signs and great miracles that were occurring.

Luke intimates that 'he stayed close to Philip constantly'.[12] It was probably not clear to Philip why Simon was so 'devoted to him' (NAB). When the apostles came from Jerusalem, Simon's inner motives were made manifest. He was looking for more power.

> Now Simon … offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power too, so that everyone I place my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit' (Acts 8:18-19).

This man would like to continue with his religion, but with Christian power, and especially the authority. He was looking for the authority, the right, to do more amazing things. Simon realized that his religion could not give him that power. He saw that power in another religion and he joined it. He was baptized and was ready to serve with the power of the new religion. He asked for the authority so that everyone he lays hands on may receive the Holy Spirit. 'To him "Jesus" and "the Spirit" were simply two demonic powers, more powerful but of the same kind as those he already used' (Gooding 1990:146).

Calvin (2000) suggested that Simon thought he would be able to sell the grace of God and get some greedy gain out of it. Simon clearly misunderstood the Christian gospel. He had to let go of his religion in order to be able to function within the gospel of Christ and in his kingdom. The fact that he was very prominent in his religion did not make him a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ after conversion. In his case, he wanted to buy the power for personal gain. In Christianity one can never buy a ministry. It will not be a genuine ministry. It will certainly be a human performance without the power of the living Christ to transform. The norms of Christian ministry are different from those of Simon's religion.

What was the apostles' response to 'brother' Simon's attitude? He was punished.

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with the inner aspect of belief and conversion. He simply reported what happened, as it was observed.

[12] Luke used προσκαρτερέω a number of times in the first part of Acts (1:14; 2:42, 46; 6:4 and 10:7). Louw and Nida (1989, s.v.) give the following explanation for this word: 'to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty – "to devote oneself to, to keep on, to persist in."'

> But Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could acquire God's gift with money! You have no share or part in this matter because your heart is not right before God! Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that he may perhaps forgive you for the intent of your heart. For I see that you are bitterly envious and in bondage to sin' (Acts 8:20-23).

Christianity is not a religion of outward manifestations, even though these manifestations are taking place. Christianity is a matter of the heart. The heart has to be right before God (v. 21). If the heart is not right before God, one can never have share or part[13] in 'this' matter. To which 'matter' was Peter referring? The Greek word translated matter in this verse is *logos*. In verse 4, the believers went around preaching the good news of 'the word' (τὸν λόγον). In verse 14, the apostles heard that Samaria had accepted 'the word' (τὸν λόγον). Simon however had no part 'in this word' (ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ).[14] This word was the gospel with everything that belongs to it (Van Eck 2005:199).[15] Peter's answer indicated that he did not consider Simon to be a genuine believer. Simon was going to perish; he had no share or part in this matter, and his heart was not right before God (vv. 20-21).

It is not clear from the rest of the story whether Simon made a definitive choice for Christ or not. Luke says that Simon replied, 'You pray to the Lord for me so that nothing of what you have said may happen to me' (Acts 8:24). Was this a prayer of repentance? Or did he go on his own way?[16] We are not

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[13] μερίς (share) or κλῆρος (part) clearly refer to the statement about the Levites in Deuteronomy (see 12:12; 14:27, 29). The LXX translated the Hebrew phrase חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה in the same way. The phrase refers to the blessings that were given to the people of God in the Promised Land.

[14] According to Peter, Simon had no share 'in this word, matter, thing' (ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ). Scholars differ in their understanding of λόγος in this verse. According to Barrett (2004:414-15), it refers to the word of God, or the gospel. He said: 'Christian initiation is bound up with the proclamation of the word of God, and Simon's proposal shows that he has no understanding of this.' Simon had no part in this Christian gospel. In verse 20 Peter spoke about 'the gift of God' (τὴν δωρεάν τοῦ θεοῦ). In the book of Acts, this phrase refers to the person of the Holy Spirit and not to his gifts (sees 2:38; 10:45; 11:17).

[15] According to Van Eck, it includes signs, baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit, and everything else that the gospel brings among people.

[16] As a matter of fact, he did not pray. He asked the apostles to pray for him. Some Greek manuscripts have the following reading of this verse (see Metzger 1994:314): '"And Simon answered and said *to them, 'I beseech you*, pray for me *to God*, that none *of these evils* of which you have spoken *to me* may come upon me'—*who did not stop weeping copiously*."' According to Calvin (2002), 'we may conjecture that he repented', even though Calvin admitted that many early church writers shared a different view. Metzger (1994:314) adds the following comments: 'The addition gives the suggestion that Simon's tears are of remorse and

sure.[17] The mission to Samaria, however, was not a failure. Many Samaritans accepted the message.[18] The church was established among them. God gave them the Holy Spirit through the Jewish leaders of church in Jerusalem. Form the very beginning of the Church, God did not want to establish a divided church, a Jewish church and a Samaritan church. The laying of the hands by the Jewish apostles signified the unity of the church. Encouraged by the ministry of Philip and what happened there the apostles also preached the word to other Samaritans.

> So after Peter and John had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many Samaritan villages as they went (Acts 8:25).

In summary, the case of Simon reveals a few things. It appeared that he professed to be a Christians and was baptized. He showed interest by maintaining a close contact with the evangelist Philip. However, his Christianity was only an outward issue. There was no genuine conversion. Simon was a leader of another religion who wanted to add elements of Christianity to his religion. Peter responded very sharply to this attempted syncretism. The content of the Christian message would not allow that.

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perhaps of repentance; in the Clementine tradition Simon's tears are tears of rage and disappointment.'

[17] The church Father Irenaeus (*Against Heresies, 1:23.2)* said that 'all sorts of heresies derive their origin' from Simon. He (*Against Heresies,* 1:23.4) continued to say: 'Thus, then, the mystic priests belonging to this sect both lead profligate lives and practise magical arts, each one to the extent of his ability. They use exorcisms and incantations. Love-potions, too, and charms, as well as those beings who are called "Paredri" (familiars) and "Oniropompi" (dream-senders), and whatever other curious arts can be had recourse to, are eagerly pressed into their service. They also have an image of Simon fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter, and another of Helena in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship. In fine, they have a name derived from Simon, the author of these most impious doctrines, being called Simonians; and from them "knowledge, falsely so called," received its beginning, as one may learn even from their own assertions' (cf. Salmon 1999:905ff.; Stoops 1992:29ff.).

[18] According to Acts 8:6, 'The crowds were paying attention with one mind to what Philip said.' The word *homothumadon*, translated as 'with one mind', appears a few times in Acts (1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29). The word may express the idea of 'with one purpose', 'unanimously'. According to Bruce (1952:183), 'were paying' attention should be understood in a full sense as 'paying attention and giving a favourable response'. As such, the response to the gospel was not an individual choice but a unanimous decision as a group. This article will not allow us to explore this concept of 'groups-decision' further.

## 4. The content

What was the content of the message of the early disciples? A simple reading of their messages revealed that they were Christ-centred, no matter the context. On the day of Pentecost, for example, Peter preached a sermon in which he explained what happened to the disciples (Acts 2:14-40). His emphasis, however, was not on the things that happened, but on Christ and his glory. This can be seen in Acts 2:32-36, the centre of his message.

Peter's second message also had Jesus Christ as it centre. Peter and John healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus (Acts 3:1-8). When the audience saw it, they were all amazed. Peter used that opportunity to address the people. He did not focus on the healing that took place; instead he glorified the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 3:13, 15).

Peter's third message was given in front of the Jewish rulers, elders, and experts in the law. He did not change the emphasis of his message. He emphasised that the miracle took place in the name of Jesus. It was not through their power or in their name. Peter explained that salvation is only found in Jesus (Acts 4:10-12). The Jewish leaders tried to prevent them from speaking in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). The apostles, however, made it very clear that it was impossible for them to remain silent. They would carry on speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus!

Philip did exactly this in Samaria. 'The narrative emphasizes that Philip is performing the same kind of preaching mission as Jesus and the apostles' (Tannehill 1990:104). His preaching was very effective and many people became Christians. What was the content of his message? Luke described the messages in three ways: 'Christ' (v. 5), 'the good news' (v. 12), and 'the word of God' (v. 14). Philip proclaimed the Christ in 'words' and God preformed 'deeds' through him.[19] This twofold way of presenting Christ was the normal pattern of the early disciples. Most likely Philip preached Christ more than once to the Samarians.[20]

Preaching Christ is further explained in Acts 8:12 as 'proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ'. In the

[19] The Greek word κηρύσσω (*kērussō*) should be understood as 'proclaim aloud'.

[20] The NET translated the Greek form here with 'began proclaiming' since this was the first time that such a preaching took place. According to Bruce (1952:183), 'he was doing so when the following events happened.' So the reference is not necessarily to the beginning of his preaching, but to what he was doing when the following events took place. And most likely they took place more than once. See Robertson (1930), 'began to preach and kept on at it'; Vincent (2002, 1:488) '*Kept doing* from time to time.'

preaching of the apostles, the kingdom of God was related to the person of Christ. In Acts 28:23, Paul testified about the kingdom of God, 'trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets'. Preaching the kingdom, then, is preaching Jesus. Throughout Acts, Luke often referred to the name of Jesus Christ.[21]

The preaching of Philip is also described in Acts 8:14 as 'Samaria had accepted the word of God'. This same phrase is also used in Acts 11:1 to describe the preaching of Peter to Cornelius. In Acts 10 we have a detailed summary of Peter's message. It is clear there that the content of his message was about Jesus from Nazareth, the Man whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38-43). This message about God's anointed Son is described as the 'word of God' (cf. Acts 4:31; 6:2; 13:5, 7, 46; 18:11). In other words, preaching the word of God or the kingdom means preaching Christ. It means preaching about him, in his God glorifying life on earth, his death as substitute for mankind, his victorious resurrection, and glorious ascension to the throne of God. This is exactly what Philip did.

In his encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip preached the same message. He used Isaiah 53, the passage that the eunuch was reading, to preach 'the good news about Jesus to him' (Acts 8:35). Preaching the good news and preaching the word of God means the same thing. It means preaching Christ! 'There is for Luke no difference between telling the good news of the word of God and proclaiming Christ; he is the good news' (Barrett 2004:403).

As stated earlier, the Samaritans had their own Christ, *Taheb*. Philip preached them 'the' Christ, the Christ of Scripture, the Son of the Living God. Philip must have explained what the prophets spoke long ago about the Christ (see Acts 3:18).

## 5. The consequence

The result of this kind of preaching is described in detail.

> The crowds were paying attention with one mind to what Philip said, as they heard and saw the miraculous signs he was performing. For unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, were coming out of many who were possessed, and many paralyzed

[21] See 2:21, 38; 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18, 30; 5:28, 40, 41; 8:12, 16; 9:14, 15, 16, 21, 27, 28; 10:43, 48; 15:26; 16:18; 19:5, 13, 17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9.

> and lame people were healed. So there was great joy in that city. … They believed Philip … they began to be baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:6-8, 12).

The results of the Philip's preaching were: people were healed and delivered, people believed and were baptized, and there was great joy in the city. Transformation was taking place. The text makes it clear that the people *were delivered* from the unclean spirits and did not have to come every Sunday for deliverance. Luke used the same verb here as in other passages in his Gospel, where Christ set people free from evil spirits (cf. Luke 4:35, 41; 8:29, 33, 38; 11:24). When Christ is preached, people are set free. Philip preached the same Christ in Samaria as Peter did in Jerusalem. The result was the same in both places. The context was different, but the centrality of Christ was evident in both messages. It was not about the preachers, not even the miracles that took place afterwards. The content of the apostolic message was the living Christ. If preaching does not result in changed and transformed lives, a messenger should ask questions. The encounter of Christianity with people of other religions can never be without consequences. It is an issue of making a decision. One can never be a genuine Christian and a member of another religion at the same time.

Christianity has nothing to do with magic; magic is powerless before the genuine power of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit can neither be manipulated nor bought. Simon illustrated that. A proper response to God's gift of salvation is much more than simply a 'what-is-in-it-for-us?' approach. It involves genuine commitment in response to the work of God's Spirit (Polhill 1992:221).

## 6. The contemporary application

In this section, some applications will be drawn from the study. Contemporary issues and practices will be compared with the message and the method seen in this passage. These applications have to be temporary and selective until a more thorough study of the passage and early Christianity is conducted.

### 6.1. Lessons for modern church leaders

Simon could not be a Christian and a magician at the same time.[22] What do we see when we compare the events in Samaria with Christianity in some parts of the world today? The early Christians would have been surprised to find out

[22] According to Roloff, quoted in Barret (2004:406), Simon's magic was synchronistic. It combined elements of Judaistic-Samaritan beliefs with Hellenistic-heathenism.

that 'Christians' today are members of secret societies (e.g. Lodges and Freemasons). Moreover, they would find it strange that some 'Christians' are practising witchcraft.

Philip and the apostles recognized the presence of magic and demons in the Samaritan context. They set the people free in the name of Jesus from these oppressions. Today, we find 'pastors' who accuse innocent children of being witches. They cause members of the Christian community to become addicted to horoscopes and to fear spirits.[23] They attribute sicknesses and life's other calamities to witches and wizards. Very often they even go so far as to identify the witches and wizards.[24]

Once the pastor identifies the causes of the misfortune, he suggests the way forward. Friends and family members mistreat and expel the victims from their community. Often they have to live in seclusion, if they survive the ill-treatment (i.e. if they are not murdered). The 'pastors' use different methods to cast out spirits, such as placing the hands of the witches in near-boiling water, driving nails into their head, or pouring hot sodas on their head. The damage that these 'men of God' are causing is beyond repair.

It is sad to see that men like Simon find their way into Christian churches today. Many of the modern Simons label themselves as prophets, apostles, bishops, and so on. They rob people of their money and possessions. They create fear among believers by telling them that witches and wizards are all around them. By doing this, they make sure that there remains a 'market' for their 'ministry'. These so-called prophets and ministers cause great damage to the cause of Christ. Just like Philip, they should set people free, without needing to repeat the same deliverance ritual on a regular basis.

What should the body of Christ do in a context like this? It should do just as the apostle Peter did in the case of Simon. These false ministers should be exposed publicly! They should not be allowed to carry on with their evil

[23] There seems to be a desire among human beings, Christians and non-Christians alike, to find an answer for the life problems they are facing. They want to know why they are suffering from malaria, why they are not able to find a job, why they do not have children after many years of marriage, why so many people are dying in the village, etc. Are these just 'natural disasters'? These questions are legitimate. They remind us of the story of Job. Was what happened to Job just a natural disaster? The fire that burned his sheep, the great wind that caused the house to fall on his children and kill them, the Sabeans who killed his servant and took away his donkeys and oxen, and the Chaldeans who took away his camels: were these things just accidents? Why did these things happen to Job and not to another person?

[24] 'In several high-profile cases, pastors have been implicated in promoting accusations, proclaiming deliverances, charging fees for exorcisms, and failing to report child abuse to police' (Phiri 2009).

practices within the Christian community. In most cases, they are untrained leaders, who started their own church after breaking away from another church. The most important thing is that they are not changed from the inside.[25] How than can we recognize these Simons? We should analyze their messages and their personal life. Is their preaching, teaching, and lifestyle Christ-centred? Are they pointing people to the Lord Jesus? Are those to whom they minister becoming followers of Christ? Are their followers being set free from the fear of demons and evil spirits? And, are the believers impressed by the power of the living God?

### 6.2. Lessons for modern messages

Philip's message in this context is an example for us. We should preach Christ! Our messages should glorify him. Meetings of Christians should be recognized as Christ-centred meetings. If someone attends a Christian church, he should not leave the church unchanged. The Christ-centred preaching should disclose the secrets of his heart and he should fall on his face to the ground and worship the living Christ (1 Cor. 14:24-25). Christ-centred preaching should have an impact on Christians as well. They should reflect the glory of the Lord. Through the Holy Spirit they should be made more and more like Christ as they are changed into his glorious image (2 Cor. 3:18). Zinzendorf said, 'I have one passion only: It is He! It is He!' (Ogilvie 1983:149). As the great nineteenth century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once said:

> You remember the story of the old minister who heard a sermon by a young man, and when he was asked by the preacher what he thought of it he was rather slow to answer, but at last he said, 'If I must tell you, I did not like it at all; there was no Christ in your sermon.' 'No,' answered the young man, 'because I did not see that Christ was in the text.' 'Oh!' said the old minister, 'but do you not know that from every

[25] The body of Christ should exercise care in dealing with these 'Simons'. A lot of harm is also done to the body of Christ by those who accuse everybody who does not agree with them of being a false prophet. If I do not believe in the power of God to perform miracles today, I will accuse everybody that claims miracles in his ministry of being a deceiver. It takes more than judging people based on our set of doctrines! It is sad to say that there are many preachers out there who cause much harm to the body of Christ. But they should not be categorized as Simon. They are preaching Christ. They are those of whom Paul said: 'Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill … The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment. What is the result? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice' (Phil. 1:15-18).

> little town and village and tiny hamlet in England there is a road leading to London? Whenever I get hold of a text, I say to myself, "There is a road from here to Jesus Christ, and I mean to keep on His track till I get to Him."' 'Well,' said the young man, 'but suppose you are preaching from a text that says nothing about Christ?' 'Then I will go over hedge and ditch but what I will get at Him.'
>
> Let your sermons be full of Christ, from beginning to end crammed full of the gospel. I have preached the gospel, not about the gospel, but the gospel, the full, free, glorious gospel of the living Christ who is the incarnation of the good news. Preach Jesus Christ, brethren, always and everywhere; and every time you preach be sure to have much of Jesus Christ in the sermon (Spurgeon, 2006:§4).

All Christians will agree: we should preach Jesus Christ. Christ was the centre of the apostolic preaching. However, some will emphasize one aspect of the work of Jesus more than another. Liberal theologians will agree that we should preach Christ, but they invent a 'christ' quite different from the one preached by the early church.[26]

Some prosperity preachers will also say 'amen' to the fact that we should preach Christ. They will preach Christ. However, they only preach healing, deliverance, and provision through Christ. They preach about the gifts and not the Giver! Certainly the Christ that the apostle preached was the healer, deliverer, and provider. However, he was more than that. He was not a Christ in the image of the people or preferred by the preachers. The apostles preached that Christ 'died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Preaching Christ in this way was 'a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1:23). It was however the good news of God, 'God's power for salvation to everyone who believes' (Rom. 1:16). It was not about the gifts but about the Giver! Christ-centred preaching should transform people into the image of the Son of God.

Some theologians believe that we should adapt the message to the time in which we are living. According to them, we, as Christians, should not try to convert Hindus. We must try to make the Hindu a better Hindu. This effort sounds very noble. However, that was not the command that Christ gave to his

[26] Such as, 'the historical Jesus of Nazareth can be seen as a Galilean shamanic figure' (Craffert, 2008:420; cf. Craffert 1999).

church. Christ's message to his disciples after his resurrection was that 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations' (Luke 24:47**)**. The message that the Christian church can and should bring to the dear Hindus is forgiveness of sins in the name of the crucified, risen, and glorified Christ.

African and so-called 'black theologians' also try to find ways to proclaim Christ in their own context. In general, they propose two ways. The first one takes concepts from traditional religions as the point of departure. These concepts are used as means through which African Christians can understand the person and the work of Christ. They use concepts like 'ancestors' and apply them to Jesus. Jesus is then seen, for example, as the great ancestor (e.g. Bediako 1983; Nyamiti 1984), an approach known as inculturation. The second approach, liberation theology (e.g. Cone 1997; Boesak 1976), takes the present experience of oppression and exploitation as the point of departure. Christ is seen as the liberator of the oppressed. There is a need to scratch where it is itching. Christ should be presented as the answer in specific context. However, even these approaches tend to lean too strongly to the present context. They make use of concepts without adequately evaluating whether the underlying notions in the traditional religion can be applied to Christ as well. Can the underlying notions behind the ancestor within the African culture be applied to Christ as well? A leading African scholar, Dr Abel Ndjerareou (2010, personal communication), believes not. The 'Black Christ', the 'Liberation Christ', the 'Shaman Christ', and other 'Christs' were rightly criticized for their one-sided representation of Christ (see Konig 2009). These creations by academics make Christ what he is not. They overemphasize just one aspect of the person and work of Christ at the expense of others. Often his humanity is overemphasized at the expense of his divinity and the purpose of his mission. Salvation focuses only on the here and know, on the social without attention for the spiritual. Both sides need to be emphasized.

> Jesus should remain the known Saviour wherever he is proclaimed ... Whatever form his re-imaging takes in the new emerging Christian religions should not change him into another figure that is not the God-Man, Jesus Christ (Akper 2007:240).

## 7. The conclusion

What then are the lessons that can we learn from this passage for missions in our multi-religious world today?

1) Christianity must never be cut off from its roots, if it wants to remain biblical Christianity. We cannot satisfy ourselves with a type of Christianity in which we include some elements of the Bible, but let go of other parts. Just like Samaria, our churches should accept 'the word of God' (v. 14).
2) The message of missions is Christ. Just like Philip, we should preach 'the Christ' (v. 5).
3) There can be no room for syncretism in the body of Christ. It is either full submission to the Lord Jesus Christ and denunciation of paganism or no Christianity at all. Above all, being a Christian is a matter of the heart (v. 21). Syncretism is evident today in many parts of the world. There are religions which claim to be branches of Christianity, but at the same time preach a different Jesus than the one preached by the apostles. They also adhere to ritual practises that are demonic. What they are preaching is at best a mixture of Christian ethics with an alien, pagan, even if modern, philosophical worldview; and at worst little better than Simon's superstitions (Gooding 1990:147).
4) The method of missions in Acts 8 was through proclamation (v. 5) and evangelization (vv. 25, 35). No matter what the context is, the message of Christ should be proclaimed and the good news should be preached. Furthermore, pseudo-Christians should be exposed, just as Peter exposed Simon (vv. 20-22). If a person confesses to be a Christian, he or she must demonstrate a Christ-like lifestyle. A person cannot claim to be a Christian and then go to another religion for spiritual help in times of need and crisis. He cannot serve two masters. He cannot live through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the power and influences of another religion. He will have to make a clear choice.
5) Effective missions should be characterized by genuine conversions, healing, deliverance, and great joy. In other words, there should be visible transformation.

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# From zenith to zero: a historical-theological analysis of the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon

Dan Lioy[1]

**Abstract**

*This journal article undertakes a historical-theological analysis of the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon. Fresh insight into this investigation is obtained by making modified use of the five stages of decline appearing in Jim Collins's study titled How the Mighty Fall. Concededly, the author's evidence-based research deals with the underlying reasons why major corporations implode. That said, when the conceptual framework put forward by Collins is used to assess the collapse of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom, it helps to shed light on what brought about the defeat and captivity of God's chosen people, as reported in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.*

*This essay affirms that the nation's journey from zenith to zero approximately corresponds to the five successive stages delineated by Collins. First, the kingdom experienced arrogance as a result of its unparalleled power and wealth. Second, this hubris emboldened the nation to plunge into an undisciplined pursuit of seizing even more worldly success. Third, the kingdom's obsession to prolong its greatness clouded the moral judgment of its leaders and resulted in them denying they were taking the covenant community down a treacherous path. Fourth, as the storm clouds of disaster began to appear on the nation's horizon, the civil and religious centers of power resorted to desperate measures to save the kingdom. Fifth, due to a series of God-ordained misfortunes and reversals, the covenant community became dispirited, lost all hope, and were eventually brought down by external forces they could neither control nor defeat.*

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## 1. Preface

Jim Collins has spent several decades studying all sorts of companies, ranging from those that are newly created to distinguished firms that have existed over a hundred years. The list includes organizations located on a spectrum from great to good as well as from weak to insolvent (Collins 2007). Even though much of his evidence-based research has focused on investigating the reasons for corporate success, in *How the Mighty Fall* (2009), he turned his attention to the question of why some companies, despite achieving preeminence in the marketplace, eventually succumb to failure. As a result of Collins's inquiry, he has set forth five stages of institutional decline to explain the preceding phenomenon.

A synopsis of the author's findings is presented in the second section and used as a framework to assess the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon. Concededly, there are limits in applying a twenty-first century, western industry-derived model to examine ancient Near Eastern history. That said, the underlying premise of this essay is that Collins's theoretical construct, when utilized in a judicious manner to examine the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles (the primary data set for this essay; cf. Soggin 1977:332-333), sheds fresh insight on the underlying reasons for the nation's defeat and captivity. The central argument of this article is that the kingdom's journey from zenith to zero approximately corresponds to the five successive stages delineated by Collins. This supposition is borne out in the historical-theological analysis appearing in the third section of the paper.

## 2. The five stages of institutional decline set forth by Collins

The aim of this section is to give a brief synopsis of the five stages of institutional decline set forth by Collins (cf. 2009:15-26). The first phase is 'hubris born of success' (27). In this case, marketplace dominance is regarded as 'deserved' (43) and an 'entitlement' (21). Likewise, all notions of success as being 'fortuitous, fleeting, or even hard-earned in the face of daunting odds' (43) are rejected.

Stakeholders accept the myth that the prosperity of the company will proceed unabated, regardless of what the firm tries or avoids. The leaders of the institution set aside its fundamental core values and purpose, which were the basis of its original success. They also squander the creative talent of the firm by chasing after 'extraneous threats, adventures, and opportunities'. Moreover, instead of seeking to understand the reason why the company had become an industry leader, corporate executives adopt a 'rhetoric of success'. The

unfounded assumption is that the company will remain prosperous because it is inherently ‘superior’ (44) to its rivals.

The second stage is the ‘undisciplined pursuit of more’ (45). This is a situation in which the greatness of the institution is equated with being the largest in the industry. In response to mounting ‘pressure for more growth’ (63), the executives of the firm compulsively go too far and do too much. This dynamic spawns a ‘vicious cycle’ of oversized ambitions in which the organization makes a series of ‘dramatic moves’; and in doing so, it reaches the breaking point. The deteriorating circumstance drives the most talented people from the company, which impairs its ability to ‘execute’ on its plans and sustain ‘excellence’.

Over time, the cost of doing business rises. Also, despite the organization’s attempts to shore up its balance sheet by ‘increasing prices’, the uptick in ‘revenues’ neither stems the loss of cash nor reduces the amount of debt that must be shouldered to continue day-to-day operations. In a misguided attempt to micro-manage the emerging crisis, the institution piles on additional layers of ‘bureaucratic rules’. This not only fosters ‘political turmoil’ (64), but also disrupts and impedes the smooth transition of ‘leadership’ at the top. Moreover, ‘personal interests’ are placed above those of the company. Instead of ‘investing primarily in building for greatness decades into the future’, self-serving administrators attempt to ‘capitalize as much as possible in the short term’.

The third stage is the ‘denial of risk and peril’ (65). At this point in the organization’s downturn, ‘negative data’ (81) is minimized or invalidated, and subordinates insulate those in charge from the ‘grim facts’ (77). Also, corporate executives draw attention to and exaggerate the ‘external praise and publicity’ being heaped on the firm. In this scenario, the decision-making process is no longer characterized by an objective and critical analysis of all the relevant information. Instead, there is the tendency to condone ‘sloppy reasoning’ and entertain baseless ‘opinions’. This state of affairs is exacerbated by a ‘dictatorial management’ (81) style that coerces everyone into agreement and erodes ‘healthy team dynamics’.

Furthermore, institutional leaders deliberately choose to ignore ‘empirical’ facts and ‘accumulated experience’ in order to ramrod through huge, uncalibrated ‘bets’ (68). Because the risks are asymmetrical (that is, the downsides exceed the upsides), the gamble proves to be dicey, brazen, and foolhardy. Then, as ‘setbacks and failures’ (81) grow, the management team sidesteps taking ‘full responsibility’ for their decisions and tries to fault

'external factors or other people'. The entity becomes distracted with seemingly endless attempts to reorganize and resolve discord brought on by 'internal politics'. The members of the leadership team further distance themselves from having to deal with the 'brutal realities' by clutching for 'symbols and perks of executive-class status' (82).

The fourth stage is the 'grasping for salvation' (83). By this point, the board realizes that unless corrective measures are taken, the long-term survival of the institution is imperiled. 'Hasty, reactive behavior' (100) replaces 'calm, deliberate, and disciplined' responses and 'intelligent, well-executed actions' (94). In a desperate attempt to rescue the company, the executive officers seize on 'dramatic, big moves' (100) that they wager will lead to a 'breakthrough'. For instance, the board might approve a 'game changing acquisition' or audaciously embrace an 'exciting new innovation'. When the initial attempt fails, the corporation quickly latches onto another scheme or objective, and does so without giving sufficient forethought and adequate scrutiny to the option being considered. This pattern is repeated as one failed 'strategy' is quickly replaced by another.

In response to the multiple 'threats and setbacks', the management looks for a 'charismatic leader' who can save the institution. Rather than 'setting expectations low', the executives promise too much and fail to deliver on what they pledge. Moreover, a litany of 'buzzwords and taglines' are used to rekindle excitement in demoralized employees. Even when there is an 'initial burst of positive results', this quickly evaporates. Then, as the company fails to rectify the situation, initial hopes are 'dashed'. People inside and outside the organization can see that its 'cash flow and financial liquidity' (101) have been severely compromised. As the viable 'options narrow', unforeseen and uncontrollable factors undercut the ability of administrators to make thoughtful 'decisions'. Eventually, 'confusion and cynicism' infest the organization. On the one hand, the firm's underlying 'purpose' becomes hazy; on the other hand, its 'core values' are 'eroded', which leads stakeholders to view whatever the management says as being empty 'rhetoric'.

The fifth stage is the 'capitulation to irrelevance or death' (103). At this juncture, the organization finds itself in an irreversible death 'spiral' (105). Regardless of what the management does to stop the decline, the company's 'resources' waste away, the availability of 'cash tightens', and 'options' dwindle. In some cases, the leadership continues the struggle to save the institution. Admittedly, while there is the remote possibility they might succeed in reversing the dire straits of the institution, the more likely outcome is that their efforts are doomed to fail. In other cases, the power brokers

conclude that it is futile to resist what seems inevitable and decide to let the firm ‘go bankrupt’. In either case, a company that once dominated its industry fades away and is forgotten.

In stepping back from the five stages of institutional decline set forth by Collins, it is sobering to consider how ‘once-invincible’ (2009:47) titans of industry can ‘self-destruct’. While some firms ‘languish for years’ (23) from one phase of a downturn to the next, others sequence through each of the stages quite rapidly. The hapless fate is comparable to an ocean-going vessel in which a hole is exploded in the side of its hull ‘below the waterline’ (74). Despite the heroic efforts of the crew to patch the hole and save the ship, a torrent of water pours in and plunges everyone and everything on board to the bottom of the sea.

The downturn of major establishments could also be compared to a ‘staged disease’ (5). At first, ‘institutional decline’ is more difficult to recognize but much ‘easier to cure’. Then, as the organizational entity advances through the phases of deterioration, the warning signs become increasingly easier to spot but are far more challenging to remedy. This is a circumstance in which an institution outwardly appears to be strong but is ‘already sick on the inside’. In fact, it is ‘dangerously on the cusp of a precipitous fall’.

## 3. The five stages of decline leading to the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon

### 3.1. Introduction

This essay maintains that the five stages of institutional decline put forward by Collins approximately corresponds to the tragic arc of the covenant community’s implosion as a nation-state. The preceding supposition is the rationale for taking what Collins proposed and using it as a starting point for arriving at a conceptual framework to delineate the phases that led to the defeat and captivity of God’s people after the glory days of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom. What follows, then, is a modified paradigm that becomes the basis for the historical-theological analysis of the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

With respect to the nation’s journey from zenith to zero, it can be seen as occurring in five successive stages. First, the kingdom experienced arrogance as a result of its unparalleled power and wealth. Second, this hubris emboldened the nation to plunge into an undisciplined pursuit of seizing even more worldly success. Third, the kingdom’s obsession to prolong its greatness

clouded the moral judgment of its leaders and resulted in them denying they were taking the covenant community down a treacherous path. Fourth, as the storm clouds of disaster began to appear on the nation's horizon, the civil and religious centers of power resorted to desperate measures to save the kingdom. Fifth, due to a series of God-ordained misfortunes and reversals, the covenant community became dispirited, lost all hope, and were eventually brought down by external forces they could neither control nor defeat.

### 3.2. Stage one

The first stage is akin to the notion of 'hubris born of success' (Collins 2009:27). This is a circumstance in which the Israelites, during the reigns of David and Solomon, reached the zenith of their power (cf. Finkelstein 1963:56; Soggin 1977:332; Wood 1979:13). At first, the covenant community was transformed from a 'tribal confederacy to a dynastic state' (Bright 2000:184). Then, as a result of God's blessing in the lives its inhabitants, the nation came to dominate the surrounding region (cf. Wood 1970:271, 273). The 'international respect and recognition' experienced by God's people remained 'unchallenged by foreign powers until the closing years of Solomon's reign' (Schultz 1970:127).

Prior to David and Solomon, the 12 tribes were a 'loosely organized alliance' (Hill 2005:442) that experienced a recurring cycle of oppression and deliverance under various 'charismatic' leaders (1375–1050 BC; cf. Judg. 1:1–1 Sam. 7; Dumbrell 1990:49).[2] This tumultuous period was followed by the checkered reign of Saul (1050–1010 BC; 1 Sam. 8–31). In accordance with the social and cultural norms prevalent throughout the ancient Near East, Israel's first king was a 'male sovereign ruler' (Heim 2005:610) who exercised the 'right to transmit the royal power to his descendants' (Szikszai 1962a:11). That said, as a monarch Saul proved to be a moral and spiritual failure (cf. Alter 1999:xix; Bright 2000:191-192; Brueggemann 2005b:368; Wood 1970:245-246; 1979:87). He repeatedly compromised God's commands, brought the twelve tribes to the brink of ruin, and ended his life tormented by evil spirits (cf. Heater 1991:140; Waltke 2007:637-638).

In contrast, Saul's divinely chosen successor, David, is described as a 'man after God's own heart' (1 Sam. 13:14; cf. Acts 13:22; Arnold 2005:867; Merrill 1998:209; Wood 1979:173), in which the 'heart' denotes 'will' or 'choice' (Gordon 1997a:505). Dumbrell (1990:57) explains that 'unlike Saul,

2 Unless otherwise noted, the dates used in this essay are based on the timeline appearing in the *Zondervan TNIV Study Bible* (2006:1656-1658).

David is a king by divine choice alone and not by popular demand’. Similarly, Hill and Walton (2009:259) maintain that while ‘people may choose kings, as they did Saul, God chooses dynasties’. Admittedly, David was imperfect in his personal life and kingly reign (1010–970 BC); nonetheless, he stood out as ‘something of a savior figure’ (Williamson 1997a:469) whom others lauded as a ‘shepherd, musician, poet, warrior, politician, [and] administrator’ (Howard 1992a:41). Perhaps David was most renowned for his singleminded devotion to the God of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 18:3; 22:2; Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:232-233; Hasel 1979:669, 671; Klein 1992:999; Payne 1979:876; von Rad 2005:165-166). Indeed, this was the basis for David’s military exploits and political achievements, which included solidifying his control over Judah and Israel, conquering Jerusalem, subduing a number of long-time foes, and establishing a ‘centralized administrative structure’ (Hill 2005:442; cf. 2 Sam. 1–10; Arnold 2005:869; Finkelstein 1963:50-51; Hoppe 1992:561; Kaiser 2008:113; Keller 1982:191; Merrill 1991a:162-163; Satterthwaite 2005:198).

God’s hand in David’s victories is noted in such passages as 2 Samuel 5:10, 12, and 8:14 (cf. Howard 1993:165). Moreover, the Lord’s role is brought into sharp relief by Nathan, the ‘court prophet’ (Gordon 1997b:1176), not long after the king’s adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (cf. 11:1-27; Lasine 2001:105-106). In Nathan’s oracle, he recounted how the Lord had blessed David by choosing him to be Israel’s king and keeping him safe from Saul (12:7). God had also given David the property, harem, and throne of Saul (v. 8). God not only established David as the ruler of Israel and Judah, but also would have given him much more. This possibility was forfeited, however, when the king gratified his sinful passions and murdered an innocent man. David sinned partly because he felt discontent with God’s blessings. Indeed, despite all that the monarch possessed, he still was not satisfied (cf. Arnold 2005:869-870; Dillard and Longman 1994:142; Edersheim 1979:4:195-196; Harrison 2005:196-198; Howard 1992a:44; Howard 1992b:1029; McKeown 2005:717; Myers 1962a:778; Stansell 1994:72; Szikszai 1962b:204).

Centuries earlier, Moses not only anticipated Israel’s occupation in Canaan, but also the success and hubris it would spawn (cf. Brueggemann 2005b:186-187; Gordon 1997b:1173; Heim 2005:616-617; Orlinsky 1977:54; Schultz 1970:136; Szikszai 1962a:13). As he sketched both the delights and the perils of the land, he clearly stated the key to finding God’s best. The chosen people were to obey the commands the Lord had given them and worship Him with fear and trembling (Deut. 8:6; cf. Wood 1979:28, 56). After all, God was bringing them into a land of abundant water: streams, pools, and springs

flowing everywhere (v. 7). Incidentally, that entire generation had spent four decades in the wilderness of Sinai with barely enough water to survive (cf. Waltke 2007:540). To them the divine promise must have sounded like an impossible dream. No longer would they have to march from place to place in search of water.

Moses knew quite well how easy it would be for God's people and leaders to forget Him. This is especially true when things were going well. In the land of plenty and prosperity, they would eat and be satisfied. They would enjoy the fruit of their labors. They might forget that God had given them abundant food and water. Therefore, Moses told the chosen people to praise the Lord for the 'good land' (v. 10). Moreover, all of life in Israel was to be guarded by God's laws. The faithful teaching of His commands would keep His people from forgetting about Him. Additionally, as they remembered and obeyed the Lord's decrees, they would be preserved from falling into sin and idolatry (v. 11; cf. Kaiser 2008:91-92; Klein 1988:4:317-318).

Having said that, if the Israelites failed to remain faithful to God, they would fall into pride and forget the Lord (cf. McConville 2005:630). 'Otherwise' (v. 12) implies doing something different from keeping the Lord's commands. The temptation to disobedience would come with plentiful food, comfortable houses, large flocks and herds, and wealth. When everything was 'multiplied' (v. 13), the people would become arrogant and ignore the Lord, who rescued them from Egypt, the 'land of slavery' (v. 14). While there was nothing inherently wrong with the kingdom's prosperity, if it led to boasting and forgetting God, then such abundance would eventually bring about the nation's downfall (Dillard and Longman 1994:145).

The seeds of the kingdom's demise, while possibly sown later in David's reign, took full root and mushroomed during the tenure of his successor, Solomon (970–930 BC; cf. Bright 2000:211; Heater 1991:117; Sweeney 1995:610; Wood 1970:279; Wood 1979:88). Admittedly, the latter experienced an impressive start to his reign (cf. Finkelstein 1963:54-55; Hays 2003:154; Hoppe 1992:561-562) and eventually became a 'model of royal power' (Brueggemann 2005a:xi). Despite would-be suitors to the throne, David specifically chose Solomon as his heir and directed his son to obey the Lord's commands (1 Kings 2:3; cf. Alter 1999:xiii; Dillard and Longman 1994:174; Heater 1991:144-145; Payne 1979:875; Payne 1988:566; Schultz 1970:142; Scolnic 1994:19). David declared that if Solomon remained devoted to God, He would enable the new monarch to prosper in everything he did, no matter where he went. Also, God would keep His promise to David of maintaining his dynasty as long as his descendants walked with the Lord (v. 4;

cf. 2 Sam 7:11-16; Edersheim 1979:5:56-57; Harrison 2005:200; Hays 2003:159; Hill 2005:450; Myers 1962a:781; Myers 1962b:401; Provan 1997:846, 851; von Rad 2005:162).

Solomon’s auspicious beginning continued when he asked God for wisdom to be a just and prudent ruler over the chosen people (1 Kgs 3:7-9). In turn, the Lord not only gave Solomon a ‘wise and discerning heart’ (3:12), but also greater ‘wealth and honor’ (v. 13) than any other living monarch (cf. Howard 1993:149-150; Merrill 1998:290; Stansell 1994:73; Torijano 2002:11; Wood 1970:289). Israel’s king ‘possesses wisdom in the same sense as he possesses gold, silver, and wives: in huge quantities’ (Lasine 2001:134). It is hard to imagine now, but almost 3,000 years ago there was an astute and stronger monarch on David’s throne in Jerusalem than the rulers in other parts of the Fertile Crescent (cf. Eccl. 1:16; Keller 1982:203-204; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:182; Orlinsky 1977:58, 62-63; Payne 1981:46; Vos 1953:321-322; Wood 1979:305, 323). Nonetheless, at the end of the Davidic-Solomonic era, the Israelites failed at ‘consolidating and maintaining a sovereign entity’ of this ‘significant size and strength’ (Malamat 1982:190). At the outset, the Lord conditioned the length of Solomon’s life on his obedience to the divine ‘decrees’ (1 Kings 3:14), which David had consistently observed. While David lived to be 70, Solomon died at 60 (cf. 2 Sam. 5:4; 1 Kgs 11:42). Thus, even though both reigned 40 years, Solomon’s life may have been shorter than his father’s because Solomon slipped away from his initial commitment to God (cf. Schultz 1970:151).

Perhaps at first the king’s moral drift was obscured by the unparalleled success he enjoyed, as seen by him accomplishing the following: consolidating, fortifying, and presiding over his empire; building a magnificent palace for himself; erecting an impressive temple-complex for the Lord; bringing the ark of the covenant to the Jerusalem shrine; dedicating the temple; establishing international trade relations; and conscripting the descendants of vanquished foes into forced labor (cf. 1 Kgs 4–9; Harrison 2005:201-202; Hasel 1979:669; Ishida 1992:106-107; Klein 1992:999-1000; Millard 1981:5-6). Even an eminent dignitary such as the queen of Sheba admitted that Solomon’s ‘wisdom and wealth’ (10:7) greatly surpassed what others had said about him (cf. Dyrness 1977:191; Edersheim 1979:5:106-108; Keller 1982:229; Myers 1962b:407; Payne 1981:60-61). Indeed, he was the embodiment of ‘juridicial brilliance, administrative efficiency, and encyclopedic knowledge’ (Knoppers 1993:85). It is not too difficult to imagine the king’s court officials, among others, regarding the nation’s dominance of the region as somehow being deserved. Who knows whether Solomon himself began to take his opulence and ‘imperial stature’ (Malamat 1982:191) for granted, and accepted the myth

that his success would continue unabated, regardless of what he did (cf. Wood 1979:329).

Most likely, it was around the midpoint of Solomon's reign when he began to set aside his God-given core values and purpose (cf. Hill and Walton 2009:262, 294; Merrill 1998:298; 311; Wood 1970:299). Perhaps this is why, after the king had dedicated the temple, the Lord 'appeared to him a second time' (9:2) and reminded him of the importance of serving God with integrity and sincerity (v. 4; cf. Knoppers 1990:426; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:195). The Lord also warned Solomon that if he and his successors transgressed the Mosaic covenant (the 'constitution of ancient Israel'; Mendenhall 1975:158) and venerated pagan deities, disaster would overtake them. Specifically, God would remove His people from Canaan, allow the temple to be demolished, and permit Jerusalem to be destroyed (vv. 6-9; Holloway 1992:4:77; Torijano 2002:14). Scripture does not record how the king felt after this encounter with the Lord. Presumably, at least at first, Solomon took to heart what God had said; but then, the pressures of being at the helm of a sprawling empire began to distract the king and weaken his moral resolve. He seems to have embraced the unfounded assumption that his kingdom would remain prosperous due to a sense of divine entitlement.

### 3.3. Stage two

As Solomon moved into the latter half of his reign, he become increasingly characterized by hubris; and gradually, this emboldened him to plunge the kingdom into an undisciplined pursuit of seizing even more worldly success that would eventually bring the nation to its metaphorical ground zero (cf. Scolnic 1994:26). In line with Collins's second stage of institutional decline (cf. 2009:45), Solomon equated the greatness of his empire with being the most powerful nation in the Fertile Crescent. There seems to have been an underlying compulsion that drove him to pursue more and more fame and fortune (cf. Waltke 2007:706). There also appeared to be no limits to his ambitions, especially as he accumulated a vast amount of possessions and slaves (cf. 1 Kings 10:14-29; Eccles 2:1-10). Eventually, though, despite his felicitous beginning, his marriage to many foreign women eroded Solomon's devotion to the Lord and led him down the path of unbridled idolatry (1 Kgs 11:1-8; cf. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:248, 250; Handy 2005:923; Hays 2003:155; McConville 2005:630).

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 records detailed instructions for the future kings of Israel (cf. Brueggemann 2005a:142-143; Dillard 1981:290; Ellul 1972:18; Hays 2003:156-157; Howard 1993:159; Merrill 1998:190; McConville

1997:535-536; von Rad 1962:335; Sweeney 1995:615-616). They were not to accumulate horses, wives, or silver and gold. Neither Kings nor Chronicles faults Solomon for his horses or money, probably because the Lord had promised him unusual wealth as a sign of divine blessing (cf. 1 Kgs 3:13; 10:23-25); nevertheless, 1 Kings moves directly from discussing Solomon’s horses and money to his many wives, for which Scripture holds him accountable (cf. Edersheim 1979:5:109-110; Wood 1979:306). In ancient times, kings often married many wives as a way of allying their dynasties with the noble families of large and small domains all around (cf. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:230-231; Ishida 1992:109; Mendenhall 1975:160). Accordingly, Solomon married into the Moabites and Ammonites to the east, the Edomites and Egyptians to the south, and the Sidonians and Hittites to the north (11:1). All of Solomon’s wives, except his Egyptian princess, belonged to Canaanite peoples whom Israelites were not to marry lest they be led into apostasy (v. 2; cf. Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:1-4).

As God’s Word foretold, the latter outcome is exactly what happened to Solomon. As the king’s affection for his harem increased, his passion for God diminished (cf. Sweeney 1995:612-613). This observation is confirmed by the Hebrew verb rendered ‘love’, which appears only four times in 1 Kings (cf. 3:3; 5:1; 11:1, 2). In 3:3, the verb is used to describe Solomon’s love for the Lord; then in 11:1, the verb is used to describe Solomon’s love for his foreign wives (cf. Brown, Robinson, Driver, and Briggs 1985:12; Köhler, Baumgartner, Stamm, and Richardson 2001, 1:17; Swanson 2001). Interestingly, in 10:9, there is a Hebrew noun based on the preceding verb, in which the queen of Sheba spoke about God’s ‘eternal love for Israel’ (cf. Brown, Robinson, Driver, and Briggs 1985:13; Köhler, Baumgartner, Stamm, and Richardson 2001, 1:18; Swanson 2001). The infinitive construct of the verbal root for the noun describes Solomon’s tenacious love for his harem of 700 royal wives and 300 concubines (11:2-3; cf. Handy 2005:924). In short, the king’s marriages became affairs of the heart as well as affairs of state.

Tragically, for all Solomon’s wisdom, he did not appreciate the risk he incurred by loving a thousand pagan women. He also failed to anticipate the cost to the nation when he accommodated the idolatrous desires of his many wives not far from the glorious temple he had built as the place where the holy name of the Lord would dwell (vv. 5-7; Brueggemann 2005b:288-289; Smith 1993:190-191, 233). Scripture implies that Solomon’s capitulation to idolatry began reluctantly and gradually, especially as he permitted idolatry within his harem. Eventually, the king had shrines for pagan deities built on high places just east of Jerusalem so that his wives could worship in preferred

surroundings (vv. 7-8). Finally, Solomon actually engaged in these pagan rituals with his wives (cf. Hays 2003:162; Mendenhall 1975:164).

It is appalling to consider how far down Solomon plummeted from the moral standard previously set by his father (Knoppers 1993:145). While David was guilty of committing adultery and murder, he always clung to the Lord with great passion. In contrast, Solomon's heart lost its grip on the Lord and his passion shifted to his wives and their gods (Dillard 1981:292; McConville 2005:630; Walsh 1995:471). His life is the epitome of 'squandered potential' (Hays 2003:164). Verses 5 and 7 mention some of the deities worshiped by Solomon's wives. Ashteroth was the fertility goddess of Phoenicia. Baal was her consort, and sacred trees or poles were her symbol. Later Jezebel, another Sidonian princess, would champion her worship in the northern kingdom of Israel (cf. 16:31-33). Molech and Chemosh were Ammonite and Moabite representations of the same cruel god, whose worship occasionally involved child sacrifice (cf. Lev. 18:21; Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:258-259; Curtis 2005:139-142; Harrison 2005:162-166; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:202).

### 3.4. Stage three

At this point in Solomon's reign, he was moving the kingdom into the third state of its decline. Specifically, the monarch's obsession to prolong his empire's greatness clouded his moral judgment, as well as that of his officials. Furthermore, the leadership increasingly rejected the truth that they were taking the covenant community down a treacherous path. The latter mirrors what Collins (2009:65) refers to as the 'denial of risk and peril'. On the one hand, God had made abundantly clear to Solomon and his courtiers the objective ethical standards of His law. On the other hand, despite the abundance of pertinent information concerning what the Lord expected of His people, the king and his subordinates deliberately chose to ignore His Word.

While Solomon's policies 'brought wealth' to some in the kingdom, others were forced into 'slavery'. Concededly, the monarch increased the 'powers of the state', as seen in his extensive 'building projects', armed forces, 'lavish support of the cult', a 'burgeoning private establishment', and a layered 'bureaucracy'; nonetheless, Solomon's endeavors also placed such an unbearable financial 'burden' on the nation (Bright 2000:220-221) that he turned to 'vassal states' to bridge the fiscal canyon (Brueggemann 2005a:70). The deliberate choices he made were comparable to a huge, uncalibrated bet. Expressed differently, his actions were similar to a dicey, brazen, and foolhardy gamble in which the downsides far exceeded the upsides. In a

manner of speaking, he jeopardized the long-term future of the nation by engaging in self-centered, shortsighted practices (cf. DeVries 1985:xxiii; Hill and Walton 2009:295-296; Walsh 1995:486). Even before Solomon’s reign ended, the fabric of his empire began to unravel and would eventually result in its collapse. The decline of the kingdom was not an accident, either. It occurred because God judged the king and his subordinates for their idolatrous and immoral ways (cf. Brueggemann 2005b:236-237; Knoppers 1993:163; Smith 1993:210-211).

According to 1 Kings 11:9, the Lord was displeased with Solomon, for he was no longer wholehearted in his devotion to the ‘God of Israel’. Moreover, because the king intentionally violated the divine prohibition concerning idolatry (v. 10), the Lord declared that He would rip away a portion of the once-united kingdom from Solomon and give it to one of his ‘subordinates’ (v. 11). The introduction of the Hebrew verb rendered ‘tear’ is the first of several occurrences that indicates the finality and forcefulness of the judgment for Solomon’s sin (cf. 11:12, 13, 30, 31; 14:8). What God said to the king matched word for word Samuel’s statement to Saul when his disobedience lost the monarchy for his heirs (cf. 1 Sam 15:28). In particular, Samuel told Saul that the kingdom would pass to his superior; in contrast, the Lord told Solomon that the kingdom would pass to his servant (cf. Klein 1988:318-319; Knoppers 1990:427, 437).

In the later year’s of Solomon’s reign, the once calm political waters he so carefully cultivated became exceedingly turbulent (cf. Hoppe 1992:3:562). We can imagine that against the backdrop of this deteriorating situation, court officials placed personal interests above those of their monarch; and why not, especially since he became increasingly wayward and narcissistic in his disposition. Earlier in Solomon’s tenure, gifted persons would have eagerly flocked to serve under him; but as the sun began to set on his reign, talented administrators and warriors shunned the idea, particularly as one crisis after another deluged the kingdom. Admittedly, some of these hardships were caused by adversaries the Lord raised up against the nation’s monarch, including ‘Hadad the Edomite’ (1 Kings 11:14) and ‘Rezon son of Eliada’ (v. 23; cf. Bright 2000:213-214; Edersheim 1979:5:112-114; Payne 1981:63; Schultz 1970:152). Perhaps Solomon’s most despised nemesis was ‘Jeroboam son of Nebat’ (v. 26; cf. Wood 1979:98).

Jeroboam was from Ephraim, the northern tribe that tended to dominate the others (cf. Dahlberg 1962:840; Soza 2005:544-545). At first, he was an insider, a capable official for a king famed for wisdom, justice, and righteousness (v. 28). In fact, Jeroboam handled his administrative tasks so

well that during the expansion of Jerusalem, Solomon put him in charge of all the Israelite work force from 'the house of Joseph', that is, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. Seale 1982:997). Previously in Solomon's reign, there had been Israelite workers conscripted for one month of work out of every three to move timber from Lebanon to Jerusalem for the temple and palace (cf. 5:13-14). Otherwise, conscripted labor had been limited to resident non-Israelites with Israelite foremen (cf. 9:20-23). The Hebrew noun rendered 'labor force' (11:28), which categorizes the workers from Ephraim and Manasseh, differs from the one used of forced laborers; nonetheless, the noun still denotes wearisome, backbreaking work (cf. Brown, Robinson, Driver, and Briggs 1985:687; Ishida 1992:108; Köhler, Baumgartner, Stamm, and Richardson 2001:1:741; Myers 1962b:403; Walsh 1995:492; Soggin 1982:259; Swanson 2001).

Instead of Jeroboam being energized and content in his assigned responsibilities, he initiated a rebellion against Solomon (11:27; cf. LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:197-198; Leihart 2005:26; Tadmor 1982:250). For this insurrection, the king tried to have Jeroboam killed; but the latter managed to find refuge in Egypt, where he stayed for the remainder of Solomon's reign (v. 40; cf. Evans 1992:742). Jeroboam had much to anticipate, especially in light of what the Lord declared to him through 'Ahijah the prophet' (v. 29). Jeroboam learned that God would divide the kingdom when Solomon's son, Rehoboam, came to the throne, with Jeroboam getting 10 of the tribes (vv. 34-35; cf. McKenzie 2005:452; von Rad 2005:157; Soza 2005:545). The Lord offered Jeroboam the opportunity to establish his family as a permanent dynasty over Israel on the same terms He had offered to David (vv. 37-38). In fact, the Lord offered Jeroboam a chance to rule over all his heart desired (cf. Ellul 1972:121-122; Knoppers 1990:428; Knoppers 1993:200-201; Merrill 1997:4:769; Selman 1994:32). David had that opportunity, too (cf. 2 Sam 3:21). The difference, though, between David and Jeroboam was in what their hearts desired. The ambitious, capable civil servant would prove to have a greedy heart that eventually condemned his dynasty to early extinction (cf. 1 Kings 15:25-30; Dyrness 1977:120; Heater 1991:151; Seale 1982:997).

In concert with the observations made by Collins regarding the decline of once mighty institutions, we can see how the kingdom of David and Solomon became increasingly dictatorial in its management style. The monarch's decision to conscript laborers from among the Israelite population is one example of Solomon's hard-nosed approach (cf. 1 Kgs 12:4; MacLean 1962:29; McKenzie 2005:454). A second case in point would be the king's willingness to use whatever means necessary—including murder (cf. 11:40)—to quell rebellion (cf. Handy 2005:925; Myers 1962b:401; Payne 1988:566-

567; Provan 1997:846). To Solomon’s credit, his tactics enabled him to retain control over the empire. Even so, there was ‘widespread discontent in the north that smoldered under the ashes’ and eventually ‘burst into political flame’ (Soggin 1977:379). In turn, this disrupted and impeded the smooth transition of power from Solomon to his successor, Rehoboam. The latter tried to resolve the discord he faced from the 10 northern tribes by clutching onto the symbols of regal status and authority. The biblical text, however, reveals that he failed in his high-stakes gamble (cf. Edersheim 1979:5:121-122; McKnight 2005:838; Merrill 1997:4:770).

After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam went to Shechem for his public coronation as king of all Israel. Shechem lay in the northern part of the territory of Ephraim (cf. MacLean 1962:29). It was a city steeped in spiritual and historical significance for every Israelite (cf. Donner 1977:384; Heater 1991:123; Ishida 1992:112; Tadmor 1982:253). The northern tribes certainly approached Rehoboam as though they could negotiate some of the terms of their allegiance to him (12:4). Jeroboam had been living in exile in Egypt as the guest of Shishak, the pharaoh, after leading an abortive rebellion against Solomon (cf. 11:26, 40; Burge 2009:32; Dahlberg 1962:840; DeVries 1985:xxii; Harrison 2005:212). When Jeroboam heard that Solomon had died and that Rehoboam would meet with the northern tribes as part of a coronation ritual, Jeroboam came home to Ephraim (12:2; cf. 11:26; Merrill 1998:300). The leaders of the northern tribes asked Jeroboam to join them and help them articulate their grievances to the new king (12:3). They had not forgotten how capably Jeroboam had represented them to Solomon (cf. 11:28; Evans 1992:743; Leihart 2005:27; McKenzie 1987:299-300).

Jeroboam’s presence as a former threat to Solomon’s rule must have compelled Rehoboam and his advisers to take the complaint of the leaders of the northern tribes seriously. Rehoboam probably would have liked to arrest Jeroboam on the spot and execute him. The fact that Rehoboam did not suggests that he knew Jeroboam enjoyed greater support in the north than Rehoboam did (cf. Merrill 1998:321; Wood 1970:303). So the king asked for three days to consider how to respond to the demand made of him through Jeroboam (12:5). Rehoboam had two groups of advisers to appeal to: (1) the experienced, incumbent cabinet of his father, Solomon; and (2) the younger officials who had served him as the crown prince (vv. 6, 8; cf. Edersheim 1979:5:127; Mosiman and Payne 1988:72).

First, Rehoboam consulted his father’s administrators, who knew the affairs of state well. They instantly recognized the justice of the complaint by the northern tribes and urged Rehoboam to win the loyalty of his subjects by

reducing the work projects and the accompanying taxes (v. 7). The experienced leaders wanted Rehoboam to show himself as the king being a servant of Israel, in order to earn the trust as his subjects. Rehoboam foolishly rejected the counsel of his father's officials even before he had an alternative (v. 8). Instead, Rehoboam went to the advisers he had known for years, with confidence that their recommendation would align more closely with his preferences.

Instead of acknowledging the grimness of the situation, these shortsighted bureaucrats flattered Rehoboam's vanity by urging him to be harsher than his father (vv. 10-11). Three days later, the Israelite delegation, with Jeroboam as its leader, returned to keep its appointment with Rehoboam. The latter made the speech of a harsh tyrant rather than a servant-monarch (cf. Hays 2003:166). The elders who had advised the king probably felt despair as Rehoboam acted unwisely. In contrast, his younger confidants may have reveled in the status and power they now seemed to command, especially as they listened to Rehoboam repeat the speech they had composed for him (vss. 12-14). Little did they know that the long-term survival of the kingdom was imperiled (cf. Merrill 1998:321-322; Payne 1981:66).

### 3.5. Stage four

By this point in the tragic arc of the covenant community's implosion as a unified state, God's people were well into the fourth stage of decline. Indeed, the storm clouds of disaster that had first appeared on the nation's horizon during the final days of Solomon's reign were now fully formed. It is at this juncture that Rehoboam and his subordinates resorted to desperate measures to save the kingdom. They never seemed to suspect that the situation had become irreversible (cf. McKnight 2005:839). We can only imagine how alarmed they became when, upon hearing Rehoboam's answer, Jeroboam and the northern tribes left Solomon's successor to ponder the folly of his ridiculous posturing about his great power (cf. Donner 1977:385; Howard 1997:1128; McKenzie 2005:452; Seale 1982:997). Ironically, the once 'united monarchy ended up where it began', that is, with the 'Hebrew tribes in disarray and clamoring for new leadership' (Hill 2005:450).

As the evidenced-based research of Collins suggests, a predicament like the one facing Rehoboam never happens overnight. It is the result of years—even decades—of military, economic, and political change (cf. Merrill 1998:311). In turn, the negative impact of a such an emerging crisis is compounded by errors in policy and a mismanagement of human and material resources. The preceding observations notwithstanding, there seems to be a watershed

moment when long-simmering grievances reach a breaking point and bring about a dramatic loss of confidence. In the case of Rehoboam, that happened when he refused to listen to the people; and this provoked them to reject him as their ruler (vv. 15-16; cf. 2 Chr. 10:1-16; Burge 2009:34; Mosiman and Payne 1988:72; Payne 1988:567).

In the heat of the moment, Rehoboam exchanged ‘calm, deliberate, and disciplined’ responses with ‘hasty, reactive behavior’ (Collins 2009:100). Then, in a desperate attempt to salvage a botched situation, the king remained at Shechem and sent out Adoniram to gather the laborers for the next season of work on royal projects. Evidently, Rehoboam expected many, if not all, of the Israelites to fall into line obediently behind the decrees and officials of the central government. Instead, the rebels stoned Adoniram (1 Kgs 12:18; cf. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:251). He must have been a rather elderly man, having served Solomon for 40 years and David for some time before that as the director of forced labor (cf. 2 Sam. 20:24; 1 Kgs 4:6; cf. Wood 1979:293). After killing Adoniram, the rebels marched on Shechem, which forced Rehoboam to flee for his life by chariot to Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:18; cf. Donner 1977:385). When word got around that Jeroboam had returned from Egypt and led a successful forced labor and tax rebellion against Rehoboam, a popular assembly gathered and asked him to become king of Israel (v. 20). It is likely that the assembly met in Shechem, for that is the site Jeroboam first made his capital (cf. v. 25).

Now only one two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, remained loyal to Rehoboam and the dynasty of David (cf. Knoppers 1990:436; Schultz 1970:169; Wood 1979:333). (Jerusalem was right on the border between Judah and Benjamin, so many of the southern towns of Benjamin were more closely tied to Jerusalem than to the north.) This dramatic reversal of fortune happened because God had purposed to tear 10 tribes from the house of David in fulfillment of the prophecy by Ahijah to Jeroboam (v. 15; cf. 11:29-36). Rehoboam and his advisers on one side, and Jeroboam and the leaders of the northern tribes on the other, acted in keeping with their self-serving characters and short-sighted interests. At the same time, these leaders and events precisely fulfilled the sovereign will of God (cf. Duke 2005:178-179; Holloway 1992:4:77; Seow 1999:3:4-5).

The situation could not have looked more bleak for Rehoboam. He was now desperate to find a way to regain the status and power that had slipped through his hands. This prompted him to make the audacious decision to put down the rebellion of the northern tribes before they could organize effective resistance. Thus, as soon as he arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered all of the troops of

Judah and the loyal faction of Benjamin. Rehoboam had a force of 180,000 soldiers to crush the rebels (12:21; cf. Edersheim 1979:5:131). The king's plan mirrors that of modern-day companies in the fourth stage of institutional decline. In the case of Rehoboam, his decision was going to be the dramatic, bold move that would lead to a 'breakthrough' in his state of affairs (Collins 2009:100).

The Lord, however, overruled Rehoboam's plan when He sent a message through Shemaiah, a prophet who appears only in Kings at this point (v. 22). The Chronicler recorded another of his spoken prophecies concerning a later battle with the Egyptians (cf. 2 Chr. 12:5-8), as well as mentioned a written account Shemaiah made of Rehoboam's reign (v. 15). The Lord addressed Rehoboam in Shemaiah's prophecy as 'king of Judah' (1 Kgs 12:23). God also spoke directly to the people of Judah and Benjamin, along with the remnant of northern tribes in Judah. The Lord commanded both king and people to refrain from going to war against their 'brothers, the Israelites' (v. 24). In this message, God Himself distinguished Judah as a nation from Israel as a nation. Next, the Lord told Rehoboam and all the people remaining subject to him that He was ultimately responsible for the division of David and Solomon's domain into two kingdoms (cf. Bright 2000:231). On the basis of Shemaiah's word from the Lord, the soldiers who were ready for civil war obeyed God by disbanding and going home (cf. 2 Chr. 10:18–11:4).

This dramatic turn of events after the death of Solomon was just the first in a series of God-ordained misfortunes and reversals to be experienced by the covenant community (cf. Orlinsky 1977:75; Payne 1989:316-317). To be sure, Judah survived as an independent nation for another 344 more years (from 930–586 BC). In fact, this was considerably longer than the northern kingdom of Israel, which remained intact for only 208 more years (from 930–722 BC). Whereas all the rulers of Israel were evil, Judah cycled through a series of upright and wayward monarchs (cf. Hill and Walton 2009:289-290). The more noble-minded kings were able to rekindle the interest of the people in abiding by the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant; yet despite the efforts of these rulers, they failed to bring about lasting moral reform (cf. Brueggemann 2005b:614-615; Kaiser 2008:189; von Rad 1962:343).

With each successive generation, the viable options for God's people increasingly narrowed; and as they strayed further from the decrees recorded in the Mosaic law, the Lord allowed circumstances to overtake them that neither the rulers nor their subjects could have foreseen or controlled (cf. Dillard and Longman 1994:161; Hobbs 1985:xxxvii; Patterson and Austel 1989:4:9; Seow 1999:3). God's intention was to get His chosen people to

repent of their idolatrous and immoral ways (cf. 2 Kgs 17:7-23; 21:1-15; 22:15-20; 2 Chr. 33:1-9; 34:23-28; 36:15-21; Gray 1970:41; Jacob 1958:194; von Rad 2005:160; McConville 1997:536; Williamson 1982:25, 32). To use of the language of Collins (2009:101), the Lord wanted the remnant to reclaim their underlying 'purpose' for existing as a nation and embrace once again the 'core values' embedded in His law (cf. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen 2005:265-266; Howard 1993:198, 202; Selman 1994:27-28; Allen 1999:302-303). Regrettably, the covenant community rebelled against God and experienced His judgment at the hand of their enemies (e.g. the Assyrians and Babylonians, among others; cf. LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:212; von Rad 2005:155-156; Thompson 1994:30-31).

### 3.6. Stage five

By now, God's people were far along in the fifth and final stage of their demise as an intact covenant community. We can only guess at how dispirited and hopeless the beleaguered remnant felt as one adversary after another pounded them (cf. Brueggemann 2005b:149; Payne 1989:314). At first, various godly kings of Judah struggled to save the nation (cf. DeVries 1985:xxv; Heater 1991:152-154; Provan 1997:847); but in a manner of speaking, the ship of state's hull had taken far too many catastrophic hits 'below the waterline' (Collins 2009:74). This meant that no amount of heroics would prevent the once glorious kingdom of David and Solomon from capsizing and sinking. Indeed, it was the Lord who allowed His spiritually bankrupt people to be brought down by external forces they could neither direct nor defeat (cf. Allen 1999:302; Gray 1970:40; Selman 1994:30, 36, 60; Waltke 2007:548). He saw the moral cancer that for centuries had been eating away at the soul of the covenant community. By the time God's people were defeated by their enemies and taken into captivity, their nation was already morally rotten to the core and beyond salvaging (cf. Kaiser 2008:129; Patterson and Austel 1989:9; Payne 1981:116; von Rad 1962:336; von Rad 2005:155-156; Seow 1999:6; Williamson 1982:25).

## 4. Postscript

As counterintuitive as it might seem, the exile of the remnant to Babylon was the beginning of their road to spiritual renewal and national rebirth (cf. Hobbs 1985:xxxiv); and paradoxically, it was there, in that foreign land inhabited by pagans, that the chosen people became reacquainted with the stipulations recorded in Mosaic law (cf. Duke 2005:171; Selman 1994:51). Ironically, it was also in Babylon that the Jews recommitted themselves to the Lord as His

covenant community. Thus, by the time the first group of exiles returned to Judah under Zerubbabel (538 BC; cf. 1 Chr. 3:17-19; Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh. 12:1; Hag 1:1, 12, 14; Matt 1:12; Luke 3:27), they were determined not to let anyone or anything prevent them from remaining wholehearted in their devotion to God (cf. Payne 1989:312-313; Thompson 1994:43-44; Waltke 2007:549; Yamauchi 2005:293).

The latter observation is played out in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Dyrness 1977:123; Jacob 1958:274; Kaiser 2008:226; Longman 2005:489-490; Merrill 1991b:193-194; Satterthwaite 1997:636; Williamson 1997b:980-981). Ezra reveals that for the Jews returning to Jerusalem, the challenge was to rebuild not only their city, but also their relationship with the Lord. Chapters 1 through 6 deal with the restoration of the temple, while chapters 7 through 10 are concerned with the reformation of the covenant community. Nehemiah records how not only the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, but also how the people were renewed in their faith in God. Chapters 1 through 7 recount how the city's walls were successfully reconstructed, despite the stiff opposition from Judah's foes. Then, in chapters 8 through 13, the spiritual restoration of the Jews is highlighted.

Ezra and Nehemiah make it clear that God did not restore His people only one time. Rather, He repeatedly, constantly, and continually led them to renew their commitment to Him. In fact, the Lord sent a number of prophets and leaders to teach, motivate, and guide the remnant to live uprightly. Despite their unfaithfulness at times, God accomplished His will. The return from exile, the rebuilding of the temple, the restoration of Jerusalem's walls, the repopulation of the city, and the repeated reformation of the Israelites were clearly the work of the Almighty. In the end, His name was glorified!

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# A grammatical exposition of 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Kevin G. Smith[1]

**Abstract**

*The most definitive biblical text on the nature, function, and purpose of scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, contains several difficulties that have made it the subject of much scholarly debate. The purpose of this article is to examine the Greek text phrase by phrase, exploring the difficulties and evaluating possible solutions. Concerning the nature of scripture, the first three words are best translated 'all scripture is God-breathed', although 'every scripture is God-breathed' remains possible. The inspired nature of the scriptures is presupposed by both these translations, and even by other interpretive options. Furthermore, it is proper to consider both copies and translations as inspired scriptures, while recognizing that in so doing we are referring to their true character rather than their absolute character. The function of scripture is represented by four prepositional phrases, which portray its functions as guiding believers towards correct belief and behaviour, while exposing wrong beliefs and behaviours. The ultimate purpose of scripture, however, is conveyed not by the four prepositional phrases in verse 16, but by the hina clause in verse 17—the word of God is given to prepare the man of God for every good work.*

## 1. Introduction

Not only is 2 Timothy 3:16-17 the most definitive biblical statement on the nature and role of the scriptures, but it is also a passage with several well-known difficulties. The purpose of this article is to examine the Greek text phrase by phrase, exploring the difficulties and evaluating possible solutions.

The context for Paul's[2] definitive statement regarding the scriptures is a warning about the 'difficult times' which will characterize 'the last days' (2

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Tim. 3:1). People will abandon sound doctrine (see 4:3-4), and wickedness will be rampant. This description of Timothy's ministry context occupies verses 1-9. From verse 10, Paul addresses Timothy about how to be a faithful minister in such times. He twice uses the strong 'but you' (σὺ δέ, vv. 10, 14) to contrast Timothy with the prevailing spirit of the age. In verses 10-13, Paul reminds Timothy about his (Paul's) own teaching and example (vv. 10-13), which illustrates the principles that the godly will suffer and the wicked will continue to degenerate. In this context of the general degeneration of society (vv. 1-9) and the apostle's own teaching and example (vv. 10-13), Paul urges his disciple to stand firm for Christ, to swim against the current of society (vv. 14-17). He urges Timothy to stand firm in the truths he has known since childhood, truths grounded in 'the sacred writings' (τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα, v. 15). Verses 16-17 elaborate on the allusion to 'the holy writings'.

I shall examine the text in three logical divisions. The controversial first three words, 'All scripture is God-breathed' (πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος) make a statement about *the nature of scripture*. The four prepositional phrases that follow describe *the functions of scripture*. Finally, the ἵνα clause in verse 17 states *the purpose of scripture*.

## 2. The nature of scripture

The opening words of 2 Timothy 3:16 are notoriously problematic. πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος has been the subject of endless discussion. The main difficulties are as follows:

- Should the singular πᾶσα be translated 'all' or 'every'?
- In terms of its meaning, is θεόπνευστος active (God breathed the scriptures) or passive (the scriptures breathe God) in force?
- In terms of its relationship to γραφή, is θεόπνευστος in an attributive ('every God-breathed Scripture') or a predicative ('every Scripture is God-breathed') position?

Despite extensive technical analysis of the intricacies of the passage (see Bennetch 1949; Roberts 1961; Miller 1965; House 1980; Goodrick 1982), no consensus has emerged.

[2] Insofar as it affects the interpretation of the text, this study accepts the traditional view of the authorship, date, and occasion of the Pastoral Epistles, i.e. 2 Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy shortly before the apostle's death. The traditional view continues to be ably defended by scholars such as Guthrie (1990; 1996), Knight (1992; 1995), Mounce (2000), Fairbairn (2002), Carson and Moo (2005), and Towner (2006; cf. 1994).

The word γραφή occurs 50 times in the Greek New Testament (NA27). Although in extra biblical Greek it could refer simply to a piece of writing (BDAG, s.v. §1), in the New Testament it is a technical term for ‘sacred scripture’ (§2). Among the 50 occurrences, 30 are singular, typically referring to an individual passage from the Old Testament, although there are some passages in which it appears to be a collective singular alluding to ‘scripture as a whole’ (§2bβ). Regardless of how the relationship between γραφή and θεόπνευστος is interpreted (see below), γραφή alone refers to sacred, inspired writings.

The obvious referent of γραφή is the Old Testament. This is strengthened by the fact that verses 16-17 are an amplification of what Paul said about value of ‘the sacred writings’ (τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα, v. 15), an unambiguous reference to the Old Testament as a collection.

Might Paul have included completed parts the New Testament in his conception of ‘scripture’? Forty-seven of the 50 occurrences of γραφή refer unambiguously and exclusively to the Old Testament. Two, however, hint that the teachings of Christ and the writings of Paul were already considered as ‘scripture’ in the early decades of the church. First, in 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul writes, ‘For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain”, and “The worker deserves his wages.”’ The latter is a verbatim quote from Luke 10:7, which Paul places alongside Deuteronomy 25:4, both in the category of ‘the scripture says’. Second, 2 Peter 3:15-16 speaks about how people distort Paul’s letters, as they do ‘the other scriptures’ (τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς, v. 16). Thus Peter places Paul’s letters among the scriptures. ‘Since the early church viewed the words of Jesus as fully authoritative, it would not have been a large step for the early Christians to accept the writings of his apostles as equally authoritative with the OT’ (Mounce 2000:569).

Moller (2008:66-68) draws attention to Timothy’s familiarity with Paul and his gospel. Timothy is mentioned by name in ten of Paul’s letters, and would have been intimately acquainted with Paul’s claims regarding the divine origin of his message (e.g. Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:1-13). Paul claimed to be an authoritative interpreter of the new revelation which came through Jesus Christ. There is every chance that Timothy could think of some of his writings as being ‘scripture’. It does not seem a stretch to imagine that Paul and Timothy might have conceived of extant portions of the New Testament as scripture.

In any event, the point is somewhat moot, as Knight (1992:448) explains well:

> Looking at the question from a later historical perspective, it can be said that the unqualified statement that 'all scripture is God-breathed' would apply to all the writings that belong to the category of γραφή, including those that were not extant when Paul wrote. Paul's statement is not that 'these' certain writings are God-breathed and no others, but that 'all' γραφή are God-breathed. The way in which he makes this affirmation gives us warrant to relate that truth to 'all' of the NT, since it is recognized to be γραφή (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16-17, where this has already taken place in the NT age).

We can therefore conclude that γραφή in verse 16 refers explicitly to the Old Testament, and perhaps implicitly to extant portions of the New Testament which were known and accepted at the time of writing. By implication, it can be applied to the whole Bible, since the later New Testament writings were also divinely inspired γραφαί (Stark 1970:5; Grudem 1994:74; Mounce 2000:569).

Goodrick (1982:481-483) includes an excellent discussion of whether only the autographs can be called γραφή, showing that both *copies* and *translations* are referred to as 'scripture'. 'Several times in the NT the Bible-in-hand is inescapably identified as *graphē*' (p. 482; e.g. Luke 4:21; John 5:39; Acts 8:32; 17:2, 11). In each of these cases, Jesus and the New Testament writers referred to existing copies of the Old Testament writings as γραφαί. Goodrick also points out that there are fourteen times when the New Testament quotes from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, yet explicitly identifies the source as γραφαί. Goodrick's conclusions are worth quoting:

> Furthermore there is no way that anyone can claim that any one of these scrolls was completely free from copyist's error, and yet they were *graphē,* and every *graphē* is inspired (p. 482).

> Although we must be quick to admit that its absolute character is lost when we leave the autographs and turn to the Bible-in-hand, we must insist that its true character is not lost (p. 483).

We may conclude that Paul's reference to 'scripture' in 2 Timothy 3:16 refers primarily to the Old Testament, but by extension applies equally to the New Testament. Furthermore, it is proper to consider both copies and translations

as inspired scriptures, while recognizing that in so doing we are referring to their true character rather than their absolute character.

In the singular, πᾶς typically means *every*, ‘emphasizing the individual members of the class denoted by the noun’ (BDAG, s.v. πᾶς, §1). This is especially so when it modifies an anarthrous noun. Thus ‘every scripture’ would ordinarily be the expected translation. If γραφή is understood as a collective noun referring to the scripture as a collection, then ‘all’ or ‘the whole’ becomes the natural rendering. Roberts’s (1961:35) claim that the singular γραφή ‘is always used of the individual passage and never in the collective sense’ is overstated. Among the 30 singular occurrences of γραφή, John 20:9, Galatians 3:22, and 2 Peter 1:20 clearly refer to ‘scripture’ as a collective, while John 2:22, 10:35, and 17:12 might also be interpreted this way. When the singular ἡ γραφή refers to a specific scripture, the context makes this clear. So it remains quite possible that πᾶσα γραφή in 2 Timothy 3:16 is an elaboration of ‘the sacred writings’ (τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα) in verse 15, and should be understood as ‘all scripture’. While ‘every scripture’ seems the more natural reading of the Greek text in isolation, the way Paul elaborates about the uses of scripture later in verse 16 suggests that he was thinking of ‘all scripture’, since it is ‘all scripture’ which achieves the four purposes he lists; it would not be true to claim that ‘every scripture’ can achieve all four. At the end of the day, it matters little since ‘if “every scripture” is inspired, then “all scripture” must be inspired also’ (Hendriksen 1957:301).

Θεόπνευστος is a rare word, used only here in the New Testament, and seldom in the centuries following. Unfortunately, we must resort to etymology to understand such rare words. Θεόπνευστος is a combination of the noun θέος (‘God’), the verb πνέω (‘to breath [out]’), and the adjectival suffix -τος. Zodhiates (2000:§2315) suggests ‘the formation of the word should be traced to *empnéō*, inspire (Acts 9:1), urged by the *pneúma*’, here the Spirit of God. The challenge is to understand the relationship between the nominal and verbal roots. Does scripture breathe out God (active sense)? Or did God breath out scripture (passive sense)? Barth’s view (in Runia 1962:131) that it means both—God breathed out the scriptures and the scriptures breath out God—may may well be theologically true, but it is not exegetically valid for those committed to single-sense, author-intended interpretation. This question can be answered with a high degree of confidence. Compound verbal adjectives beginning with θεο- and ending in -τος follow a distinct pattern. The ending -τος is suffixed to the aorist passive stem, and θέος serves as the agent of the verbal action (see House 1980:57-58; Goodrick 1982:484; Mounce 2000:566). This favours the passive sense. The idea is analogous to 2 Peter 1:21, namely, the Holy Spirit breathed out the scriptures.

Now, is θεόπνευστος attributive, meaning 'every God-breathed scripture', or predicative, 'every scripture is God-breathed'? Roberts (1961) strains to show that in all twenty-one occurrences of πᾶς + noun + adjective (no articles) in the New Testament, the adjective stands in an attributive relationship to the noun. However, his examples are unconvincing since only one[3] occurs in a verbless clause where there is potential for ambiguity; all the others occur with expressed verbs or in prepositional phrases, and are thus of no help in establishing a principle which might apply to 2 Timothy 3:16. Common sense must surely prevail over such attempts to establish a grammatical rule to guide the interpretation of verse 16 (see Goodrick 1982:483). The two adjectives in the expression θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος must surely stand in the same relationship to γραφή, and since ὠφέλιμος is predicative, presumably so is θεόπνευστος. 'Every God-breathed scripture is also profitable' may be grammatically possible, but it feels terribly convoluted. 'Every scripture is God-breathed and profitable' is a much more intuitive reading of the text.[4]

In conclusion, πᾶσα γραφή could mean 'every scripture', but Paul seems to have 'all scripture' in mind. θεόπνευστος is most likely passive in meaning, hence 'God-breathed', and stands in a predicate relationship to γραφή. Therefore, 'all scripture is God-breathed' is the likeliest rendering in English.

## 3. The functions of scripture

Owing partly to their ambiguities and largely to modern interest in the inspiration of scripture, most scholarly debate has focused on the first three words of verse 16, namely, πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος. Paul's own emphasis, however, is on the rest of the passage. The inspiration of scripture was not disputed. Paul's aim was not to assert the inspiration of the scriptures, but to elucidate the value of the inspired scriptures. In his opening assertion, the stress falls not on θεόπνευστος ('God-breathed'), but on ὠφέλιμος ('useful'); not on God's inspiration of the scriptures, but on his intention for them.

The semantic relationship between the two adjectives in the assertion 'every scripture is God-breathed and useful' is one of grounds-INFERENCE. The scriptures are useful *because* they are God-breathed. We could paraphrase: 'Every scripture is God-breathed; therefore, every scripture is useful …'. Proof that the focus is on scripture's usefulness lies in the fourfold elaboration of its usefulness:

[3] That is, one other than 2 Timothy 3:16.

[4] I should hasten to add that although I believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the scriptures and the inerrancy of the autographs, I do not consider 'every God-breathed scripture' as an assault on the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

Every scripture is useful
for teaching
for rebuking
for correcting
for training in righteousness

The Greek text has a fourfold repetition of πρός with the accusative. Here πρός functions as a marker of purpose (Louw and Nida 1989:§89.60), signalling the immediate purposes of the inspired scriptures; the ultimate purpose is indicated by the ἵνα clause in verse 17. Since a single πρός followed by four nouns would suffice to convey the basic meaning, repeating ‘for’ with each noun is rhetorically significant. It serves to focus attention individually on each function of the inspired scriptures (Goodrick 1982:485).

The four immediate purposes are akin to four functions or uses of scripture. *Teaching* (διδασκαλία; 15 times in the Pastoral Epistles) refers to the content of sound doctrine. Scripture is useful for instructing people in correct beliefs because it contains revealed truth. The meaning of *rebuking* (ἐλεγμός) and *correcting* (ἐπανόρθωσις) is difficult to pinpoint, since both terms occur only here in the New Testament. Büschel (1995:222) suggests that ἐλεγμός means ‘the rebuking of the sinner’, while Preisker (1995:727) interprets ἐπανόρθωσις as ‘“amendment,” i.e. the restoration that means salvation’. However, Knight’s (1992:449) proposal seems more promising. He suggests that the four commands in 4:2 correspond to the four functions in 3:16.

| **1 Timothy 3:16** | **1 Timothy 4:2** |
|---|---|
| for teaching | preach the word |
| for rebuking (ἐλεγμός) | rebuke (ἐλέγχω) |
| for correcting | correct |
| for training in righteousness | exhort |

If this mapping of terms is correct, then *rebuking* refers to ‘correcting error’, while *correcting* is ‘most likely with reference to conduct’ (Knight 1992:449). Thus the scriptures are useful for correcting both doctrinal and behavioural error. *Training in righteousness* (παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ) denotes guiding believers regarding how to live righteously.

Therefore, the four functions of scripture form a chiastic quartet in which the first two deal with belief and the last two with behaviour, the frames being positive and the centre negative. This is a graphic portrayal of these observations:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | *teaching* | right belief | positive |
| | B *rebuking* | wrong belief | negative |
| | B` *correcting* | wrong behaviour | negative |
| A` | *training* | right behaviour | positive |

'The profit of Scripture relates to both creed and conduct' (Stott 1984:103). The NEB paraphrase captures the sense quite well: 'for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living'.

## 4. The purpose of scripture

The ultimate purpose of scripture is expressed by the telic ἵνα clause in verse 17: 'so that the man of God may be *competent*, *equipped* for every good work' (ESV, emphasis added).[5] The primary reason God inspired the scriptures, according to these verses, is to equip his people for life and service. The major stress does not fall on the four functions (intermediate purposes) of scripture. Timothy is to keep his priorities in order. Preaching the scriptures is not an end in itself; equipping people for every good work is central. The word of God is given for the benefit of the man of God.

In preaching and teaching this verse, we often inadvertently put a period after verse 16, implying that God inspired the scriptures so that we might teach, rebuke, correct, and train. In so doing, we confuse the intermediate purposes (functions) for the main purpose, and misrepresent Paul's meaning.

The statement of ultimate purpose in verse 17 consists of a main (ἵνα) clause, amplified by an attendant circumstance participial clause. The word order of the two clauses is carefully crafted to draw attention to a play on the cognate words ἄρτιος and ἐξαρτίζω. In the Greek text, ἄρτιος is displaced to the front of the first clause, and ἐξηρτισμένος to the end of the sentence. Their displacement not only sets them positions of prominence, but also creates a frame around the ἵνα clause.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ἵνα | **ἄρτιος** | ᾖ ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος | |
| | | πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν | **ἐξηρτισμένος**. |

The two focal words are cognate terms. The verb ἐξαρτίζω is formed from the preposition ἐκ the adjective ἄρτιος (Strong 1996:§1822). Both terms describe

[5] An alternate interpretation takes the ἵνα clause as expressing the result of scripture's usefulness in believers' lives. On this interpretation, the four πρός phrases express the purpose of the scriptures, and ἵνα the result of their usefulness.

'the man of God' as being prepared, equipped, or competent for a task or function.

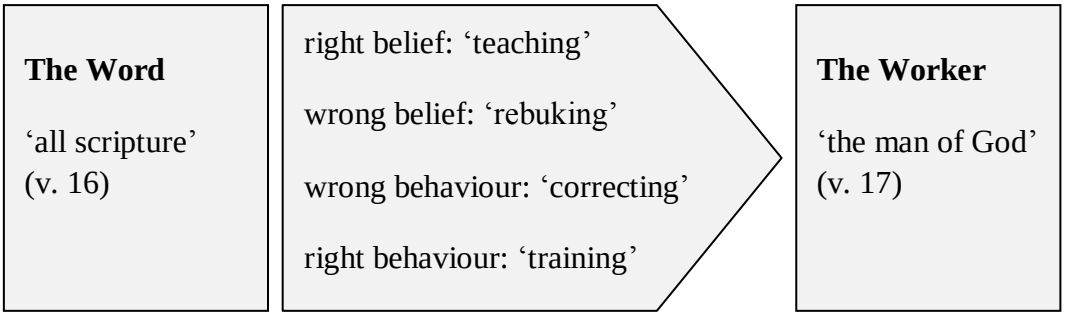
The exact phrase 'every good work' (πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν) also occurs in 1 Timothy 5:10, 2 Timothy 2:21, and Titus 3:1 in the Pastorals. The plural 'good works' (ἔργων ἀγαθῶν) is found in 1 Timothy 2:10. Throughout the Pastoral Epistles, ἔργον ἀγαθὸν is used interchangeably with forms of ἔργον καλόν (see 1 Tim. 5:10), which are found in 1 Timothy 3:1, 5:10, 5:25, and 6:18, and in Titus 2:7, 2:14, 3:1, 3:8, and 3:14. In all instances (except 1 Tim. 3:1), 'good works' refers to exemplary conduct befitting a person's duties towards God and others. The point in 1 Timothy 3:16-17 is that the scriptures equip the man of God to do what God wants in all circumstances; they equip him by instructing him as to what God expects (Knight 1992:450). Since the entire paragraph from 3:10 is addressed to Timothy (see the σὺ δέ in verses 10 and 14), the immediate referent of subject 'the man of God' must be Timothy himself, but the truth expressed is equally true for all God's people.

In summary, then, the primary purpose for which God gave the inspired the scriptures was to equip his people for every good work. The scriptures reveal his will to his people, thereby equipping them to do what pleases him.

## 5. Conclusion

It is likely that the phrase πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος means 'all scripture is God-breathed', declaring scripture collectively to be inspired by God. Whereas modern debate rages around the inspiration of scripture, this was not a point of dispute in Paul's day. His emphasis lies not so much on declaring scripture to be inspired, as on outlining the functions and purpose of inspired scripture. In other words, his stress falls less on *God-breathed* than on *profitable*. The ultimate purpose for which God inspired the scriptures was to equip his people for good works. The scriptures achieve this equipping by teaching people what they should and should not believe, and how they should and should not behave.

The following diagram, which has been adapted from Wilkinson (1988), sums up the conclusions of the preceding analysis. The Word is given to equip the worker. It does so by providing God's instruction regarding belief and behaviour.

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# Revisiting Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* in the light of its renewed impact on emergent theology

Noel B. Woodbridge[1]

Moltmann J 2009. *Theology of hope: on the ground and the implications of Christian eschatology*. Translated from German by J Leitch. Minneapolis: Ausgburg Fortress.

## 1. Introduction to the book and the author

The most influential work by Jürgen Moltmann is his book, *Theology of Hope*, first published in English in 1967. Amid the optimism and turmoil of the 1960s, this book by a little-known German theologian burst upon the scene. Not only did Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* reintroduce the doctrine of Christian hope in academic theological discussion, but it also thrust its author to worldwide renown. *Theology of Hope* seized the attention of the public as well as theologians. It was even acclaimed in a front-page article in The New York Times: 'God Is Dead Doctrine Losing Ground to "Theology of Hope"', announced the headline. Clearly, Moltmann's vision of hope connected with the spirit of the times.

More than forty years later, in a world that has changed in so many different ways, the impact of *Theology of Hope* continues to be felt. This book is unquestionably one of the most important books in recent Protestant theology. It has already created a considerable stir in Europe, and is now rapidly gaining recognition throughout the world as the major statement to date of a new eschatological theology which emphasises the critical and revolutionising effect of Christian hope upon the thought, institutions, and conditions of life today. This book is taught in universities and seminaries throughout the world, and its ideas have dramatically shaped our understanding of eschatology, one of the most important Christian doctrines.

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Jürgen Moltmann is a German theologian and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany. In 1944, his secular education was interrupted when he was drafted by the German army. He was sent to the front lines in the Belgian forest. He surrendered in 1945 to the first British soldier he met.

For the next few years (1945-1947) Moltmann was confined as a prisoner of war and moved from camp to camp. His experience as a prisoner of war had a powerful impact on his life, as it was in the camps that he had time to reflect upon the devastating nature of World War II, developing a great sense of remorse. In July of 1946, he was transferred to Northern Camp, a British prison located near Nottingham. The camp was operated by the YMCA. It was here that Moltmann met many students of theology. He observed that his fellow prisoners, who had hope, fared the best. After the war, it seemed to him that Christianity was ignoring the promised hope it offered for a future life.

Upon his return to Germany in 1948, at the age of 22, Moltmann began to pursue theological training at Göttingen University, where he was strongly influenced by Karl Barth's dialectical theology. In 1952 he received his doctorate from the university under the direction of his doctoral supervisor, Otto Weber, who helped him to develop his eschatological perspective of the church's universal mission.

From 1952 to 1957 Moltmann was the pastor of the Evangelical Church of Bremen-Wasserhorst. In 1958 Moltmann became a theology teacher at an academy in Wuppertal, which was operated by the Confessing Church, and in 1963 he joined the theological faculty of Bonn University. He was appointed Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen in 1967 and remained there until his retirement in 1994.

## 2. Summary of the book

Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* constitutes a groundbreaking work in theology. In his work, Moltmann describes Christian hope in terms of a challenge to both the desperation and official optimism of the Reconstruction that tried to return to 'the glory days of the past' rather than live in the hope of a entirely new future that comes from God, who lives not so much 'above us' but 'in front of us', and who draws us into his own future for the world. Moltmann skilfully incorporates elements of Bloch's *Principle of Hope*, Hegel's *Speculative Good Friday*, and the *Death of God* theology to introduce the Christian hope to the post-war Europe and to the world. Clearly, Moltmann's

*Theology of Hope* has earned itself a prominent position among the greatest works of theology in the twentieth century.

The book is entitled *Theology of Hope*, not because it sets out to present eschatology as a separate doctrine, competing with the well-known textbooks on this topic. Rather, it aims to show how theology can be derived from hope when considered from an eschatological perspective. For this reason, the book enquires into the ground of the Christian hope and into the responsible exercise of this hope in thought and action in today's world. Moltmann proposes that Christian hope should be the central motivating factor in the life and thought of the church and of each Christian.

For Moltmann, the whole of creation longs for the renewal by the 'God of Hope'. Empowered by this hope, the Christian's response should include the mission of the church to all nations, the hunger for righteousness in the world, and love for the true life of the endangered and damaged creation. The church should therefore be seen as the people of hope, who continually experience the God who is present in his promises. The coming kingdom provides the church with a much broader view of reality than merely a private vision of personal salvation. The coming kingdom also creates a confronting and transforming vision of the mission of the church as the people of God.

## 3. Strengths of the book

### 3.1. Christian faith is understood as hope for the future of man and this earth

Moltmann is known as one of the leading proponents of the theology of hope. He believes that God's promise to act in the future is more important than the fact that he has acted in the past. What is implied by this focus on the future, however, is not *withdrawal* from the world in the hope that a better world will somehow evolve, but *active participation* in the world in order to assist in the coming of that better world.

Moltmann understands Christian faith as essentially hope for the future of man and this earth promised by the God of the exodus and the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. The coming God of the biblical tradition is identified as the power at the 'front' of history rather than 'above' it. The promise of God is the propelling force of history, awakening hope, which keeps men unreconciled to present experience, sets them in contradiction to current natural and social powers, makes the church 'a constant disturbance in human society', and 'the source of continual new impulses toward the realization of righteousness,

freedom, and humanity here in the light of the promised future that is to come' (p. 22).

### 3.2. God's promise makes possible creative discipleship in an unfinished world by focusing on the 'hermeneutic of Christian mission'

By keeping history in 'eschatological process', God's all-embracing promise, far from robbing man of freedom and his historical initiative, makes possible creative discipleship in an incomplete world. A hermeneutic of hope in God's promise must necessarily be a political hermeneutic. It does not have to focus merely on the proclamation of the word or in a new self-understanding, but also on the 'hermeneutic of Christian mission' (pp. 272ff.). Christian theology thus becomes the theory of Christian practice. Its task is to clarify the radical openness of reality to new possibilities, to summon men to break away from the spell of the status quo, and to take up the task of building a new reality that corresponds better to God's promised future.

### 3.3. It calls for an 'eschatological hope of justice'

Moltmann expresses the socio-political implications of his theology of hope as follows: the point is not simply to *interpret* the world, history, and human relations differently but to *change* them in the expectation of God's transformation (p. 84). Moltmann's call for 'the realization of the eschatological hope of justice, the humanizing of man, the socializing of humanity, peace for all creation' (p. 329) is concrete evidence that he is providing something more than a mere rhetoric of change to the church in its effort to exercise its hope responsibly in modern society and in its confrontation with particular issues.

### 3.4. Its impact upon theological research models in practical theology

Moltmann's influence can be seen in the current theological research models in practical theology, especially in the use Hegel's method of contradiction, pitting a thesis against an antithesis, resulting in a new synthesis. For example, the Zerfass model requires that *praxis* 1 (*present* church practice) must first be examined with the use of a series of instruments from *the social sciences*. As a result, tensions become visible, leading to the emergence of impulses to act with a view to *renewal* of the existing *praxis* to form the new *praxis* 2 (*improved* church practice).

### 3.5. Its impact upon the Emergent Church Movement

Jürgen Moltmann's book, *Theology of Hope*, is an influential document forming a foundation for the Emergent Church Movement's revisionist, evolutionary eschatology. The 'hope' of Emergent/postmodern theology is based on the Hegelian idea that contradictions synthesize into better future realities. Emergent Church leaders recently published a book entitled *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* that cites and echoes Moltmann's ideas.

## 4. Weaknesses of the book

### 4.1. It is based on the secular philosophies of Marx and Hegel

Moltmann was influenced by Marxism and the philosophies of Georg Hegel. Hegel embraced contradiction, pitting a thesis against an antithesis with the outcome being a new synthesis. However, Hegel's ideas are philosophical and have not been proven in the real world. Moltmann took Hegel's ideas and created a Christian alternative to Marxism (which is also based on Hegel's philosophy) that he called a theology of hope.

According to Moltmann, eschatological 'hope' is 'headed toward the kingdom of God on earth with universal participation.' He indicates how Hegel's ideas could be used to interpret Good Friday and the resurrection through a dialectical process that would deliver us from both 'romantic nihilism' and 'the methodological atheism of science' to a synthetic, hopeful future (p. 169).

### 4.2. Its hope for a bright earthly future is a false hope, since it rejects biblical eschatology

He applied Hegel's synthesis to theology and eschatology. In so doing, he decided that because incompatibilities were evolving into new and better things, God could not possibly allow the world to end in judgment. Instead of judgment, Moltmann set aside Scripture and announced that the entire world and all of creation was heading toward an earthly paradise and progressively leaving evil behind.

According to the theology of hope proclaimed by Moltmann and his Emergent disciples, 'the truth will only be known with certainty in the future.' Therefore, this uncertainty results in the consequent heresies that 'God is re-creating the world now with our help' and 'the world has a universally bright future with no pending, cataclysmic judgment.'

Although God's judgement of the earth is clearly predicted in 2 Peter 3:10-12, Moltmann rejects the clear teaching of the Bible and claims that 'God is re-creating the world now with our help.'

### 4.3. Its view that Jesus's resurrection is a view of history and not a historic event is a rejection the biblical gospel

Moltmann uses the presupposition of Christ's resurrection as the ground for a new view of history, namely, that God is still creatively involved in the process of history leading it to a glorious future:

> The raising of Christ is then to be called 'historic', not because it took place *in* history … it is called historic because, by pointing the way for future events, it *makes* history in which we can and must live. It is historic, because it discloses an eschatological future (p. 181).

Moltmann sees the death and resurrection of Christ as two contradictory events. The resulting synthesis is a new world (a hope-filled eschatology) with no Second Coming or judgment. Thus Emergent Theology teaches that God is renewing the world and the gospel is good news for everyone. Hence, Christians need to stop telling people that they are sinners in need of a Saviour.

The question arises: Was Jesus really raised bodily from the dead, and did he appear bodily to reliable witnesses, and should one believe in the saving value of his death, burial, and resurrection in order to be saved from the wrath of God? According to Moltmann, one cannot expect to know the answer to this multi-facetted question, because the proof of what type of world or history will be formed lies in the future, where God is bringing history.

Hence, for Moltmann, the Christian's hope is not based on Jesus's bodily resurrection that furnished proof to all men and thus made them accountable (as Paul said in Acts 17:31), but in Jesus's resurrection as a view of history with a hopeful future.

## 5. Conclusion

*Theology of Hope* is anything but a superficial affirmation of the 'power of positive thinking'. Rather, Moltmann argues that we must acknowledge the suffering and injustice that mark our present experience in the world. Only then can we feel the force of, and give witness to, God's promise to heal the

world. This understanding of Christian hope was born in perhaps the unlikeliest of places—a prisoner of war camp in the aftermath of World War II.

It is clear that Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* has had a great impact on theology over the past four decades, especially in the field of eschatology. No doubt his ideas will continue to influence theologians in the years that lie ahead, especially amongst leaders in the Emergent Church Movement.

However, it is regrettable that Moltmann, in his book on Christian hope, chose to focus on only one aspect of the gospel—the *social* gospel dealing with the hope of the social transformation of the world in the future. In my opinion, Moltmann left out the most important aspect of the gospel—the *spiritual* gospel concerning the present and future transformation of the lives (and bodies) of individual believers.

By dismissing the bodily resurrection of Christ, as a historical event, Moltmann automatically rejected the foundation of the Christian's hope, which includes 'the hope of salvation' (1 Thess. 5:8), the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit ('Christ in you the hope of glory', Col. 1:27), the hope of the believer's future bodily resurrection (Acts 24:15), and 'the blessed hope and glorious appearing … of Jesus Christ' at His Second Coming (Tit. 2:13). Moltmann's rejection of the *spiritual* aspect of the Christian's hope is like throwing away the diamond ring, while merely retaining the casket, because it is considered to be of greater importance.

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# Review of Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*

Annang Asumang[1]

Anderson RS 2007. *An emergent theology for emerging churches: theological perspective for a new generation of leaders.* Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship.

Judging by recent developments in evangelical bloggosphere, *the emerging church conversation* appears to be making some impact among young evangelicals of the United Kingdom, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and perhaps South Africa. The phenomenon has also not gone unnoticed by several well-known leaders of the evangelical community, some of whom have written assessments ranging from balanced to severely adverse. Most of these evaluations of the conversation have expressed frustration that despite the prolific publications by the members and leaders of the conversation, there is a worrying lack of clearly articulated belief and practices of the conversation. This has no doubt hampered how pastors and leaders are able to guide others on how to relate to the conversation.

It therefore came as a matter of relief and excitement when I laid hold of Ray Anderson's book, written with the intention of providing a theological perspective for the new generation of leaders within the emerging church conversation. Anderson begins with an introductory title—'What has Antioch to do with Jerusalem' (p. 10), a title which to a significant extent provides the background and tone to the whole book. Anderson's thesis is that 'the Christian community that emerged out of Antioch constitutes the original form and theology of the emerging church as contrasted with the believing community at Jerusalem' (p. 21; cf. p. 74). Thus the conversation is hereby cast in the mould of the church at Antioch, the rest of the evangelical movement (or perhaps all other Christians) as 'the Christian community in Jerusalem' (p. 17). This provides a reasonable portrait of the self-understanding of the emerging church conversation—like the 'emergent

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church' of Antioch, the postmodern emerging church conversation is mission-oriented, messianic, revelational, reformational, kingdom-focused, and eschatological (p. 18). These features are then expounded in turns in the subsequent chapters.

Of much interest is the chapter in which Anderson discusses the hermeneutics of the emerging church conversation, titled, 'It's about the Work of God, not just the Word of God' (pp. 115-135). In my view, this chapter represents the most openly articulated précis of the approach that the emerging church conversation adopts in dealing with the difficult ethical questions of our day. Basically, Anderson argues that biblical interpretation should not just restrict itself to what the Bible says, but more so to what God is doing among the Christian community (p. 123). He cites two examples of this method with how some churches have dealt with the issue of women in ministry, and the treatment of divorcees in the church. Here Anderson articulates a theology of revelation which pits the 'word of God' with the 'work of God', an account which should attract a whole thesis to examine its validity (p. 132). Though this is not the place for such an examination, it suffices to say that Anderson's use of the term 'revelation' to describe postmodern, utilitarian interpretations of Scripture, admittedly, in the face of difficult ethical challenges, creates several problems for this reviewer.

That said, there are several elements of Anderson's rendition of the theology of the emerging church conversation which elicited my sympathies. Regarding the Christology of the emerging church conversation, for example, I find as welcome Anderson's call for a Christology of 'naïve realism' (p. 41), by which he appears to be rebuking the often artificial manner that some biblical scholars have tended to approach the historical Jesus question in the gospels. Regarding spirituality, Anderson's call for a renewed understanding of discipleship and spirituality that acknowledges the transforming reality of the Holy Spirit in the believer (pp. 64-67) is also agreeable, even if his implication that such an emphasis is new is perhaps an overstatement. I also concur with Anderson's call on the church to take social justice and poverty seriously (pp. 148-151); even though I am uneasy with his attempt to brand moral concerns such as abortion and homosexual practices as belonging to the realms of questions of social justice (pp. 153-154). I found Anderson's willingness to criticize sections of the conversation for adopting 'innovative methods' of worship which lack a 'compelling story of the gospel' (p. 85) as courageous and healthy.

The book is primarily directed to 'insiders' of the emerging church conversation, in which case it could have limited utility to 'outsiders'. Despite

its desire to open up several of the long held assumptions of theological discourse in the western hemisphere for debate, criticisms of the conversation have not always been welcomed by some members of the conversation with the humility that is needed at this stage. A critic from within the conversation could better achieve a 'hearing' than one from the 'outside'. This is not, however, to say that Anderson is the *bona fide* spokesperson of the conversation. Thus the challenge still remains that for several believers who are yet 'outside' of the emerging church conversation, having an accurate knowledge of what the conversation stands for and so providing a fair critique of it continues to be a baffling undertaking. I nevertheless recommend it to pastors and students who wish to know the specific beliefs of the conversation.

Much more serious than this limitation of the book, are my disappointments with some of the theological assumptions and direction of interpretation that Anderson adopts. One example might suffice. Anderson's sweeping caricature that the first century Jerusalem church *per se* as anti-mission, non-progressive obstructionists of Paul is more than an unfortunate hyperbole. I am afraid that in buying into this caricature, which is more commonly found in non-conservative circles of biblical scholarship, Anderson has built a straw man which is foreign to the New Testament. It is true Paul had significant opposition and problems with the Judaizers, who claimed to have had the support of the pillars of Jerusalem (e.g. Gal. 1-2; Phil. 3). Yet, that is not the same as saying that the 'pillars' of Jerusalem instigated such opposition. On the contrary, the evidence from 1 Corinthians and 1-2 Peter indicates that the 'Jerusalem pillars' were missional, and supportive also of Paul.

Furthermore, creating an artificial dichotomy between the two groups in order to cast a postmodern movement in the mould of Paul is, to say the least, an unfortunate hermeneutic. More seriously, branding the Jerusalem church as 'temple-centred and Moses driven messianic community' (p. 138) as an indirect means of placing critics of the emerging church conversation in a bad light does not augur well for the conversation. Finally, this rather early self-identification of the emerging church conversation with Paul may not be healthy to the conversation itself for, by claiming the garb of Paul, any Paul loving critic from outside the conversation will be disarmed and stifled. The eventual loser of such a one-sided dialogue could be the conversation.

# Review of BibleWorks 8: an introduction for SATS students

Franklin S. Jabini[1]

*BibleWorks 8: Software for Biblical Exegesis and Research*. 2008. Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks. US$349.00 (DVD version) and US$354.00 (CD version).

## 1. Introduction

The South African Theological Seminary (SATS) has students who come from a variety of backgrounds. They are studying for different purposes and ministries. Some students study for personal enrichment, others to become pastors. Some are already pastors, who want to equip themselves to be more effective in the ministry. Several of our students have recently completed training to serve as Bible translators, while others are experienced translators who need a postgraduate degree with a focus on Bible translation or biblical languages. With these students in mind, I will introduce BibleWorks 8 (BW8). I have been using BibleWorks (BW) since its infancy. I have used it for Bible study and sermon preparation, for exegesis leading to Bible translation, and for research culminating in both popular and academic publications.

I taught biblical languages for more than nine years at several theological institutions in the Caribbean before I relocated to South Africa in 2007. When I studied the languages in college and seminary, the emphasis was on memorizing paradigms and other forms. When I started to teach, I followed the same model that I learned in seminary—until I bought BW. Using the programme, I analyzed the entire Hebrew Bible to see how frequently particular verbal patterns appear in the Old Testament. It discovered that two patterns, the Qal and the Hifil, account for more than 80 percent of all the Old Testament verbs. Some patterns, such as the Hophal and Pual, account for less than one percent. Yet when I studied the languages in seminary, my teachers placed equal emphasis on all the verb forms. I did a similar research for New Testament Greek. The research with BW changed my way of teaching the languages completely. I started to focus on the most important forms and

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spend more time translating them in class. That was my introduction to BW. BW has undergone many improvements since then.

In this review, I will first introduce some of the contents of BW8. I will give a brief overview of the various resources that are available in BW8. In the next section, I will give a brief overview of some of the ways in which students can use BW8. I will focus first on students who work only from the English language, and then turn my attention to those who work with the biblical languages.

## 2. What is BibleWorks?

### 2.1. Bible translations

According to its makers, 'BibleWorks is one of the most powerful and easiest-to-use Bible concordance and morphological analysis programs available.' The programme is a computer-based exegetical tool that focuses on the biblical text. BW8 comes with more than 190 Bibles in nearly 40 languages. Besides major modern translations in English, the programme has modern Bibles in others languages that are spoken by SATS students, such as Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Dutch, French, Afrikaans, and many more. Most of the translations are the latest in these languages.

### 2.2. Original language texts

The most important texts however are those in the original languages of Scripture. The standard package of BW8 comes with original language texts such as the fourth edition of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Rahlfs's *Septuagint*, the twenty-seventh edition of the Nestle-Aland, fourth edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament*. Other Greek texts include *Robinson and Pierpon*t, *Scrivener, Stephanus, Westcott and Hort, Tischendorf,* and *Von Soden*.

Students doing advanced studies in the languages or in textual criticism will also be able to work with the original texts of the *Peshitta*, *Vulgata*, *Targumim*, *Josephus*, *Philo*, *Apostolic Fathers,* and *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha in Greek.* Most of the original language texts come with morphologically analyzed versions, with makes it possible to conduct advanced searches on lemmas and/or specific forms.

### 2.3. Original language resources

The programme comes with resources for beginning and advance students of the scriptures in their original languages. It has beginner's grammars and paradigm charts with audio files in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. There are flash cards that can be imported, exported, or printed. Users can record their own pronunciations or import pronunciations to be associated with each card. Beginner's lexicons include Holladay's *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* and Friberg's *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament.*

Advanced students are well served with major old and recent grammars such as Joüon-Muraoka's *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Gesenius's *Hebrew Grammar*, Waltke and O'Connor's *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Robertson's *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Burton's *Moods and Tenses of New Testament Greek,* and Conybeare and Stock's *Grammar of the Septuagint*.

Additional resources that are standard in BW8 include, among others, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon* (abridged and unabridged), *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek lexicon*, Gingrich and Danker's *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Louw and Nida's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains,* and Moulton and Milligan's *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*.

Besides these resources that are available in the standard package, there are a few modules that can be unlocked, such as *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* (Futato), *Dead Sea Scrolls English Translation Bundle: Biblical and Sectarian Texts, Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Balz and Schneider), *Grammar of Palestinian Jewish Aramaic* (Stevenson), *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Blass, Debrunner, and Funk), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* third edition (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint,* volumes 1 and 2 (Lust, Eynikel, Hauspie, and Chamberlain), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm), *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament,* second edition (Metzger), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* abridged edition (Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley). Students should decide on whether to unlock these modules based on their needs.

### 2.4. Reference works in English

There are a few reference works available in English in the standard package, such as *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Early Church Fathers, the Babylonian Talmud, Easton's Bible Dictionary, Fausset Bible Dictionary, International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1915) and *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament.*

## 3. How to use BibleWorks?

After the installation, students should familiarize themselves with the *study guides* under the Help section of BW8. These guides are both a help and an introductory training tool, with training videos. I will refer to them for further study as I introduce the programme.[2] I will discuss the use of BW8 at two levels. The first will be a basic level for students without the Biblical languages, and the second an advance level for students with the languages, focusing only on Hebrew and Greek.

### 3.1. Basic level

Students who are using BW8 without the knowledge of the biblical languages should start with the study guide *Using BibleWorks and Only English Bibles*. Students working with languages other than English should be able to use most of these tools as well. In this section, I will recommend a few things that can be done with BW8.

#### *3.1.1. Choose and compare translations*

If you want to study a passage from Scripture, it is recommended that you use several translations. BW8 comes with a collection of old and new English translations. It might be helpful to choose three translations. Since SATS uses the NIV in its courses, it will be a good point of departure. For study purposes, students might select the ESV, NASB, and my personal favourite NET, besides the NIV. A good help in reading the passage for comprehension will be the NLT.

[2] See the study guide *Getting Started*, which will help you to prepare BW8 for use. The rest of the introduction assumes that you've worked through this study guide.

BW8 has a few tools to help you *Viewing the Text*. You can automatically compare different translations, using the *Text Comparison Settings.*[3] This tool allows you to see where the translations differ from each other.

I compared John 1:18 in ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, and NIV. BW8 highlights differences in these translations, which is helpful in identifying issues that need further study. I will use one phrase to illustrate the differences in the translations: 'the only God' (ESV), 'the only begotten God' (NASB), 'the only one, himself God' (NET), and 'God the One and Only' (NIV). The KJV reads 'the only begotten Son'. The NLT reads 'the one and only Son is himself God'. The notes that the translators give to explain their translation choices are helpful. The NET provides a detailed explanation of the problems that translators face in this verse, and why they translated the verse as they did. These notes help one understand why the KJV has the word 'Son' where almost all modern translations prefer 'God'. I found similar differences in other language Bibles, such as Dutch, Afrikaans, German, and French.

### *3.1.2. Study parallel passages*

BW8 allows the user to view, compare, and study parallel passages of the Old Testament, the Gospels, and places where the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament.[4] It has a number of synopsis files that can be edited. Old Testament parallels include the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The New Testament has a comparison of Jude and 2 Peter. Users can also create their own files, such as parallel passages in Ephesians and Colossians or the Lord's Supper in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians.

### *3.1.3. Topical and word studies*

BW8 has various sources with pre-made topical studies, such as the *Treasure of Scripture Knowledge, Stephan's Biographical Bible, Nave's Topical Bible, Thompson New Chain-Reference Bible* and *New Topical Textbook.*[5] These resources are a good starting point for a topical message. You can do your own topical study with the *Find Related Verses* and *Find Related Phrases* features. These features search related verses and phrases in random order. I took John 1:18 as a point of departure and selected a phrase of four words. I came across the following phrases: 'who is in the', 'no one has seen', 'God

[3] See *the study guide Comparing Bible Versions*. This guide helps you to compare the original language texts, but also different English translations.
[4] See the study guide *Displaying Multiple Passages for Comparison.*
[5] See the study guide *Preparing a Topical Study.*

who is in'. Some of these phrases that I found were not related to the verse under study, such as Ezra 1:3, 'He is the *God who is in* Jerusalem'.

Word studies can take different forms. The *Word List Manager* can generate a list of all words that appear in, for example, Jonah. You can select a specific word that appears often in Jonah and conduct a simple search. One such word in Jonah is 'great'.[6] The book speaks about the 'great city' (1:2; 3:2-3; 4:11), 'great wind' (1:4), 'great storm' (1:4, 12), 'great fish' (1:17), and 'great deep' (2:5). The Hebrew text has a few more references, which a student can pick up by doing a search based on Strong's numbers.[7]

Instead of doing a search using the *Word List Manager*, you can make use of the *Key Word in Context* (KWIC) function.[8] If we type the word 'great' in the KWIC function, all the appearances of the word in Jonah will appear with the indicated number of words before and after each. For this search, I selected three words before and three words after 'great'.

| | |
|---|---|
| Jon 1:2 | to Nineveh the **great** city and cry |
| Jon 1:4 | Lord hurled a **great** wind on the |
| Jon 1:4 | there was a **great** storm on the |
| Jon 1:12 | of me this **great** storm has come |
| Jon 1:17 | Lord appointed a **great** fish to swallow |
| Jon 2:5 | of death the **great** deep engulfed me |
| Jon 3:2 | to Nineveh the **great** city and proclaim |
| Jon 3:3 | was an exceedingly **great** city a three |
| Jon 4:11 | on Nineveh the **great** city in which |

KWIC presents the search results as they would normally appear in a printed concordance. BW8 has the ability to conduct searches on several texts simultaneously. When I selected the phrase 'God who is in' from John 1:18, I found references to that word in all English Bible translations and other resources such as the English translation of *Philo* and the *Old Testament Pseudoepigrapha*.[9]

[6] See the section "Topical Studies in a Particular Book" in the study guide *Preparing a Topical Study*.
[7] See the section "Searching Greek and Hebrew Words Using Strong's Numbers" in the study guides *Using BibleWorks and Only English Bibles* and *Using Strong's Numbers in BibleWorks.*
[8] See the study guide *Using BibleWorks as a Concordance.*
[9] See the study guide *Searching More than One Version at a Time*. This study guide also explains how to *Search Multiple Versions in Different Languages.*

When a word is selected for study, English only readers can make use of Strong's numbers to access Hebrew and Greek lexicons.[10] The NASB and the KJV are coded to Strong's numbers and should be selected for word studies. Some translations in other languages also come with Strong's numbers, such as the French *Louis Segond*, the German *Lutherbibel*, and the Dutch *Statenvertaling*.

#### *3.1.4. Maps and notes*

When you come across a place name in your English Bible, you can easily locate that place on a map by right clicking and choosing *Lookup in BibleWorks Maps*.[11] The maps are pre-made and editable. You can also create notes as you study a text.[12] The notes can be insights that you have gathered by studying the various resources in BW, or they may come from other resources, using ERMIE.[13]

#### *3.1.5. Studying biblical languages*

You should consider studying the biblical languages (if you have not yet done so). SATS has courses in Hebrew and Greek based on interactive CDs. BW8 comes with basic grammars for Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, with audio for the verbal paradigms in all three languages.[14] A tool like BW8 helps you to make progress as you study the languages. It has been my experience that many students do not use the languages after graduating from seminary. Very often, the primary reason is that they lack the resources they need to use the languages effectively. With BW8, you will not have that problem. It will be helpful to connect the learning of the languages to a tool like BW8, which the graduate can continue to use in ministry after graduation.

### 3.2 Advanced level

BW8 will be underutilized if it is not used for its original language tools. The strength of this programme lies in the things that can be done with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, even with only basic knowledge of these languages. All

[10] See the study guide *Using Strong's Numbers in BibleWorks.*
[11] See the study guide *Using the BibleWorks Map Module.*
[12] See the study guide *Creating Chapter and Verse Notes.*
[13] See the study guide *Opening Your Own Files and Websites Using Ermie.* The preloaded link to Ermie resources requires a good internet connection.
[14] Users have also created grammars for other languages including a *New Latin Grammar* by Charles E. Bennett and *An Introductory Coptic Grammar* (Sahidic Dialect) by J. Martin Plumley.

the things discussed in the previous sections can be done in the original languages, and much more. In John 1:18, NA27, which is the Greek text followed by most modern English translations, reads θεὸς, whereas the Byzantine text, which is followed by the KJV, reads ὁ … υἱός. The *Text Comparison* tool allows you to see the differences immediately. You can do a text-critical study, with the help of Metzger's *Textual Commentary* (requires an unlock fee). Since John 1:18 is in the Gospels, Wieland Wilker's *Textual Commentary on the Gospels* should be consulted. This commentary is a user-created resource that is available as free download. It contains an excellent discussion of the textual problems in John 1:18.

The *Resource Summary* tab in the *Analysis Window* displays all lexicon, grammar, and other reference work entries relevant to the verse under investigation. Wallace, for example, discussed the inconsistency of the Jehovah's Witnesses' *New World Translation*. He argues:

> It is interesting that the *New World Translation* renders θεός as 'a god' on the simplistic grounds that it lacks the article. This is surely an insufficient basis. Following the 'anarthrous = indefinite' principle would mean that ... θεόν should be 'a god' (1:18).

In other words, one cannot translate the first part of John 1:18 as, 'No one has ever seen a god'.[15]

The word μονογενής has traditionally been translated, based on the etymology of the word, as 'only begotten' (e.g. KJV). The Gingrich lexicon suggests 'only' and for John 1:18, and for other verses in John, 'only' or 'unique'. This use of the word is confirmed by Moulton and Milligan's *Vocabulary*.[16] According to them, μονογενής

> is literally 'one of a kind,' 'only,' 'unique' (*unicus*), not 'only-begotten.' ... It is similarly used in the NT of 'only' sons and daughters (Lk 7:12, 8:42, 9:38), and is so applied in a special sense to Christ in John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, 1 John 4:9, where the emphasis is on the thought that, as the 'only' Son of God, He has no equal and is able fully to reveal the Father.

[15] The NWT argues that the indefinite word θεὸς in John 1:1c should be translated as "a god". Their translation reads "the Word was a god." Wallace argues convincingly against that translation on grammatical grounds.

[16] See the study guides *Changing the Default Analysis Tab Lexicon* and *Finding a Definition for a Greek or Hebrew Word.*

BW8 also comes with Leedy's *New Testament Diagrams*, which explains the relationship between the words in the text. It is also possible for users to create your own diagrams. These resources allow for an in depth grammatical and lexical analysis of the text.[17]

There are numerous search options for the biblical languages. The *Cross Version Search* option allows for a search of a word in all the resources available. A search of μονογενής reveals not only seven appearances in the LXX and four in the NT, but one each in the Greek texts of *Josephus* and the *Old Testament Pseudoepigrapha*.[18]

The *Graphical Search Engine* can perform complex searches that cannot be done on the *Command Line*.[19] BW8 users uploaded a few examples of work done with this 'workhorse' on the user-created modules site.[20] Some of these examples include 'Aorist tense finite verbs immediately preceded by a present tense participle with no intervening punctuation' and 'the present tense participle, not immediately preceded by an article of the same case, gender, person and number'.

## 4. Conclusion: to purchase or not to purchase?

My simple conclusion is that BW8 is a great tool for students of the Bible. What about other books? Theological students need other reference works. BW has no intention of adding theological books to its collection. There are some user-created modules, such as commentaries by Calvin or Keil and Delitsch. However, BW has no intention of adding other books to its programme. Other software programmes aim to provide a large library of books.

I have no intention of comparing BW8 with other theological software. It a good academic practice to judge a product based on its claims and the purpose for which it was produced. BW makes the following claim:

> BibleWorks 8 is the premier original languages Bible software program for Biblical exegesis and research … BibleWorks is a tightly integrated collection of Bible software tools designed specifically for scholarly analysis of the Bible text.

[17] See the study guide *Finding the Mention of a Verse in a Reference Work*.
[18] See the study guide *Searching More than One Version at a Time*. The study guide also explains how to *Search Multiple Versions in Different Languages*.
[19] See chapter 31 under the *Help Files* for a detailed discussion of this feature.
[20] See the website http://bibleworks.oldinthenew.org/?page_id=214 (19 March 2010)

BW aims to be a programme that focuses on the biblical text, and especially the original languages. Those who are looking for such a tool will not be disappointed. BW8 comes with most of the best tools currently available for in-depth study of the original languages of the Bible. The base package comes with many of the best Hebrew and Greek grammars available. To purchase the hard copies of these resources would cost much more than the US$350 price tag for BW8. Advanced users may want to consider purchasing two additional resources to add to the standard collection: HALOT and BDAG, at an additional cost of US$212. My recommendation would be: 'If you do not have BW8, sell all you have, and buy BW8—even if you have to skip a few meals!' If your goal is to do in-depth study of the Word of God in its original languages, you will not be disappointed. As a Bible-based Seminary, we cannot emphasize the study of the Word of God enough. And with BW8 you are left at the mercy of the Word, alone with the text.