

# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

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Our sincere thanks to Ken Rathburn for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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# A Future for Israel

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# Introduction

**T**he modern-day state of Israel has been in the news and in our collective minds at least since that tragic day last year, October 7, when the nation of Israel was horribly and brutally attacked by the terrorist group Hamas. Many believers in Christ mourned that terrible day. Why are so many Christians, especially those of a dispensational outlook, concerned about Israel? Because we love those whom God loves, and the Bible makes clear

that God loves His people Israel (Isa. 41:8–10) and has a plan for Israel's future.

The articles in this issue center around what the Bible says about God's future for Israel. Though many in the past have tried to connect prophecies in the Bible to world events in the modern period, the articles in this issue of *FrontLine* do not attempt to do so. The authors are content with carefully explaining what we understand the Bible to say about Israel's future. When these prophecies happen is not up to us to determine. God is the one who made the promises; He is the one who will bring them to pass.

What encourages us in our belief that God will do so is revealed in God's nature. What kind of God is He? Does He keep His promises to those He made them to? What kind of God would He be if He did not? Think about that, especially the next time you read through the many wonderful (but distinct) promises God gave the church.

Starting our study of God's promises to

Israel is Mark Lounsbrough's article that discusses the interrelation of God's covenant with Abraham and the one He made with David. God's commitment to Israel results in His plan to use Israel to bring salvation, and even the future eschatological deliverance, to all believers. This plan begins and ends with His unique relationship with Israel.

Keith Kobelia provides us with an article that offers a good understanding of God's intentions for Israel expressed through the prophet Ezekiel. Dr. Kobelia tackles Ezekiel 37, and he includes an emphasis to which many believers not often have given much attention.

My article is next and reveals what the Minor (or *Unappreciated*) Prophets have to say about God's future plans for Israel. Included are many passages that may be unfamiliar to many but have quite an impact on God's plan for Israel. My hope for this article is that as readers see God's gracious nature revealed in keeping the promises He made to Israel, they will view



this section of the Bible not simply as “gloom and doom” (though judgment is the dominant theme), but rather as a wonderful source of encouragement and blessing.

Paul Hartog’s article assures us that the New Testament is not silent about God’s plans for Israel. Romans 11 is emphatic, based on the Old Testament foundation, that Israel’s future is secure.

Doug Brown’s article deals with the tragedy of the interpretative problems of those who replace Israel with the church, claiming that the church supersedes Israel. Such an interpretive move impugns God’s character.

Finally, Dan Brown argues that there are some startling implications for ministry in the church today as a result of God’s future for us that culminate in His future for Israel.

All glory to God!

**Ken Rathbun**





# Blessing and Dominion

The Role of Israel in God's Restorative Purpose for Creation

**T**he Bible is a storyline spanning Genesis to Revelation, replete with interactive themes similar to subplots that contribute to the main plot of a novel. Scholars summarize the key theme of God's story in different ways. The term "restoration" captures the biblical narrative well. The storyline from Genesis to Revelation unfolds God's plan to restore what Adam's race lost in

disobedience to its Creator. A major theme in the restoration process is the nation of Israel.

Through a series of covenants, God chose Israel to be the channel through whom ultimate restoration would happen. These covenants contain important strands of truth that help us trace God's purpose to restore all things. This article presents two storylines woven into the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants that highlight God's ongoing purpose for Israel. They are blessing (Abrahamic covenant) and dominion<sup>1</sup> (Davidic covenant).

## **PRE-COVENANT BLESSING AND DOMINION**

Blessing and dominion originate in the creation account of Genesis 1, long before God made a covenant with Abraham. Both of these storylines are a part of God's creative purpose for humanity and emerge *together* in Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said

unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” The blessing of God on humanity included the privilege of exercising dominion over the creation. That is to say, humanity was blessed with the authority to reign as God’s steward or vice-regent.

Adam surrendered the blessing when he rebelled against God’s perfect design, and with the blessing went the dominion. In their place came the curse recorded in Genesis 3. That is not to say that humanity lost all ability to multiply and subdue the earth, but that sin crippled humanity’s ability to represent God as vice-regent over the creation.<sup>2</sup> God graciously promised a solution that would restore what was lost, a solution often called the *protoevangelium*, or *first good news*: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise

thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). Strikingly, God uttered this promise not to Adam, but to the serpent, a subtle hint that the epic conflict that ensued at the Fall was not between God and humanity, but between God and Satan.

Humanity shunned the blessing of multiplying and filling the earth and insisted on staying in one location to make a name for itself. At the tower of Babel, wicked leaders uttered their evil resolve:

And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. (Gen. 11:3–4)

## **THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT**

At this low point in human history, the

Creator broke through to utter His holy resolve to a man from Ur of the Chaldeans and initiated the Abrahamic covenant. The chapter division makes it easy to miss the contrast between man's evil resolve in Genesis 11 and God's holy resolve in Genesis 12:

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will *bless* thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a *blessing*: And I will *bless* them that *bless* thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be *blessed*. (Gen. 12:1–3)

The contrasts between chapters 11 and 12 are clearly intentional:

Genesis 11	Genesis 12
Humanity speaks.	God speaks.
Humanity reaches up to the heavens to be blessed.	God reaches down from heaven to bless.
Humanity says, "Let us . . ." (3 times).	God says, "I will . . ." (5 times).
Humanity desires to make a great name for itself.	God determines to make Abram's name great.
Humanity wants to hoard its goods in one place.	God wants to extend His blessing everywhere.

The Abrahamic covenant stood in stark contrast to the whims of rebellious humanity. God formed a new nation through whom His blessings would extend to the whole world. From Genesis 12 forward, God continued to display His covenant faithfulness to Israel despite her stubborn refusal to embrace His promises. In due time, the ultimate seed of Abraham came, through whom the fulfillment of the covenant became possible (Gal. 4:4–5). Paul refers to this seed as a singular

person in Galatians 3:16: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”

Jesus came as Israel’s Messiah but also provided restoration for those of any nation who would receive Him. The emphasis on global blessing in the Abrahamic covenant presents itself in several iterations of the covenant in Genesis:

Genesis 18:17–18	And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be <i>blessed</i> in him?
Genesis 22:17–18	That in <i>blessing</i> I will <i>bless</i> thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be <i>blessed</i> ; because thou hast obeyed my voice.



Genesis 26:3–4	Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will <i>bless</i> thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be <i>blessed</i> .
Genesis 28:14	And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be <i>blessed</i> .

Thus, the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant find their ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. At His ascension, He blessed His disciples (Luke 24:50), and He took His seat at the right hand of the Father, where blessing is granted to all who believe on Him (Eph. 1:3). While Paul wrote to church-age saints in Ephesians, the blessings enjoyed by the church are not limited to the church.

In fact, those blessings eventually circle all the way back to Israel. Following the rapture

of the church and the seven-year tribulation, Jesus will return to establish His millennial kingdom in Jerusalem, called the *beloved city* (Rev. 20:7). Following the millennium and the final judgment, the *New Jerusalem* will descend to take its place on the new earth (Rev. 21:2). Jesus Himself pronounced blessing on those who are His, saying, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city by the gates” (Rev. 22:14, NASB). The centrality of Jerusalem calls attention to the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham. There is no other reasonable explanation for its ongoing function in the last days.

Fixed in the Abrahamic covenant is another covenant that is key to fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham: the Davidic covenant. God chose David to reveal how He would restore creation dominion to humankind by raising up a ruler proceeding from the nation of Israel.

## **THE DAVIDIC COVENANT**

When Adam rebelled against God, he unwittingly surrendered his dominion to Satan. Titles such as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4), “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), and “the prince of this world” (John 12:31) confirm Satan’s ongoing grasp of that dominion.

Jesus came to strip Satan of his dominion. The Abrahamic covenant does not employ explicit dominion language in its provisions. However, dominion becomes evident in two ways. First, God revealed it indirectly as part of Jacob’s blessing on Judah: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). Later, He revealed it directly in His covenant with David: “And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam. 7:16).

Consequently, the Davidic covenant is not a detached covenant, but an *expansion* of the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant is the umbrella that contains in seed form every other promise that God made to Israel. The Davidic covenant identifies the ultimate seed of Abraham who will rule over the house of Israel forever. It also specifies the tribe from which this ruler will come (Gen. 49:10; Mic. 5:2). The temporary interruption of the Davidic kingly line did not annul God's promise to David. The announcement of Jesus' birth over five hundred years later came with a prophecy of His rule over the house of David (Luke 1:32–33), clear evidence that the promise was still standing.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–8), Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world in exchange for submission to his ongoing dominion. Satan invited Jesus to join his kingdom as a sort of steward over the creation, while he would

continue as sovereign. The offer would provide a way for Jesus to avoid the suffering of the cross and for Satan to avoid the condemnation of the cross, a win-win in his evil stratagem. Later, the enemy made another attempt when he induced Peter to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross (Matt. 16:22–23).

Having resisted such a temptation, Jesus fulfilled his messianic mission and went to the cross. There, He achieved two victories assuring the restoration of the dominion lost in the garden of Eden. Paul tied them together in Colossians 2:13–15:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers,

he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

First, Jesus paid the Adamic race's sin debt by nailing it to His cross, qualifying the repentant sinner to participate in the restored kingdom. Second, He leveled a threefold defeat to His archenemy by disarming, dishonoring, and defeating him. In so doing, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent at the cross, sealing his ultimate doom. The crushing of the serpent's head does not imply that he ceased to exist or oppose Jesus after the cross. It was a judicial blow, but God has allowed him to retain his dominion for a season. God delivers from the domain of darkness those who embrace Jesus and transfers them into "the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). When Jesus returns to establish His kingdom following the tribulation, Satan will be confined to the abyss for the duration of the millennium (Rev. 20:1–3).

Blessing and dominion, forfeited by Adam's sin, will be restored by Jesus Christ. He is

the source of blessing in the Abrahamic covenant and the Messiah who will rule forever as promised in the Davidic covenant. He will rule and disperse His blessings from Jerusalem in the millennium and from the New Jerusalem in the eternal state. A literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of Scripture leaves no doubt that Israel is front and center in God's restorative plan for the creation.

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Mark Lounsborough served in Brazil for nineteen years before coming to Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, to serve as the chair of the missions department. He and his wife have four children and seven grandchildren.



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<sup>1</sup> Both “dominion” and “kingdom” are suitable terms. I chose “dominion” because of its use in Genesis 1:28. The creation as God’s kingdom is not specifically stated here, but the language of dominion implies a kingdom over which Adam was to serve as a steward.

<sup>2</sup> Humanity retains a limited ability to represent his Creator, not as God’s vice-regent, but as created in God’s image. He lost



the position, but the Creation Mandate still stands. Only the Second Adam will be able to restore mankind to God's original purpose for him as vice-regent.

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# Ezekiel 37:15–28 and Elements of God's Future Promises to Israel

**T**he prophet Ezekiel was called to an unusual but important ministry to the captives of Judah in Babylon. Despite his unusual methods (e.g., symbolic acts) and extraordinary visions (e.g., Ezek. 40–48), his overall message is clear and provides insight into God's plan for Israel.

## **THE CONTEXT OF EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY OF THE TWO STICKS**

Ezekiel was taken captive in the second wave of the Babylonian Captivity when King Jehoiachin was taken captive in 597 BC (Ezek. 1:2). Ezekiel then spent the remainder of his life in exile in Babylon, ministering to the captives that lived by the river Chebar (1:1, 3). While the elders of Israel came to Ezekiel for counsel (e.g., 14:1–3), they were largely unresponsive to his message.

Ezekiel's book is laid out primarily in chronological order.<sup>1</sup> The first part of Ezekiel's book primarily contains prophecies of judgment upon Judah (4:1–24:27) with a brief section containing oracles of judgment against the foreign nations (chaps. 25–32). A major turning point occurs, however, with the fall of Jerusalem (33:21). After this point, Ezekiel's ministry turns to providing hope of restoration for the captives of Judah (chaps. 33–48).

Among the notable prophecies in the second half of Ezekiel's book are the vision of the



valley of dry bones (37:1–14) and the prophecy about Gog of the land of Magog (chaps. 38–39). Sandwiched between these sections is a symbolic act that Ezekiel performed and a corresponding oracle explaining the symbolic act: the prophecy of the two sticks (37:15–23).

## **THE CONTENT OF EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY OF THE TWO STICKS**

Ezekiel 37 begins with the vision of the valley of dry bones (vv. 1–14). In this prophecy, the nation, which is lifeless and without hope (cf. v. 11), is supernaturally brought back to life and vitality (cf. v. 12). The prophecy of the two sticks complements this vision of hope and identifies several specific elements that will comprise God's future blessing upon the nation of Israel.

The symbolic act associated with the prophecy of the two sticks is straightforward (vv. 15–20). The Lord tells Ezekiel to take two sticks and write the names of the Israelite nations upon them (v. 16). On one stick the

prophet was to write “For Judah,” which was the Southern Kingdom after the division of Israel in the days of Rehoboam (cf. 1 Kings 12:1–24). On the other stick the prophet was to write “For Joseph,” representing the Northern Kingdom, Israel. Ezekiel refers to the Northern Kingdom as “Joseph” and “Ephraim” (Ezek. 37:16) because the tribes from the sons of Joseph (i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh), and especially Ephraim, were very influential tribes in the Northern Kingdom.

Ezekiel was then to bind the two sticks together and to treat them as one stick (v. 17). The Lord instructed the prophet to tell the people that this act symbolized the reunification of the two nations into one “stick” or nation (v. 19).

The corresponding oracle (e.g., “Thus saith the Lord GOD,” v. 21) provides very specific details about His future plans for Israel as a nation.<sup>2</sup> The elements of future blessing that the Lord promises to Israel tie together several strands of prophetic teaching concerning

Israel and argue that God has an eschatological role for Israel.

***The complete regathering of Israel (Ezek. 37:21).*** The first element of blessing that the Lord identifies in His future plans for Israel is regathering. The Lord promises to “gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land” (Ezek. 37:21). This is a complete reversal of the dispersion of Judah that had taken place at the hands of the Babylonians and the deportation of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, at the hands of the Assyrians. The Lord would “undo” the judgment that the people had experienced because of their disobedience.

While the Lord did allow the captives in Babylon to return in the postexilic period (as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah), this was far from a complete regathering. While the returns from captivity in the Persian period may be a prelude to the hope that the Lord promised Israel, those

returns do not exhaust the prophetic promises of a complete regathering of the nation of Israel (e.g., Jer. 23:3; 32:37; Ezek. 11:17; 20:41; 34:13).

***The permanent reunification of the nation (Ezek. 37:22).*** The promise of regathering is preparatory for the promise of the reunification of the nation (Ezek. 37:22). This element of the oracle actually relates directly to the symbolic act Ezekiel performed (vv. 16–17). After the split of the kingdom during Rehoboam's reign, Israel in the north and Judah in the south were distinct political entities.

The prophecy of Ezekiel foresees a reversal of this traumatic division. The healing of the breach would be complete and enduring. They would be “one nation” and they would “no more be two nations,” never to be divided into two kingdoms again (v. 22). The people of Israel to date have never experienced the



type of regathering and complete reunification that the Lord promised through Ezekiel.

***The spiritual renewal of the people (Ezek. 37:23).*** The Lord's promises to Israel are not merely physical but also contain spiritual elements. The Lord promises that a time will come when the nation will be cured of idolatry, the people will be cleansed, and they will acknowledge the Lord as their God (Ezek. 37:23). Thus, the nation will not only be physically restored but will be living in covenant fellowship with the Lord.

Israel had a long history of rebellion against the Lord. This, in fact, led to the dispersion that the people had just experienced. However, the prophets saw a time when the people would be renewed in their commitment to the Lord, forgiven of their sin, and obedient to His rule. As with other elements of this prophecy, the people of Israel have never experienced this type of spiritual renewal, which is an important part of God's future promises for Israel (11:20; 14:11; 36:28).

***The eternal rule of a Davidic ruler (Ezek. 37:24–25).*** The divine oracle that explains the binding of the two sticks also promises a Davidic ruler, reigning over His people (Ezek. 37:24–25). Ezekiel specifically identifies this ruler as “David” (in both verses 24 and 25; cf. Jer. 30:9; Hos. 3:5). Some interpreters take this as a reference to the resurrected David<sup>3</sup> while others take it as a reference to David’s descendant, the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> While the latter view might be slightly more likely, it is entirely possible that David will have a role to play in God’s kingdom program. Either way, this everlasting Davidic rule has not been experienced by Israel. It represents another future expectation for Israel.

***The perfect reception of peace (Ezek. 37:26).*** Another element of God’s promise to Israel is that they would live in complete peace (Ezek. 37:26). The Lord will establish “a covenant of peace” with Israel. This covenant will involve dwelling in the land with God in their midst

(v. 26). This covenant will be everlasting (v. 26). The covenant in view here is probably not one of the great covenants that God has made with Israel (e.g., the Abrahamic covenant or Davidic covenant) but the peace that will result from the provisions of those covenants.<sup>5</sup> This aspect of God's promise has obviously not been experienced in the history of ancient or modern Israel. Peace has always been elusive for the nation of Israel, but it represents an important prophetic expectation for national Israel.

***The personal relationship with God (Ezek. 37:27–28).*** A final element of Ezekiel's prophecy is that the Lord would dwell personally with His people (Ezek. 37:27–28). The Lord's "sanctuary" (v. 26) and "tabernacle" (v. 27) would physically be present among the people, indicating that He will be worshipped (i.e., in the millennial temple; cf. 40:1–44:31). The people would eternally recognize the Lord, giving testimony to the Gentiles (37:28). Israel has not experienced this per-

sonal presence of God coupled with complete covenant faithfulness.

## **THE IMPLICATIONS OF EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY OF THE TWO STICKS**

As we consider Ezekiel's prophecy of the two sticks, several implications arise that have direct impact upon God's future plans for Israel.

***God does not make vain promises.*** Ezekiel 37:15–28 identifies several elements of blessing that God declared that He would accomplish for His people. These promises were not dependent upon the people but upon the Lord's ability and intent to fulfill His promises.

God is not able to lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). When God makes a promise, He fully intends to complete that promise in the way that it was intended. Anything less calls the character of God into question. God does not make vain promises or promises that He cannot keep. Knowing the future and the character of Israel, the Lord made promises

to Israel that He fully intends to fulfill in His eschatological program.

***God has not fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecies.*** As one considers the prophecy of the two sticks, one sees that the elements of the prophecy have not been fulfilled in the nation of Israel to date. Neither the post-exilic community nor the modern state of Israel experienced the complete restoration, peace, or complete covenant fellowship that this passage envisions. The people have not been unified under a Davidic ruler and God is not personally dwelling among the people.

***God has a future plan for Israel.*** The final conclusion is that Israel does indeed have a role in God's eschatological plan.<sup>6</sup> God is not finished with Israel. The Lord has made promises to the nation, which He is fully able to complete. These promises have not been fulfilled as stated in the historical nation of Israel (post-exilic or modern), but I believe that

God will fulfill these promises to the nation of Israel in the eschatological events that He has outlined in Scripture.

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- <sup>1</sup> See the chart of dates in Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 647.
- <sup>2</sup> Lamar Eugene Cooper (*Ezekiel*, NAC 17 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 327) identifies thirteen promises for Israel in this passage.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1:1295.
- <sup>4</sup> Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 851.
- <sup>5</sup> Cf. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 851; Dyer, “Ezekiel,” 1295.
- <sup>6</sup> See especially Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 847; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 328.



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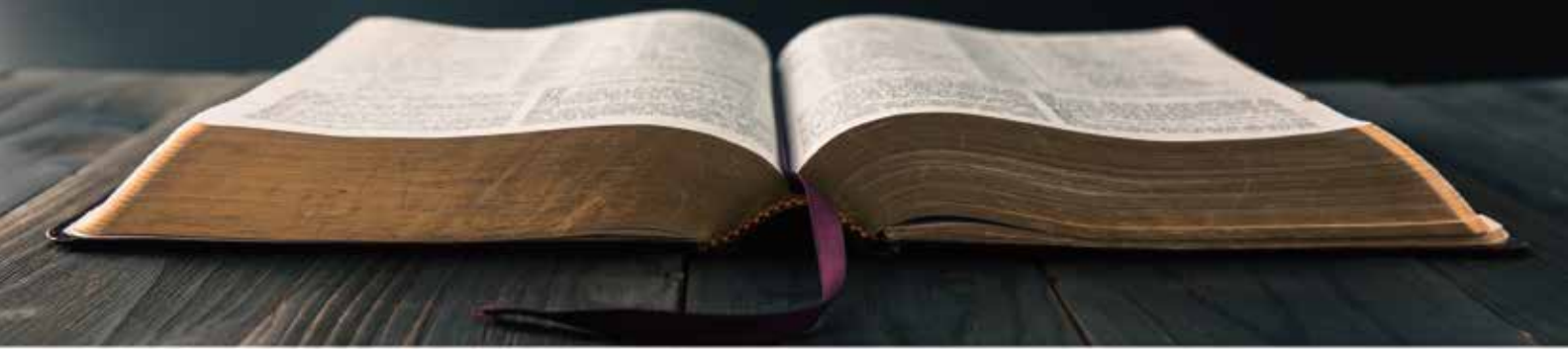
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# Insights from the Unappreciated Prophets on God's Future for Israel

**W**hile the Old Testament is rich with insights about God's plans for Israel, one section is sometimes left overlooked. That portion is what we commonly call the Minor Prophets. However, I have never been happy with that designation, since using that title seems to minimize their significance. Actually, I think the opposite is true: the *Unappreciated* Prophets are crucial

to understanding what God's plans entail for Israel's future.<sup>1</sup>

When we think about these prophetic books, one thought usually comes to mind: *judgment*. It is perfectly true that there is much condemnatory content, and that it is directed against Israel and Judah. However, that is not the whole story. At specific and intentional points, the reader is directed to witness God's permanent love for His people demonstrated by undeserved kindness, which is another name for grace.

This article will provide evidence from the Unappreciated Prophets that God indeed has loved and will always love His people Israel. God's ultimate plans include her completed restoration. We will look at Israel's historical context, then move to select passages that provide evidence for God's desire to restore to His people the promises He made to them so many years ago, *and the reason He did so*. First, however, we will examine the value of

the Unappreciated Prophets.

## **THE VALUE OF THE UNAPPRECIATED PROPHETS**

The Unappreciated Prophets contain a vast wealth of prophecies that demand more attention than we Bible-believers often give to these “obscure” books. Studying the prophets in depth has given me a greater appreciation and renewed excitement about God’s purpose for Israel’s future. This study has enabled me to link together many themes found throughout the Scriptures. Here, I have chosen to focus on the so-called “Minor” Prophets. Yes, they are shorter, but certainly not less important than the “Major” Prophets. Are they obscure? Only if we neglect them. But I think you will see they make a tremendous contribution to our understanding of the Bible and God’s future for Israel. This plan includes both Jewish and Gentile believers, though the focus is on the former. I would like to present an understanding of this future plan

taken from a normal, literal reading of the Unappreciated Prophets, a perspective that deserves a wider hearing.

## **CONTEXT**

Let us remind ourselves where we are in Old Testament history. By the eighth century BC, the kingdoms of both Israel and Judah had degraded morally. Time was running out for the Northern Kingdom. The pre-exilic prophets gave forceful condemnations of Israel's sins that grieved her holy God. The people of Israel would be overrun and exiled by the cruel Assyrians in 722 BC.

The people were not ignorant of God's statutes, but many had too often tired of the strict observances required by the God of their fathers. The fleshly, thrilling worship practices of the Canaanite deities (and those of other nations) proved irresistible to the Israelites.

God refused to tolerate this spiritual infidelity. His prophets rightly denounced the

people and warned them of the horrible consequences. But the people were generally unresponsive. They listened to the prophets' condemnation of other nations (in Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum) and witnessed the destruction of those kingdoms, but their hearts and behavior were not altered. I readily acknowledge that the Unappreciated Prophets contain many passages of judgment, but this article will focus on God's restoration promises. For you to get the most benefit from our study of these promises, I strongly urge you to have a Bible open as you read. We will begin with the prophets who ministered before the exile.

## **HOSEA**

Hosea's prophecy contains many terrible judgments for the Northern Kingdom and highlights her horrible sins as the reason for those judgments. Hosea had the sad task of predicting the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. God used the naming of Hosea's children in chapter 1 to indicate His severed

ties with the nation (vv. 4–9). However, this stark revelation is immediately followed by an amazing promise:

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel. (vv. 10–11)

These verses harken back to the covenant given to Abraham in Genesis 13, 15, and 17, and to Isaac and Jacob in other passages. God meant what He said to the patriarchs.

In the first thirteen verses of chapter 2, Hosea compares Israel's unfaithfulness to God with that of an adulterous wife, even as his own wife had been unfaithful to him. The

prophet uses very harsh, severe, and explicit language. Then the scene changes abruptly in verses 14–23.

- An intimate reconciliation between Israel and her God is predicted in verses 14–17.
- A peace for Israel is described in verse 18b.
- God provides a strong indication of His love for Israel in verses 19–20, though covenantal language is not used in relation to His people.

Another passage in Hosea worth noting is chapter 3. In this chapter, Hosea describes the process of purchasing back his adulterous wife with silver and barley (v. 2). He boldly declares his firm and unrelenting commitment to her (v. 3). His wife's adultery pictures the relationship of Israel's sins of idolatry and drunkenness (v. 1). The last two verses depict the following:

- Israel's immediate future both without a



king and without the sacrificial duties of the priests (v. 4)

- The emergence of a Davidic leader (v. 5a)
- A (permanent) reconciliation between Israel and the Lord (v. 5b)
- It is worth emphasizing that verse 5 has a correlation to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:1–17).

## **JOEL**

Joel is probably one of the most difficult books of the Unappreciated Prophets to date; I prefer the pre-exilic date. In this small book, Joel uses the phrase “Day of the LORD” five of the sixteen times it is found in the Unappreciated Prophets. He wrote to warn Judah to repent before this terrible judgment. Joel is well-known for describing a locust army in chapter 1 and a literal army in chapter 2.

While there is much to comment on in this book, I will focus on chapter 3. Its first verse indicates it takes place at the same time

as the battle described in chapter 2, when God restores the “captivity of Judah and Jerusalem.” Chapter 3 details the following:

- God’s provision of being the hope and strength for His people Israel (v. 16b) and His plan to establish them forever (v. 20)
- God’s presence manifested among His people (vv. 17, 21b)
- God’s power over the land to produce plentifully (v. 18)
- God’s design to provide forgiveness to His people (v. 21a and the immediate context of v. 20)
- The descriptions here are characteristics of the time when God restores the kingdom to Israel.<sup>2</sup>

## **AMOS**

The context of Amos 9 is one of judgment and condemnation for the rebellious people of Israel. God will find them wherever they hide (vv. 2–4).

Though God desired to destroy Israel (vv. 8a, 10), He did not intend to do so completely (vv. 8b–9). God then describes a future “day” for Israel: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old” (v. 11).

Again, we notice several elements in verse 11 and the next verses that indicate God has a future for Israel:

- A ruler intimately connected to David’s dynasty will restore Israel’s fortunes (vv. 11ff.).
- Israel will possess the boundaries God intended (v. 12).
- Great agricultural blessings will appear in the Promised Land (vv. 13, 14b).
- God will gather His people Israel, and they will rebuild the nation (v. 14a). They will never again be separated from their land (v. 15).

There is a strong connection not only to the Davidic covenant, but also to the permanent restoration of Israel in the land which produces abundantly.

## **MICAH**

The only difficulty with engaging Micah's prophecies about the future kingdom is limiting them to a manageable number (the same can be said of Zechariah). The context of chapter 2 is that after Micah berates the people at length for their sins (vv. 1–11), his tone suddenly changes. Using the symbolism of sheep in a safe sheepfold, God speaks to His people about the gathering of a remnant: "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel" (v. 12). The text indicates there will be a "multitude," suggesting a numerical increase of God's people. Also, they will have a king leading the way, and God's special presence will be with them (v. 13).

Micah 7 says that despite a great wickedness

in the land (vv. 1–6), Micah’s *hope* was in God to restore justice (vv. 7–10). Great predictions were made in the next verses describing God’s ideal society—His future kingdom for Israel:

- Israel will be restored to the land, with extended boundaries (vv. 11–12).
- In contrast to the wicked (vv. 12–13), Israel will enjoy prosperity in her land (v. 14).
- God will protect His people (v. 14a) amid the subdued Gentile nations (vv. 16–17).
- God will provide purification for His people from their sins (vv. 18a, 19) and reconciliation (v. 18b).

The last verse of the book provides one of the surest indications that God has a future for Israel. Because He made a promise many years before with Jacob (Gen. 28:13–15 and other passages) and Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–18; 15:1–21 and others), He will keep it: “Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob,

and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old” (Mic. 7:20).

## **ZEPHANIAH**

Zephaniah is a short book that is filled with condemnation for Judah (chap. 1) and Jerusalem (3:1–7). Zephaniah also denounces other nations (chap. 2), including a prophecy (future to Zephaniah’s time) of the fall of Assyria (2:13–15). The prophet leaves few “stones of judgment” unturned.

In 3:8–20, there emerges a startling end-times prophecy with significant kingdom implications. Observe the time indicators mentioned earlier (endnote 2) as you read of the following:

- God’s gathering of the nations for fierce judgment (v. 8)
- A gathering of God’s people for comfort, restoration, and honor (vv. 18a, 19b, 20a)
- God showing the nations of the world

(still in the context of verse 8) turning to worship and serve Him (v. 9)

- God's purging of His people Israel ("the daughter of my dispersed") resulting in a purified people (vv. 10–13a)
- A reconciliation between God and His people (vv. 12, 15a, 17b)
- Peace and safety for Israel (vv. 13b, 15b, 16)
- The great king in Israel being God Himself, personally manifested during His reign (vv. 14–17).

This last characteristic warrants further comment, as this text adds significant development to our understanding of the role of this future king of Israel:

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD,

is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. (vv. 14–17)

First, this announcement is cause for great rejoicing for Israel, God's people (v. 14). The text uses unmistakable language ("daughter of Zion," "Israel," "daughter of Jerusalem," v. 14; "Zion," v. 16). Only a non-literal re-reading of the text and context of the book (a condemnation of literal Judah and prediction of the fall of literal Jerusalem) could replace this clear reference to national Israel with some other entity, such as the church. If the church is in view, is the church also a recipient of the judgments of this book (vv. 1–18)? It seems dishonest to apply the blessings of the book to the church and leave national Israel with only



the judgments, when there is no indication from the text that this is meant to be done.

Israel's cause for rejoicing is not only reconciliation and peace (v. 15), but also the fact that the monarch is identified as the LORD God of Israel. This cements the identification of Israel's Messiah-Deliverer as none other than God Himself. The identification of the Messiah as God is important as we view subsequent Old and New Testament history. The God-King's presence will be physically manifested in Jerusalem (vv. 15–17). He will rejoice over His people, even with singing. Surely, He is the Hope of Israel.

God will also restore the nation (v. 18), protect the people (v. 19), and ultimately take away the reproach of their punishment (v. 20). These last verses of chapter 3, understood literally, fit perfectly with the context of the book of Zephaniah and with God's plan for Israel.

## **ZECHARIAH**

There is much in this book that deals with the end times and God's plans for Israel. Continuing the pattern observed in Haggai, his contemporary, Zechariah also prophesied to those returned from Babylon. He mentions both Zerubbabel the civil governor and Joshua the high priest.<sup>3</sup> However, Zechariah focuses more on the latter.

In 6:9–15, several Jewish men from the exiles in Babylon visited their brethren in Jerusalem who had yet to complete the temple. God used this opportunity for them to witness an amazing picture that is valuable to our study of Israel's future kingdom (vv. 9–10). God instructed Zechariah to take the silver and gold from the visitors and to fashion crowns with it. Rather than crowning Zerubbabel, the political leader, Zechariah was to crown Joshua, the high priest (v. 11). This unusual act also came with an unusual message: A "branch" would build God's tem-

ple (v. 12), accept the glory, and rule from a throne (v. 13a). These are extraordinary acts for a priest, yet the Scriptures explain that the offices of both king and priest would be combined into a harmonious union in this one ruler (v. 13b). These crowns, kept in the temple, would remind the visitors from Babylon of God's plan for Israel's future (v. 14). Gentiles (those who are far off) would also assist in building the temple of God (v. 15).

The importance of this prophecy can hardly be overstated. Here we find the joining of the offices of priest and king in one person. We already know that this king is God Himself (v. 15), and by this passage we understand He will rule both politically and spiritually. Joshua the high priest stands as an illustration of this fusion.

## **CONCLUSION**

What do these prophecies from the Unappreciated Prophets have in common?

They describe a time when the Messiah will return and establish His kingdom, restore the people of Israel, and reign on the earth. Aspects of these actions were foretold in the Abrahamic, Davidic, land, and new covenants.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROPHECY CAN HARDLY BE OVERSTATED. HERE WE FIND THE JOINING OF THE OFFICES OF PRIEST AND KING IN ONE PERSON.**

On what basis does God enact these promises and what informs His desire to fulfill them? Certainly, it was not based on Israel's response to them (Deut. 9:4–5). Rather, it was based on His mercy and grace (see Isa. 41:8–10; Hos. 2:23; Mic. 7:18, 20). It is not that Israel or anyone else (including the church) can earn God's favor. Instead, God deals with Israel in a way that is centered on His undeserved grace, which is the same basis upon which He deals with us. And that is why Israel has a future in God's plan.

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- <sup>1</sup> I am grateful to BMM missionary Rachel Tarvin, who helped me think of the designation “Unappreciated Prophets.”
- <sup>2</sup> I call these “kingdom indicators.” They include the following: (1) The passage’s declaration that it takes place in the “latter days,” “the time of the end.” (2) A description of the gathering of God’s people, Israel, from all over the world. This gathering is also a logical necessity if God has purposed to fulfill all His covenants with them. (3) A gathering of Gentile nations together, their battling against the Jewish people, or their being judged by God; some passages (e.g., Mic. 4) describe their conversion to God’s ways. (4) Massive climatic disturbances in either the earth or sky. (5) The mention of the phrase “The Day of the LORD.”
- <sup>3</sup> This Joshua had no blood relation to the Davidic line, as Christ had.

**Paul Hartog**



# **A Future for Israel in Romans 9–11**

**J**ames Montgomery Boice relayed the account of Frederick the Great, king of Prussia, conversing with his chaplain concerning the reliability of the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> “If your Bible is really from God,” insisted the monarch, “you should be able to demonstrate the fact simply. Give me proof for the inspiration of the Bible in a word.” The undaunted chaplain responded, “Your Majesty, it is possible for me to answer your request literally. I can give you the proof you ask for in one word.” King Frederick was taken aback and demanded, “What is this magic word that carries such a weight of proof?” His chaplain succinctly replied, “Israel.”

In his comments on Romans 11:26–27, Boice underscored the “striking phenomenon” of the continued existence of Israel: “Dispossessed of her homeland and dispersed throughout the world, Israel has nevertheless survived while other peoples in similar situations have not.” Boice further affirmed that



God “has a plan for the Jewish people that will unfold in the last days.” As senior minister of the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Boice’s comments challenged some historical interpretations from the Reformation era.

## **OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS**

The 2003 *Reformation Study Bible* refers to “all Israel” in Romans 11:26 as “a critical expression at this point in Paul’s argument, and one whose meaning is much debated.”<sup>2</sup> The study Bible provides three possible interpretations of “all Israel”: (1) “It could mean ‘all (spiritual) Israel,’ that is, all elect persons both Jew and Gentile.”<sup>3</sup> (2) Alternatively, it could mean “all the elect of Israel,” that is, “all Jews destined to be saved throughout history.” (3) Or, “it may point to a time of mass conversion among Jewish people,” that is, a future and general salvation of national Israel. One could summarize these three options for “all Israel”

as (1) “all the elect whether Jews or Gentiles,” (2) “the elect Jews throughout history,” or (3) “the eschatological Jewish people [those in the end times] as a nation.”

Martin Luther wavered in his interpretation of this text. In his *Lectures on Romans* (1515–1516), he seemed to support option (3), “the eschatological Jewish people as a nation.” He noted, “The Jews who are now fallen will return and be saved. . . . Christ, therefore, has not yet come to the Jews, but he will come to them, namely, in the Last Day.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, later in his career, Luther moved toward alternative (1), “all the elect whether Jews or Gentiles.”<sup>5</sup> John Calvin’s *Commentary on Romans* definitely favored this first option of “all the people of God.”<sup>6</sup> The Genevan reformer described this corporate body of all the elect as “the Israel of God” or “the Church, gathered alike from Jews and Gentiles.” He reasoned, “This interpretation seems to me the most suitable, because Paul intended here to set forth the

completion of the kingdom of Christ, which is by no means to be confined to the Jews but is to include the whole world.”

Nevertheless, Charles Hodge (the nineteenth-century Presbyterian theologian from Princeton) insisted that “Israel, here, from the context, must mean the Jewish people, and *all Israel*, the whole nation. . . . as a people, they are to be restored.”<sup>7</sup> As noted in the introduction, James Montgomery Boice’s four-volume commentary on Romans firmly sided with alternative (3), an eschatological salvation of the Jewish nation. Douglas Moo (a biblical scholar whose academic work has focused on Romans) has also favored the eschatological salvation of national Israel. In an extended discussion on “The Future of Israel,” he has maintained that both the immediate context of Romans 11:26 and the broader context of Romans 9–11 point to “the conversion of a significant number of Jews at the time of Christ’s return in glory.”<sup>8</sup>

## IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

In the immediate context of Romans 11:26, the previous verse declares, “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” One notes that “Israel” here in verse 25 is contrasted with “the Gentiles,” and that “blindness in part” has overtaken this “Israel.” Our focused text of verse 26 then follows in quick succession: “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” In this close sequence, the temporarily blinded “Israel” of verse 25 becomes the delivered “Israel” of verse 26. This unfolding progression of events is directly called a “mystery,” which can be defined as “a purpose of God that previously has not been revealed” (cf. Rom. 16:25–27; 1 Cor. 2:7–8; Eph. 3:1–12; Col. 1:24–27).<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, “Israel” in Romans 11:26 is associated with “Zion” (Jerusalem) and with the household of “Jacob” (a name applied corporately to the Jews in the Hebrew Scriptures). The combination of these three specific terms alludes to Psalm 14:7: “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.” The same vocabulary also echoes the prophecy of Isaiah 59:20: “And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.” The very next verse in Isaiah references “my covenant with them.” A similar sentiment is expressed in the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–32: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”

Furthermore, Jeremiah 31 expands its explanation:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . . for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (vv. 33–34).

According to this prophecy of Jeremiah, God would make a “new covenant” with “the house of Israel” because “they shall all know me,” and He would “remember their sin no more” (cf. Ezek. 20:37–40; 36:25–29; 37:23–28). Romans 11:26–27 echoes this material, “And so all Israel shall be saved. . . . For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.” Moreover, the apostle Paul solemnly goes on to affirm that this will hap-

pen because “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (v. 29).

## **BROADER CONTEXT**

The “eschatological Jewish people as a nation” interpretation of Romans 11:26 also fits the broader context of Romans 9–11. At the commencement of chapter 11, Paul states that the prophet Elijah pleaded with God “against Israel” (v. 2). This statement comes on the immediate heels of the apostle’s self-identification in v. 1: “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” Traversing backward across the bridge between chapters 10 and 11, one comes upon a citation of the divine message spoken through Isaiah: “But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (10:21). In Paul’s own day, this “Israel” remained in unbelief. Therefore, the apostle acknowledged, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (10:1).



**EVEN SO, HAS GOD CAST ASIDE HIS  
PEOPLE ISRAEL FULLY AND FOREVER?  
PAUL RESPONDS IN ROMANS 9–11 WITH  
A THUNDEROUS “NO!” HE MAINTAINS  
THAT GOD’S PLACING ISRAEL ASIDE IS  
(1) NOT TOTAL BUT IS (2) TEMPORARY  
AND (3) PURPOSEFUL.**

This apostolic desire for the salvation of Israel already surfaces in chapter 9, where Paul discussed those “who are Israelites” (v. 4). He expounds, “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (v. 3). Paul insists that “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” were given to these “Israelites” who were “brethren” and “kinsmen according to the flesh” (vv. 3–4). Israel’s reception of “the covenants” here in verse 4 thus serves as a book-end corresponding to the mention of “all

Israel” in 11:26–27 and its predictive reference to “my covenant . . . when I shall take away their sins.” Meanwhile, however, this Israel “according to the flesh” remains blinded by obstinate unbelief and stands mired in unforgiven sin, until “the times of the Gentiles” be completed (Rom. 11:25; Luke 21:24–28).

Even so, has God cast aside His people Israel fully and forever? Paul responds in Romans 9–11 with a thunderous “No!” He maintains that God’s placing Israel aside is (1) not total but is (2) temporary and (3) purposeful. First, God has preserved a faithful Jewish “remnant” from “the number of the children of Israel,” so that His casting aside is not total (9:27). “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (11:5). Second, the divine casting aside is only temporary, “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (11:25). Third, God is using Jewish unbelief for His own sovereign purposes. The current “fall” of the Jewish people has become

“the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles” (11:12). But this salvation of the Gentiles is also meant “to provoke” the Jews themselves “to jealousy” (11:11). Ultimately, God is “able to graft them in again,” and He will do so in the future (11:26).<sup>10</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

In sum, the eschatological (end times) salvation of the future nation of Israel is founded upon the unchanging character of God Himself. The Apostle Paul aptly concluded Romans 11 by breaking forth in ardent praise:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all

things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.  
(vv. 33–36)

Divine wisdom engenders worship, as the seeds of doctrine blossom forth into doxology. By divine grace, Israel awaits a glorious future, and all the glory belongs to God alone. *Soli Deo gloria!*

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 3:1375–76.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Orlando: Ligonier, 2005), 1633.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, in the full Reformed system, this “spiritual Israel” is “taken as basically synonymous with the church” (Sproul, *Reformation Study Bible*, 1633).

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 316.

<sup>5</sup> See Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 146.

- <sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 436–37.
- <sup>7</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (London: Banner of Truth, 1972), 374; italics original.
- <sup>8</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 163–72.
- <sup>9</sup> Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 170.
- <sup>10</sup> The present article addresses neither the full unfolding of eschatological events nor differing views concerning “new covenant” blessings and present-day believers, both of which would require systematizing material far beyond Romans 9–11.

**Douglas Brown**

# **No Future for Israel? Supersessionism 101**



**I**srael is controversial. For the last seventy-five years, the nation of Israel and its enemies have dominated the headlines. The recent worldwide surge of anti-Semitism and anti-Israel protests in response to the Israel-Hamas conflict is shocking, albeit predictable. But controversy about Israel is not just relegated to the geopolitics of the Middle East. Israel is also very controversial among Christian theologians. There is great disagree-

ment and division about the future of national Israel. Will Israel be saved and restored in the future? Or have God's promises to Israel been fulfilled in Christ and the church?

In this article I will attempt to explain what supersessionism is, what some of its key interpretive features are, and why I disagree with it. I will argue against supersessionism that God plans to save national Israel and restore it.

## **UNDERSTANDING SUPERSESSIONISM**

What is supersessionism? Michael Vlach defines it as “the view that *the NT Church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded* [replaced] *the nation Israel as the people of God.*”<sup>1</sup> The term “supersessionism” originates from the Latin roots *super* (“on” or “upon”) and *sedere* (“to sit”), together meaning “displace” or “supplant.” Some theologians use “replacement theology” or “fulfillment theology” as equivalent terms for supersessionism. Supersessionists generally prefer the



term “fulfillment theology” and dislike the label “replacement theology” because they perceive it as mischaracterizing their position.

One’s view of Israel directly affects two major doctrines: ecclesiology and eschatology. In relation to ecclesiology, non-supersessionists maintain a distinction between Israel and the church. In relation to eschatology, non-supersessionists hold to a dispensational premillennialism. There are three basic versions of supersessionism: punitive, economic, and structural.<sup>2</sup>

- *Punitive* supersessionism argues that Israel permanently lost its covenant standing due to punishment by God because of its hardened unbelief, persistent rebellion, and rejection of Jesus. Notable advocates of punitive supersessionism include many of the early church fathers and Martin Luther.
- *Economic* supersessionism contends that God’s sovereign plan was to replace the



nation of Israel as the people of God with the church, “new Israel.” Ethnic Israel served its purpose in God’s plan. Its covenant and purpose essentially expired with the coming of Christ and the dawning of the new covenant. This version of supersessionism was held by a few early church fathers and would represent most supersessionist interpreters today, such as N. T. Wright and most in the camp of progressive covenantalism.<sup>3</sup>

- *Structural* supersessionism is a bit harder to define because it is more a consequence of supersessionism than a separate version. This variety of supersessionism asserts that the Old Testament has become mostly obsolete partly because of the framework of the canon and partly because of the rise of Christianity. The church’s doctrine and practice depend mostly upon the New Testament, and consequently the Old Testament is relegated

to a historical footnote. Vlach summarizes Soulen's assessment: "Most supersessionists have adopted a hermeneutical approach that ignores or removes the Hebrew Scriptures of the OT from having a voice."<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that these varieties of supersessionism are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Supersessionists may hold one or all varieties to one degree or another.

## **THE DEFINING ISSUE: ISRAEL'S RESTORATION**

The defining issue for supersessionism is the future restoration of Israel. Vlach states, "In short, some supersessionists believe there will be a future *salvation* of Israel, but no supersessionists hold that there will be a *restoration* of the nation Israel."<sup>5</sup> Consider, for example, Doug Moo's and Tom Schreiner's similar interpretations of Romans 11:25–27. Both of these prominent New Testament

scholars see an end-time turning among ethnic Jews to Jesus Christ near His second coming. However, both reject the idea that the nation of Israel is restored or that Israel will be reinstated to the Promised Land. Instead, Moo and Schreiner believe these Jewish believers will merely join the church.<sup>6</sup> Schreiner concludes, “[Paul] teaches that the church is the new Israel *and* that there is a future salvation for ethnic Israel. . . . Ethnic Israel, by believing in Jesus Christ, becomes part of the true Israel, the genuine people of God.”<sup>7</sup> The future salvation of Israel is a common view held among moderate supersessionists. Stronger supersessionists, however, see no future revival occurring among ethnic Israel and simply interpret “all Israel” in Romans 11:26 as the church. N. T. Wright, for example, sees “all Israel” in Romans 11:26 as “all the family of Abraham—and that includes believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews.”<sup>8</sup> John Calvin took a similar position.<sup>9</sup>

Many years ago, my high school Sunday school teacher, David Young, helped me understand God's dealings with the nation of Israel. He drew railroad tracks on the board representing God's program. He explained that during Old Testament times, God was primarily working in and through national Israel's train. Next, he drew a side rail and explained that after Christ's first advent, God temporarily sidelined the nation during the church age. The church is the current train on God's railroad tracks. But, in the drawing, there was an on-ramp for Israel's train to come back onto the railroad tracks after Christ's second coming. This essentially illustrates the non-supersessionist position. The supersessionist position would change the illustration. There would be only one track with one train. For supersessionists, national Israel is either derailed at Christ's first coming (punitive supersessionism) or is simply transformed into new (or true) Israel as the church (economic supersessionism).

## **HERMENEUTICAL KEYS OF SUPERSESSIONISM**

How do supersessionists arrive at their understanding of Israel and the church? I will present four hermeneutical keys to supersessionism. First, supersessionists generally see Jesus as the true Israel who fulfills all of Israel's covenants, promises, and prophecies. Brent E. Parker writes, "Jesus is the 'true Israel' in that he typologically fulfills all that the nation of Israel anticipated and hoped for; Jesus is the one who brings to completion the covenants, inaugurates the kingdom, and establishes the prophesied new covenant with his blood."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, since all church-age believers (both Jews and Gentiles) are united to Christ, the church becomes the new "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). This argument is used to override any other theological considerations—no matter what details are found in God's promises and covenants to Israel, Christ fulfills them. A common proof text for this

approach is 2 Corinthians 1:20, “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”<sup>11</sup> For example, in relation to 2 Corinthians 1:20, David Garland states, “All of God’s promises to Israel find their yes in him.”<sup>12</sup> To summarize, supersessionists assert two things. First, Jesus typologically fulfills Old Testament Israel; and second, the church, through Christ, inherits the promises of Israel.<sup>13</sup>

The main problem with this approach is replacing Israel with Christ. Most non-supersessionists believe that Jesus in some way recapitulates or represents the nation (e.g., Matt. 2:15; Hos. 11:1). Most would also agree that the believer’s union with Christ is essential for Jews and Gentiles to receive covenantal blessings. But the inference that Christ replaces the nation is flawed. This logic leads to the dismissal of several promises of God about the nation of Israel. In addition, I believe that 2 Corinthians 1:20 confirms a

point exactly opposite the one supersessionists make: because God and Christ are trustworthy, every promise of God will be fulfilled as it was originally promised and originally understood. Passages like Hebrews 6:13–20 and Romans 11 make this very same point. To alter the promises of God impugns the very character of God.

Here is an illustration to make my point. Let's say I promise to take my oldest child, Krista, to her favorite restaurant for a meal with all the fixings. Later, instead of taking Krista, I take my youngest child, Makayla, to that same restaurant. When we get home, I tell Krista that Makayla's meal fulfills my earlier promise to her. How do you think this will go over in our house? Not well! Not only will Krista doubt my promises, but so will all my family members. Regardless of the meal with Makayla, I still owe Krista her meal. If you haven't figured it out, Krista represents Israel, and Makayla represents the church. Our God keeps His promises!

Second, supersessionists rely heavily upon typology to assert that Christ fulfills Israel's promises. Supersessionists assert that the typological relationship between Israel (the type) and Christ (the antitype) means that Israel is completed or fulfilled and therefore no longer serves any purpose in God's plan. The type is "transcended and surpassed by the arrival of the NT antitype."<sup>14</sup> This approach to typology leads to the dismissal of any literal fulfillment of the nation of Israel. Darrell Bock calls this kind of typology "a false typological reading."<sup>15</sup> Antitypes need not escalate in such a way as to cancel the original historical-grammatical meaning of the type. In addition, many of the promises of God are simply not types and should not be interpreted typologically. Instead, they should be read literally as they were originally intended to be understood.

Third, supersessionists regularly prioritize the New Testament over the Old Testament. This leads to reinterpreting Old Testament



passages by reading New Testament passages back into the Old Testament. Consider Gary Burge's comments on the land promises to Israel: "For as we shall see . . . while the land itself had a concrete application for most in Judaism, Jesus and his followers reinterpreted the promises that came to those in his kingdom."<sup>16</sup> I would argue that further revelation can add to our understanding of an earlier text (i.e., progressive revelation), but it can never change the original authorial intention of the passage. This leads non-supersessionist scholars to argue for a more consistent application of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation and Old Testament prioritization.<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, supersessionists emphasize the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenant promises to the neglect of the intermediate fulfillment with Israel. In other words, nearly all kingdom promises in the Old Testament fulfill Revelation 21 and 22, rather than

Revelation 20. As an example, let's consider how supersessionists interpret the land of Israel. Oren R. Martin starts with the premise that land in Scripture is typological and is fulfilled in Christ. He argues, however, that the land promises in the Old Testament do not point to Israel receiving the Promised Land but to the international kingdom of God encompassing the entire world. So, the Promised Land is not Israel, but the world. Martin writes concerning the land promises in the Abrahamic Covenant, "the ultimate inheritors of the patriarchal promises are not restricted to a national entity but extend to an international community."<sup>18</sup> While I would concur that the kingdom of God will ultimately culminate with the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21 and 22 and envelop all creation, I would argue that there is also an intermediate kingdom of God, a millennial reign of Christ in Israel among the nations (Ps. 2; Rev. 20). Supersessionism does not do justice to the details of Old Testament promises to Israel.

## THE CASE FOR ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

What does the salvation and restoration of Israel look like according to Scripture? The restoration of Israel means God will *gather* and *save* a remnant of ethnic Jews near Jesus' second coming (Ezek. 36–37; Isa. 59:20; Rom. 11:25–27), *fulfill* His covenant promises to Israel (Gen. 12:1–3; 2 Sam. 7:12–14; Jer. 31:31–37), *enthron*e the Messiah in Zion and *exalt* Jerusalem as the capital of His kingdom and the center of worship (Ps. 2, 110; Isa. 2:1–4; 9:6–7; 24:23; Mic. 4:1–3; Zech. 14:16; Zeph. 3:9–10), *restore* national Israel geographically to the full Promised Land (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18–21; 24:7; 26:4; Num. 34:2; Deut. 34:4; Neh. 9:8; Isa. 2; 19), *establish* national Israel in its mediatorial role among the nations in the kingdom of God (Isa. 2, 11; 60–62; Zech. 14; Rev. 19–20), and *subjugate* the nations to the Messiah's rule (Ps. 2, 110; Zech. 14). The biblical prophetic witness is clear that God will build a theocratic kingdom with Israel at its

center. God's kingdom will be characterized by worldwide peace, prosperity, righteousness, justice, sovereignty, and worship of the one true God. The kingdom will have many aspects: political, national, economic, social, and religious.

Of course, this interpretation of the kingdom of God points to the premillennial return of Christ and a literal millennium, during which Christ will rule for one thousand years on the earth (Rev. 20:1–6). The future restoration of Israel means that “the millennial kingdom anticipates an administrative structure where national Israel again assumes a central place as the home of the reigning Messiah, in the midst of the nations who also respond to the Christ.”<sup>19</sup> Ezekiel 36–39 makes it clear that God will use the future salvation and restoration of Israel to glorify Himself by revealing Himself to the nations (Ezek. 36:36, 38; 37:6, 13, 14, 28; 39:25–29).<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In Romans 11:1 Paul asks this question: “I say then, has God cast away His people?” His response is definitive: “Certainly not!” Contextually, it is very clear—God has a plan for the nation Israel. He plans to save and restore the nation. This will fulfill the covenantal promises and prophecies God has made concerning His people. We should rejoice with Paul that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 12, his emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kenneth Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). Many authors follow Soulen’s analysis, e.g., Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 12–17; Stanley E. Porter and Alan E. Kurschner, “Defining Supersessionism: An Introduction,” in *The Future Restoration*

*of Israel: A Response to Supersessionism*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Alan E. Kurschner, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 10 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023); Matthew Tapie and Pim Valkenberg. *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); S. J. Wellum and B. E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville: B&H, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 19, emphasis original.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, BTNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 559–60; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 477–84.

<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, *Pauline Theology*, 483, emphasis original.

<sup>8</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 2: Chapters 9–16* (London: SPCK, 2004), 60.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 437.

<sup>10</sup> Brent E. Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 45.

- <sup>11</sup> Scripture quotations are from the NKJV.
- <sup>12</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 103.
- <sup>13</sup> Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” 47.
- <sup>14</sup> Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” 48.
- <sup>15</sup> Darrell Bock, “A Progressive Dispensational Response,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 230.
- <sup>16</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 35.
- <sup>17</sup> Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths*, rev. ed. (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2017), 2–30.
- <sup>18</sup> Oren R. Martin, “The Land Promise Biblically and Theologically Understood,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 260.
- <sup>19</sup> Darrell Bock, “Summary Essay,” in *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1999), 292.
- <sup>20</sup> Alan Hultberg, “The Future Restoration of Israel” in *The Future Restoration of Israel: A Response to Supersessionism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023).

# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

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# SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS

2 TIMOTHY 1:13

## FIRST PARTAKER

*“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Tim. 2:6)*

### Books and Roads

Occasionally I use this column to feature books which I believe would prove to be either a great aid or a great inspiration to pastoral ministry. I want to recommend two of these titles: one for discipleship and one for renewed ministerial inspiration. Both were published just last year.

#### *Soteriology for Beginners*

The first is titled *Soteriology for Beginners: What Does the Bible Say About Salvation?* The author is Dr. Layton Talbert, well known to *FrontLine* readers for his regular “At a Glance” column, as well as for other occasional articles.

This title is the latest in a series conceived by Tim Richmond, planter and pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Queens, New York. Tim wanted simple yet theologically comprehensive primers on major doctrines for his discipleship of growing believers. Previous contributions to the series address theology, bibliology, Christology, and pneumatology. Together they form one dimension of an even larger series of eighteen titles, Grace Groups Discipleship Curriculum. All are available through Amazon.

**The first feature** of the book I'll note is its format. *Soteriology for Beginners* consists of just eight chapters ("Sin," "Atonement," "Conversion," "Reconciliation," and so on). Each chapter subdivides into related topics. For instance, the chapter titled "Reconciliation" explains and applies the topics of propitiation, justification, imputation, forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation itself; all six are covered in just ten pages! Yet each is carefully defined and

further explained. Some are aptly illustrated. Each chapter then closes with “Questions for Reflection,” a helpful template for anyone using the book in a discipling relationship. All this is packaged into a comfortably sized (5 x 8 inches) book of just 153 pages. Here and there, black and white photographs add interest.

**The second feature** of the book that I’d like to highlight involves the strengths of how it goes about its explanations. Rather than merely referencing Scripture texts, the book sometimes insightfully expositing an entire verse or passage. Its treatment of Genesis 3, for instance, is the best concise treatment of that passage that I can recall reading; so much so, that I’ve gone to the trouble of referencing it in the margin of my Bible. Similarly, the explanation of being Spirit-filled consists of three pages of concise exposition and harmonization of Ephesians 5:18–6:9 and Colossians 3:16–25.

On the other hand, sometimes an explanation's strength lies in its taking a more topical form and summarizing briefly the entire biblical theology of a subject. For example:

In the legal realm, imputation describes the charging (of a crime) or crediting (of innocence) to one's account as the ground of judicial treatment. In a soteriological context, it refers to (1) the charging of Adam's sin and guilt to mankind, his posterity (discussed in Chapter 1), (2) the charging of man's sin to Christ, his substitute, and (3) the crediting of righteousness to the believer. (69)

Or again, concerning "Glorification in the New Earth":

Only four passages refer to the new heavens and new earth—Isaiah 65:17, Isaiah 66:22, 2 Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21:1. These four passages combine to portray a new earth that (a) follows the millennial kingdom of Christ on this present earth,

(b) is eternal and entirely characterized by righteousness, and (c) is devoid of death, sorrow, and pain. We were formed in God's image as God's representatives to cultivate and rule in righteousness over a sinless and unfallen world. The new earth, apparently, will be our restored opportunity to do that—this time with no presence or possibility of sin. Whatever may be beyond the new earth, we are not told. (108–9)

Topical summaries like these are valuable and should be noted or indexed somewhere for repeated future use.

A third strength to the book's explanations is its clarifying of fine distinctions in both theologically accurate and practically applicable ways.

[Regarding imputation:] God is not merely “pretending” that you are now righteous. He has actually transferred the righteousness of Christ to your account. That means

that *in Christ*—and only in Christ—you *really are* righteous in God's sight. (69)

[On union with Christ:] If you are a believer, when you stand before God the Father you do not simply stand *beside* Christ, so that He escorts you into God's presence. Nor do you stand *behind* Christ so that the Father sees Christ instead of you. You stand *in* Christ; when the Father looks at you He sees Christ in you and you in Christ. You receive the same acceptance before God the Father as Christ does, because you are *in* Christ. (77)

[On faith and trust:] At the risk of oversimplifying just a little, *faith* is when I *accept* something as true; *trust* is when I *act* like it is true *for me*. *Faith* emphasizes intellectual assent. *Trust* emphasizes emotional commitment. Both are involved in true conversion. (100)

One other strength to the explanations that

I should mention is their way of responding to difficult questions accurately but simply. Here are a few examples of the questions Dr. Talbert anticipates from a new Christian.

Why isn't it good enough for you just to tell God that you're truly sorry and ask for His forgiveness? Don't we often do that with each other when we wrong each other? We don't demand that some payment or suffering be exacted from someone who wrongs us, do we? (26)

We just talked about why the atonement happened. . . . Now we're talking about how it works. . . . Why does it even matter how it works, or whether we know how it works? (40–41)

[In dealing with the difficult doctrine of election] How was this sovereign choice of God worked out in you? Did you have any alternative? Any say? Any will in the matter? (131)



For the answers, you'll have to read the book yourself! But I'll expand just a bit on the last example: questions about election.

This question is raised in the book's final chapter, "Election: Before the Beginning." Dr. Talbert acknowledges that it might seem strange to wait until the very end to deal with the divine act that preceded everything else. But this approach actually reflects the sequence in which most people come to understand and appreciate the magnitude of their salvation. Election, occurring before the foundation of the world, turns out to be one of the last things Christians attempt to understand.

The chapter's handling of the topic avoids philosophical or logical considerations for the sake of magnifying the Scripture's own statements and syntheses. It includes the related issues of foreknowledge and predestination, and it sequences the three in the order in which the Scripture seems to explain them.



Whatever position one takes on the subject, he'll find here some rigorously biblical help in answering the inevitable questions people have.

**The third feature** of *Soteriology for Beginners* that I want to note is one you've probably already discovered for yourself from reading the various quotations above: the book's personal nature. Dr. Talbert explains in his preface that he's going to write in the second person—"not to talk about what happens to 'someone' when he or she believes the gospel, but what happens to *you* when *you* believe the gospel." It's this approach that I'm fairly confident will keep a reader going, even when the topic is one that he might react against initially as being over his head. That's especially the case because the book's overarching "plot" is introduced in its prologue as the "Story."

Soteriology is not just a doctrine you believe, but neither is it a story you merely read. It is

a story you experience because it is a story you are in. . . . That plotline takes shape in just the first three chapters of Genesis. It will take the rest of the Bible to work out all its implications and reach its final conclusion. So, let the Story begin. (4–5)

From there, the chapters develop the soteriological “plot” from Genesis to Revelation, but always in the personal terms of what is happening to *you* in *your* salvation to the glory of God. It’s an approach thoroughly biblical and irresistibly engaging.

About halfway through my reading the thought came to mind, *I should read this about once a year*. Everybody needs an occasional re-whetting of the sharp edge of his understanding of salvation and of his ability to explain and preach its many aspects accurately and clearly. G. Campbell Morgan defined the three essentials of preaching to be *truth*, *clarity*, and *passion*. *Soteriology for Beginners* is true and clear. I think you’ll find that using

it will ignite an increasingly grateful passion about salvation in those whom you're discipling.

### ***The Indomitable Brainerds***

The second title I'd like to recommend is one that the pastors' fellowship of which I'm a member read in the last few months of last year. *The Indomitable Brainerds: The Gospel Legacy of David and John Brainerd's Missions to the Indians* by Mack M. Tomlinson was a "hit" with all of us.

You may have had the experience with Brainerd's *Journal* that I had several times. I would attempt to read it, but would find myself somewhat depressed by its somber, dark, and introspective spirit. This actually happened to me three times over the course of about twenty years. Finally, I read the short biography by Vance Christie, *David Brainerd: A Flame for God*, and felt that I better understood the circumstances that contributed to Brainerd's frequent depressions. After that,

I was able to plow right through the journal with great profit. In fact it proved to be very strengthening, and I made a mental note to be sure to reread it in a few years.

If your initial reaction to the recommendation of a book about Brainerd is somewhat negative due to your having had a similar defeat in attempting to read his journal, I want to assure you that this new title will go a long way toward reclaiming Brainerd's example for you.

The book, however, is about both David Brainerd and his younger brother, John. John took up David's mantle after the latter's early death at the age of just twenty-nine. The story of the two spans sixty-three years (1718–1781) and the pivotal events in the lives of each man are sequenced in a helpful timeline preceding the first chapter.

Tomlinson relates the story in nine chapters, divided almost evenly between the two brothers in just 116 pages. These are followed

by seven appendices that I found to be, if anything, almost as profitable as the biographies. I'll list their titles.

- John Brainerd's Gospel Response to the Indian Theory of Race
- David Brainerd's Flawed View of Himself
- David Brainerd's Personal Musings
- Brainerd Doctrine and Preaching
- Indian Evangelism
- Gospel-Driven Suffering
- The Brainerd Legacy

Intriguing? They certainly were to me! And I wasn't disappointed in their contents.

The biographical section of the book does a fine job recounting the life of David accurately, concisely, and inspirationally. But it was the life of John which I found to be the more valuable, chiefly because it is little known.

God gave John ten times the three years that his brother had among the Indians. During

those three decades John continued David's work, traveled to unreached Indian groups, preached the gospel to white settlers, settled a group of converted Indians into a community that existed for years on their own lands, established a school for Indian girls, improved the Indians' living conditions, and influenced a broad swath of the American frontier. *He was for a time the only minister of Jesus, and for years and years the only missionary of his church, in that wild and extended region* (149). Thomas Brainerd, one of his descendants, summarized his life: *He was a lover of all good men and all good objects, and seems to have hated nothing but sin. He was a holy man of God, and his whole life bears testimony to his sympathy with suffering humanity* (114).

Tomlinson interweaves the ministries of the Brainerds with those of other missions to the American Indians, including the ministry of John Eliot and the SPCK (Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge).



How inspirational to read of the pioneering of Eliot, and of his philosophy of ministry: *Prayers and pains through faith in Christ Jesus will do anything* (22).

The book sprinkles the storyline with choice quotations from both Brainerds' journals and letters. It also includes anecdotes that make for powerful sermon illustrations. One that I found especially moving comes from the breakthrough David's ministry experienced at the Indian encampment near Crossweeksung, New Jersey, toward the close of his ministry.

*A young Indian woman who had on her way to the meeting laughed and mocked, became so concerned for her soul, that she seemed like one pierced through with a dart, and cried out in the assembly. After public service was over, she lay flat on the ground. She could neither go, nor stand, nor sit in her seat without being held up. I hearkened to her prayer. It was: "Guttummaukalumme"*

*wechaumeh kmeleh nolah!” that is, “Have mercy on me, and help me to give you my heart!” (40)*

An additional feature which I found to be particularly valuable is the inclusion of summaries like these:

*From the founding of Haddam in 1662 until 1865, a span of just over two hundred years, ten Brainerds served as gospel ministers in New England. (8)*

*American history shows that the Presbyterians founded Princeton, the Baptists established Brown, the Dutch Reformed founded Rutgers, and the Congregationalists established Dartmouth. (16)*

*In a period of seven months, he [David] rode at least 3,000 miles on horseback between Indian Communities. He could normally average 16 miles each day. At times he rode 120 miles to be among a group, staying as long as he could. It was later estimated he*



*traveled over 12,000 miles on horseback among the Indians during his short three-year missionary career. (34)*

*From 1760–1770, John Brainerd traveled in all kinds of weather and on all kinds of roads to spread the gospel. Through it all, he was neglected financially by both able individuals and by the Presbyterian Church that commissioned him. This lack was documented in Edinburgh, Scotland—Mr. Brainerd had received only the sum of £59 and 19 shillings, even though he had preached over 500 times among the Indians. (144)*

If you love missions stories, early American history, Christian biography, or David Brainerd in particular, you'll enjoy *The Indomitable Brainerds*.

## **ROADS**

Our church has just finished working through Part I of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Beginning in January we read about

thirty pages a week, discussing them briefly in our Lord's Day evening services. During those weeks I included a few related readings in our Sunday "Worship Guide" which I hoped would give searching application to Bunyan's allegory of Christian's journey. Here are two that I hope will be a blessing to you. If you wish, please feel free to use them in any way they might be helpful.

### **Which Road Are You Traveling?**

There are only two kinds of people traveling through life into the presence of the living God, their Creator. These two kinds of people are described by Him in His Word in various ways, according to . . .

- 1. Their state before Him—either *righteous* or *wicked* (Prov. 14:32; Mal. 3:18).
- 2. Their knowledge or ignorance of the Gospel—either *spiritual* or *natural* (1 Cor. 2:14–15).
- 3. Their special regard to His Son, Jesus

Christ—either *believers* or *unbelievers* (Mark 16:16; John 3:18, 36).

- 4. Their relation to the Holy Spirit—either *in the Spirit* or *having not the Spirit* (Rom. 8:9).
- 5. Their habits of life—either walking *according to the Spirit* or *according to the flesh* (Rom. 8:4–5).
- 6. Their rules of conduct—either *the word of God* or *the course of this world* (Ps. 119:105; Eph. 2:2).
- 7. Their master—either *God* or *the Devil* (John 8:44; Rom. 6:16; Eph. 2:2).
- 8. The road on which they travel—either *the narrow way* or *the broad way* (Matt. 7:13–14).
- 9. The final destination of their roads—either *life* or *death, heaven* or *hell* (Rom. 8:13; Matt. 25:46).

## Traffic in Vanity

Worldly men covet, pursue, grasp at, and contend for the things of time and sense with such eagerness and violence that their conduct aptly resembles the bustle, selfishness, artifice, dissipation, riot, and tumult of a large, crowded fair. The profits, pleasures, honors, possessions, and distinctions of the world are as transient and frivolous as the events of the fair day with which children are delighted, but which every man of sense condemns.

Solomon, after a complete experiment, pronounced the whole to be *vanity of vanities*, the veriest vanity imaginable, a complex vanity, an accumulation of ciphers, a lottery consisting entirely of blanks. Every earthly object is unsuitable to the wants of the rational soul. All are unsubstantial, unsatisfactory, irksome, disappointing, and perishing.

Yet this traffic of vanities is kept up all the year because the carnal mind always hankers after one or another of these worldly trifles,

and longs for changes of follies and relays of joy. Objects suited to its feverish thirst are always at hand to allure it, deriving their efficacy from continually pressing, as it were, on the senses. When our first parents were fatally prevailed on to join Satan's apostasy they forsook the Fountain of living waters to hew out for themselves broken cisterns. The idolatry of seeking happiness from the creature instead of the Creator has been universal among all their posterity.

Ever since the promise of a Savior opened to fallen men a door of hope, the Tempter has continually tried to allure them by outward objects, or to induce them by the dread of pain and suffering, to neglect so great salvation. Thus the Prince of the devils sets up this fair, and by teaching men to abuse the good creatures of God to vile purposes, or to expect from them such satisfaction as they were never meant to afford, he hath used them as baits to the ambition, avarice, levity, and sensuality

of the carnal mind. No crime has ever been committed on earth or conceived in the heart of man which did not arise from this universal apostasy and idolatry. (Thomas Scott, *The Pilgrim's Progress with Notes*, adapted)

---

Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. His sermons are available at [mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons](http://mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons) and on your favorite podcast app: search for "Mount Calvary Baptist Church," and subscribe.



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# BRING...THE BOOKS

*“... when thou comest, bring with thee . . . the books” (2 Tim. 4:13)*

## Five Books for a Deserted Island

***Note:** Contributors were asked to identify five books (other than the Bible) that they would choose to have with them if they were marooned on a deserted island.*

**A**s a boy, I imbibed Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. I shuddered at his solitude, chilled with fear at his discovery of the bare footprint, and marveled at his ingenuity in adversity. My childhood copy had 378 pages, and I lived vicariously and often in each one of them, alternately thrilling and agonizing through the twenty-eight years of Crusoe’s remote life. This request to be a hypothetical castaway affords a welcome opportunity to play Crusoe again, though I have done little in the intervening years to acquire his masterful survival skills. My first book choice might best be a survival guide.



Choosing books for island isolation is akin to choosing companions. Which voices do I want resounding in my ears? Whose virtual fellowship might I most value? Whose writing ministry does God's Spirit tend to energize with effectiveness in me? Each of my choices below represents an author whose works I have tasted with such profit that they always leave me hungering for more. If thrust into this not-so-splendid isolation, I'd hope my waterproof backpack would be filled with the following volumes (if the weight of it wouldn't hinder my reaching land!) to enable a wise use of this providence.

I'd love a volume of John Owen. Any would do, though my first choice is his final work, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*. Hopefully my providential exile could approach at least in small measure what the apostle John's exile was for him—a time when he received a sight of Christ fuller and grander than he had previously known. Reading



Owen takes time, concentration, cogitation . . . and every time I read Owen, I come away dissatisfied that I have sufficiently digested his words. The *Glory of Christ*, completed on Owen's deathbed, captures a grand theme that permeates all of Owen's works. Getting a glimpse of Christ, Owen argues, is both a foretaste of and preparatory to heaven. He carefully guides the reader, teaching us not only to notice Christ's glory but to behold until we truly see it. Beholding Christ's glory is essential to our transformation, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18. Owen presents the glory of Christ in all His works and through the entirety of Scripture. My prayer would be that my time of exile would be a sanctifying time. Though I would greatly miss the edifying influence of others, should I ever be rescued, I would hope to have grown more Christlike so as to be hardly recognizable as the same man they once knew.

*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible.* Henry died (1714) before Daniel

Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), but their lives overlapped, and it is very possible they crossed paths in London. For the final ten years of Henry's life, he labored on his *Commentary*, completing it through the book of Acts. Using Henry's notes, friends lovingly completed the work for him. Many years ago, to save shelf space, I swapped my six-volume set for a single 2,000-page volume. Anyone who has consulted Henry's prodigious work understands well Charles Spurgeon's description: "He is most pious and pithy, sound and sensible, suggestive and sober, terse and trustworthy. You will find him to be glittering with metaphors, rich in analogies, overflowing with illustrations, superabundant in reflections." Henry's *hobby* was to exposit texts; he would say, "Every man that studies hath some beloved study, which is his delight above any other; and this is mine." Spurgeon recommends, "Every minister ought to read Matthew Henry entirely and carefully through *once at least*" (emphasis mine). I'd love to take

that admonition to heart and read Henry systematically. When reading his biography years ago, I learned with pleasant surprise that one of his tutors was Thomas Vincent (I wishfully surmise a distant family connection!).

*Works of Jonathan Edwards.* Since Yale University has now published twenty-six volumes of Jonathan Edwards' works, the older two-volume set from 1834 prepared during the one hundredth anniversary of the first Great Awakening may seem comparatively paltry. Yet these two volumes are full of biography (of both Edwards and Brainerd), sermons, treatises, and longer works of Edwards, some of which came after he had been dismissed from his Northampton church. These volumes, though the print is fine, are veritable libraries, totaling nearly 1,700 pages. Edwards, I find, mentors his readers in the art of scriptural meditation on passages and themes of Scripture. Reading him, one learns how passages fit into themes and how larger themes

surface in individual passages, enlightening Scripture's depth and breadth. He is eminently God-centered and Christ-exalting. Yet Edwards is also a student of the heart of man—his pastoral applications are potent and comprehensive. If I could have only *two* books, I would choose these.

If the survival guide doesn't count as a choice, my final book would be *A Gospel Primer* by Milton Vincent. I don't weary of reading this little volume. At only one hundred pages, its brevity belies its depth. Perhaps in extended isolation I can gain needed proficiency in preaching the gospel to myself. I know I will need the truths of the gospel daily every bit as much then as I do now. The many days I've already enjoyed in fellowship with this book and its author would make the use of it all the sweeter.

---

Robert Vincent pastors Grace Bible Church in Milford, Ohio.

# STRAIGHT CUTS

*“Rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15)*

## Much More Precious than Purified Gold

**G**old is considered one of the most valuable metals on earth. As this is being written, gold sells at \$2,025 per ounce. That means that a pound of gold is worth \$32,400. What if I made you an offer: in one hand I offer you two pounds of gold (valued at \$64,800), and in the other hand I offer you “manifold temptations”? Which one would you choose?

According to 1 Peter 1:7, you should choose the temptations. The word “temptations” (1:6) has two primary meanings. It can refer to an allurement to do evil. This is something the Devil offers you. We know that God never allures a believer to do evil, nor can He Himself be tempted (Jam. 1:13). The word

“temptation” can also mean a testing or trial. In 1 Peter 1:6, it refers to a trial. The word “manifold” speaks of variety. It is testing that comes through various avenues.

In his first epistle, Peter writes to believers who are experiencing multiple challenges in living for the Lord. They bear a “heaviness” (severe emotional and mental stress) through facing many and various trials in life. According to 1 Peter 1:7, such temptations are of great value. They provide a “trial of your faith.” This word for “trial” means to be approved. It demonstrates the validity of someone or something. Think of a recently completed bridge. Once completed, the engineers send across the new bridge a vehicle with a heavy payload to evaluate whether the bridge can bear the weight. If it withstands the weight, they declare the bridge approved.

In verse 7, it is not a bridge that God approves but a believer’s “faith.” His “faith” refers to his personal relationship with the



Lord Jesus Christ. In context, the Lord uses the trials that believers face to demonstrate or prove their faith is genuine. When their faith relationship overcomes the trials, the Lord declares their faith genuine or real.

An important phrase in this verse is “much more precious.” It is a comparative term revealing that a believer whose faith faces and overcomes trials is more valuable than gold. Notice that Peter enhances the comparison by indicating the gold has been “tried with fire.” The word “tried” comes from the same root as the word translated “trial” earlier in this verse. Here, it speaks of gold that has been purified through applying heat. The metallurgist has removed any impurities from the gold and verified its purity.

Take a moment to grasp what Peter writes in this verse. He teaches that the experience of a believer who overcomes multiple trials and demonstrates genuine faith is much more valuable than purified gold. Back to my orig-

inal question: If I gave you the option to go through trials successfully or to take the gold, which would you choose?

You should choose the trials. After all, according to this verse gold perishes. One day, all the gold in this world will be destroyed. In contrast, the genuine faith relationship of a believer will stand for all eternity. Your genuine faith will praise, honor, and glorify the Lord at His revelation.

I believe Peter provides an eternal perspective in this verse that is life-changing. As believers, we tend to value perishable things. We do not consistently value eternal things. Perhaps that's why Paul admonishes us to "seek those things which are above. . . . Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1–2).

John gives additional insight for valuing that which is eternal. According to Revelation 21:21, the heavenly streets will be comprised of "pure gold." Gold in the New Jerusalem



will be like asphalt in our world. I've yet to see anyone in this world digging up asphalt from a highway, excited about its value. One day, gold will have the value of asphalt. God's people will walk on it.

In contrast, the genuine faith of a believer has eternal value, as we see in 1 Peter 1:7. It brings "praise" to the Lord. It admires and exalts the Lord Jesus. Genuine faith provides "honor" to the Lord. It demonstrates reverence to the Lord. Genuine faith also brings "glory" to the Lord. It reveals His worth and value before His entire creation.

First Peter 1:7 provides a paradigm shift for believers. Rather than dreading, complaining about, or becoming frustrated or angry over times of testing in their lives, God's people are admonished by Peter to cherish such times. It is through God exposing His people to trials that their faith receives His stamp of approval. Their faith is genuine, or real. It passes the test.

When God's people fully grasp this concept or truth, they will find themselves valuing trials rather than running from or dreading them. They will delight in that which frequently upsets them. They will view their trials as "much more precious" than gold.

If someone offered you purified gold or various trials, which one would you choose now?

---

David Pennington pastors Downeast Baptist Church in Machias, Maine, serves as an adjunct professor at Maranatha Baptist Seminary, and is the founder and owner of Penn Coaching and Consulting.

# WINDOWS

*"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'" Charles Spurgeon*

## God in the Morning

When you awoke this morning to a new day, what were your thoughts? Maybe you saw today as a fresh opportunity, a day in which there were no mistakes yet (unless you stayed in bed too long). Or maybe you saw the day before you as a set of formidable challenges that had to be faced. Possibly you awoke to another round of needs waiting to be met, but you did not know how to meet them. Certainly, a new day is a fresh opportunity, but it can also be a whole new batch of difficulties. As you began this new day, did you encounter the Lord as He comes forth in the morning?

Have you noticed that the Old Testament speaks of God in the morning? What is God like in the morning? In your theological

orthodoxy you might respond that God is always the same; He does not change. God is the same whether it is morning or night. Though this is true, Scripture still speaks of what God is like in the morning.

## **GOD IS JUST EVERY MORNING**

If your day began with the opposition of the ungodly making your life difficult, or if you faced persecution, or if you were victimized by the injustice of the world, take encouragement from this: “The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: *every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not*; but the unjust knoweth no shame” (Zeph. 3:5).

Our God is the morning Judge. Every morning God appears like a judge arriving at the courthouse to dispense His justice. We may see corruption on every level of society and law, like the prophet Zephaniah saw in Judah. The people of Zephaniah’s day faced princes like lions, judges like wolves, treach-

erous prophets, and priests that did violence to the law (3:3–4). How could anyone get fairness under those authorities?

In all ages the people of God have been unfairly treated because of their righteousness, beginning with Abel, who was murdered by Cain. We too may find ourselves unfairly treated by those who oppose our stand for righteousness, yet our hope is in the God who will not fail us, whose justice is fresh and faithful with the dawn of every day. When you wake up tomorrow, remember that the justice of God is new for a new day no matter who the opponents may be.

## **GOD IS OUR STRENGTH EVERY MORNING**

The Lord is morning strength that can be refreshed at the beginning of every day: “O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee; *be thou their arm every morning*, our salvation also in the time of trouble” (Isa. 33:2). Isaiah ministered to Judah during the days

of King Hezekiah. During his reign, Judah was invaded by Sennacherib and the enormous Assyrian army. There was no chance of Judah's prevailing against Assyria without divine intervention. They simply did not have the strength. Isaiah prayed for the Lord to be the arm (strength) of Judah.

The arm of God is like the strength of a well-rested army arising to the day of battle. There are many things we suffer or encounter in our lives that seem as insurmountable as the Assyrian army. Some of the strength sappers may be hardships that are normal to our lives, while others may originate in the spiritual warfare in the heavenlies. The Christian life is a warfare that will not end until we are with the Lord. Our enemies are our flesh, the world, and the wicked one, and they are relentless. Like Isaiah, we can pray for the arm of the Lord to help us, and we can find His strength fresh with each new morning. The God whose arm delivered Hezekiah from the

Assyrians can be your arm also.

## **GOD IS AS RELIABLE AS THE MORNING**

If your day began with defeat or despair and you doubted that there was reason to hope for something better, find hope in the words of Hosea 6:3: “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: *his going forth is prepared as the morning*; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.” God is morning certainty.

The phrase “prepared as the morning” means “as certain as the morning.” Nothing in our experience is as reliable as the cycle of night and day. We can always be certain the morning will come. The reliability of God is compared in this verse with the certainty of the sunrise. In Hosea, God commanded the prophet to marry an unfaithful woman who would become an adulteress. Israel is like the unfaithful wife of the prophet. As Hosea’s wife, Gomer, was able to return to Hosea, so



Israel can return to the Lord. The nation is speaking in verses 1–3 about going back to seek God. This return is probably still a future event, but the confidence of Israel about returning is based on the character of God. Even apostate Israel can depend on the goodness of God to allow repentance, and this is as certain as the rising of the sun tomorrow morning.

Every morning, God is good, longsuffering, and ready to receive those who come to Him. The motions of God's working are as sure as the coming of morning. As certain as night and day, evening and morning, and as certain as the rainy seasons in Israel, God will keep His word and fulfill His promises.

To lack assurance about your relationship with God is a common problem among believers, especially for immature Christians. Sin in your life can rob you of your confidence. John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, converted to Christ in the mid-



1600s after a long spiritual struggle. Even after his salvation, he continued to struggle in his faith. He was plagued by recurring doubts about whether he was truly called of God. Eventually, Bunyan came to victory. The answer to doubts in assurance and confidence is to come by faith to believe in the certainty of God. He is as certain as the morning. God does not arrive in the morning in a bad mood, nor does He become changeable. There is a constant reliability in God's character that makes Him always dependable.

## **GOD IS FAITHFUL AND COMPASSIONATE EVERY MORNING**

If this morning arrived with the prospect of impossible circumstances, if you started exhausted, if the landscape before you was full of the rubble of failures, take heart in the words of Lamentations 3:22–23: “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. *They are new every morning*: great is thy faithfulness.”

God is morning mercy and faithfulness.

The weeping prophet, Jeremiah, said those words as he looked on the ruined city of Jerusalem after the invasion of the Babylonians. How tragic to see the chosen city of God in such destruction! Jeremiah could easily have concluded that the Lord had abandoned them; but because he knew God, he also knew the mercies and compassions of God. The possibility, indeed the certainty, that the ruins of Jerusalem would be restored was because of the graciousness of God.

“Mercy” is God’s loyal lovingkindness; “compassion” is God’s pity on us in our suffering. God begins every day with fresh mercy and compassion. Each new dawn is met with a new batch of kindness from our loving God. Like Jerusalem, if we received what we deserve, we would be completely destroyed. Just as God’s mercy will restore Jerusalem, so we know that His compassions will not fail us. Let us proclaim with the prophet, “Great

is thy faithfulness,” and with the songwriter, “Morning by morning new mercies I see.”

## **GOD IS OUR MORNING INSTRUCTOR**

As you arose to meet this new day, did you take time to seek fellowship with God? If you did, then you met the Lord coming forth, as it were, with all His perfections fresh and new. Isaiah 50:4 begins a “Servant of the Lord” passage. All these “Servant” sections are prophetic of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Savior speaks these words: “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary; *he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.*” God is the morning instructor.

Jesus speaks here of the Father waking Him morning after morning and also awaking His ear as a learner. I stood on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee one morning, looking eastward to watch the sunrise. As the sun began

to peek over the ridge of the Golan Heights east of the sea, my thoughts turned to my Savior who made Capernaum His home during His earthly ministry. Jesus often went out before dawn to pray on the hillsides of the Sea of Galilee. How often did He see the sun rise over the Golan Heights as He experienced the freshness of God in the morning? Jesus also found the Father to be a morning teacher, as God awakened His ear as a learner on those mornings. How interesting that the Son of God was a disciple who needed to be instructed daily by God the Father! It is the fact of His humanity that required Him to submit to instruction. If it was so important for the Son of God to meet with the Father in the morning, how essential is it for us?

We enjoyed a July vacation in the hills of Greeneville, Tennessee. Each morning I would take my cup of coffee and go out to sit on the porch of the house where we were staying. The temperature was delightfully cool,

and the mornings clear and quiet except for the chirping of the birds. I sat with my open Bible and meditated on the Lord. His presence was fresh and new, so much better than my usual hurried morning devotional times. It was delightful. There is no better way to begin a day than to begin it seeking the freshness of God.

Will you accept the obvious application of these illustrations about God in the morning and renew your commitment to your daily morning devotions and Bible reading? May our prayer be that of the Psalmist: “*Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee*” (Ps. 143:8).

---

Tom Sims serves as a deacon and Bible teacher at Northside Baptist Church in North Charleston, South Carolina.



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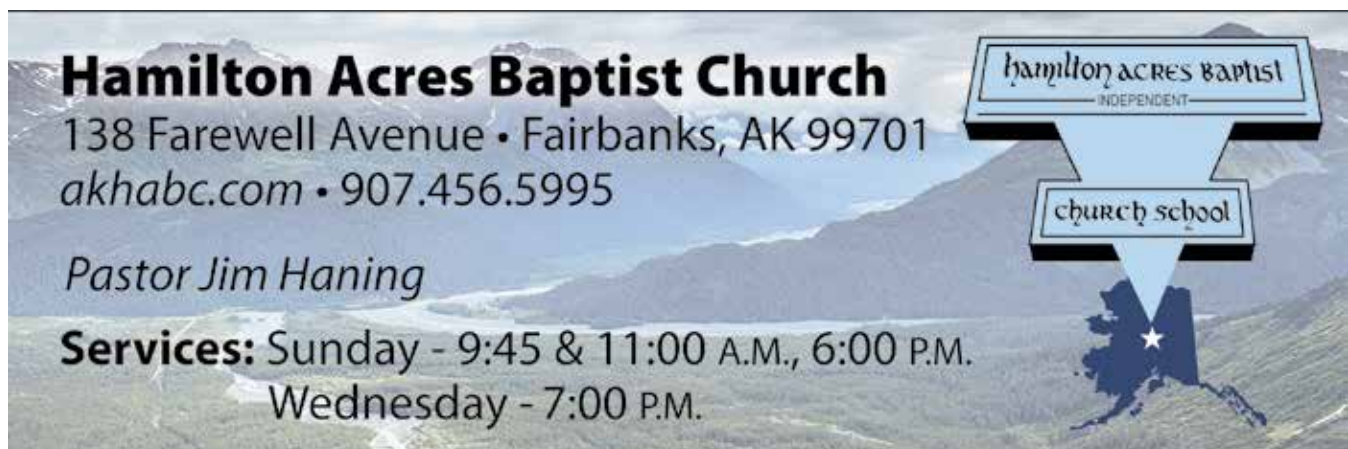
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*A Heart for God & Others*



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Church for God's Glory)  
First Baptist Church  
5304 Charles St.  
Rockford, IL 61108  
Coordinator: David  
Huffstutler

### June 10-13, 2024

#### FBFI Annual Fellowship

Tri-City Baptist Church  
6953 West 92nd Lane  
Westminster, CO 80021

### August 23, 2024

Chesapeake Bay  
Regional Fellowship  
Calvary Baptist Church  
3200 Ridge Road  
Westminster, MD 21157  
Coordinator: Kent Ramler

### September 10, 2024

#### NYC Regional Fellowship

Bethel Baptist Fellowship  
2304 Voorhies Ave.  
Brooklyn, NY 11235  
Coordinator: Matthew  
Recker

## October 18, 2024

### New Mexico Regional Fellowship

Manzano Baptist Church  
12411 Linn Ave. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87123  
Coordinator: Dan Mauldin

## October 19, 2024

### New England Regional Fellowship

(Meeting with the New  
England Foundations  
Conference)  
Heritage Baptist Church  
186 Dover Point Road  
Dover, NH 03820  
Coordinator: Taigen Joos

## October 21-22, 2024

### Central Regional Fellowship

Faith Baptist Church  
1001 South Scenic Dr.  
Manhattan, KS 66503  
Coordinator: David  
Byford

## 2025

### March 17-19, 2025

#### South Regional Fellowship

Swan Creek Baptist  
Church  
2501 Swan Creek Rd  
Swan Creek, NC 28642  
Coordinator: Tony  
Facenda

### March 24-24, 2025

#### Northern California Regional Fellowship

Calvary Baptist Church  
160 Seaside Court  
Marina, CA 93933  
Coordinator: Dan Pelletier

### April 14-17, 2025

#### Northwest Regional Fellowship

Grace Baptist Church  
2731 Matson Road  
Victoria, BC V9B 4M5  
CANADA  
Coordinator: Don  
Johnson



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## News From All Over



After serving Hamilton Acres Baptist Church for twenty-six years as senior pastor, **Bruce Hamilton and his wife, Lena**, have retired. More accurately, they have shifted their ministry focus to the mission field. Having seen many Chinese people turn to Christ, Bruce and Lena have decided to pursue this gospel opportunity full-time. At the time of this writing, they have concluded a four-month deputation tour of the lower forty-eight states and are back home in Fairbanks, Alaska, preparing for their fourth missionary journey to China. For more information, please visit [Godofalaska.com](http://Godofalaska.com)



After nearly twenty-seven years of pastoring Catawba Springs Christian Church in Apex, North Carolina, and prior to that, fourteen years of ministry elsewhere, **Chuck Woodruff** is retiring from pastoring Catawba Springs to relocate to Decatur, Alabama, to be near aging parents and a sister with cancer. Chuck and Linda believe it is God's will for them to help care for these loved ones, and they are seeking His will about what ministry the Lord might have for them in Decatur.





**Jerry and Linda Craven**, once GFA missionaries in New Zealand, are now at Catawba Springs Christian Church, where Jerry is serving as interim pastor. Catawba Springs was one of their supporting churches and had a major role in their initially getting to the field of New Zealand thirty years ago. They are very pleased to be assisting the church during the pastoral search.



In addition to his role as Director of Content Development at BJU Press, **Steve Skaggs** has served as *FrontLine* magazine's Publications Editor since the March/April 2003 issue. We thank him for his many years of

serving on the *FrontLine* magazine team. He has recently stepped down, and we welcome **Chuck Bumgardner** as our new Publications



Editor. Chuck is a Biblical Worldview Specialist for BJU Press, helping writers incorporate content for biblical worldview shaping into Christian textbooks.



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Dan R. Brown

# Why the Promises to Israel Matter Today



**O**rthodoxy<sup>1</sup> always precedes orthopraxy.<sup>2</sup> Correct doctrine always precedes correct practice. No one can function with biblical practice and methodology without first having correct beliefs in place. Wrong

theology will ultimately lead to errors in practice. Virtually every aberrant practice can be traced back to errors of theology. This truth is seen throughout both Bible history and church history. This principle of ministry serves as an undeniable truth for every aspect of both doctrine and practice. Theology is about connections within doctrines and these connections inevitably show up in the practice of ministry.

## **A FUTURE FOR ISRAEL**

Few doctrines matter more than that of the future of a literal Israel in God's prophetic plan. Many evangelicals deny a prophetic future for Israel and do so by reading the church back into the Old Testament. Trying to find the church in the Old Testament compromises the integrity of the Old Testament story line and taints virtually all of the theology that crosses into the New Testament. For example, should we try to bring the kingdom in? Are we trying to build the kingdom today? Failure



to recognize God's future physical kingdom on the earth (the millennium) with the fulfillment of covenantal promises to Israel as its centerpiece will lead not only to a distortion of the meaning of the Old Testament but also to a misunderstanding of the church's purpose today. A change in the church's purpose will lead to inevitable changes in how ministry occurs. Again, theology is about connections both to other doctrines and to practice.

The reality of Israel possessing a vibrant future in God's prophetic plan has deep implications for the practice of local church ministry. Replacement theology, the errant belief that the church has replaced Israel, sacrifices the heart of what God says He will do for His people. Removing the covenantal fulfillment (primarily the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants) of the direct promises of God to Israel significantly affects the interpretive basis for understanding the Old Testament. Changing the interpretive basis for the Bible

has a ripple effect through virtually every doctrine and ultimately in the practice of ministry.

## **THE RESULTS OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY**

Here is a sample of what is lost. The biggest loser in this aberrant theology is, of course, Israel. What the world sees today in modern Israel apparently has no connection to what the Bible describes for Israel. If God has no prophetic plan for Israel, every Old Testament saint will experience a great disappointment. And what about what Israel is today? The pre-1948 theologian could only speculate about what we see happening in history.

The second biggest loser is the church. If God did not keep His promises to Israel, then how can we expect God to keep His promises to us?

Finally, the foundation of dispensationalism is undercut by the denial of a future for Israel and the faulty interpretive process leading to that position. Dispensationalism as an inter-

pretive model is less about being a framework than about being a lens through which one looks to see what God has done, is doing, or will do in the future. Dispensationalism is about taking the biblical text at face value and then seeing the connective tissue that brings Scripture together. Surely there are other losers, but these are perhaps the largest.

With the loss of dispensationalism, the rapture becomes one of the first casualties. Again, this is about theological connections. The prophetic timelines of Daniel and Revelation either become non-literal allegories, or they become already fulfilled prophecies (the preterist position<sup>3</sup>). Some attempt to keep a future for Israel with a kingdom but reject any details (historic premillennialism). Others want to build the kingdom today, ultimately ushering in Christ's return through humanity's progress (postmillennialism). Still others reject any formal "kingdom," seeing fulfillment only through the lens of the church

(amillennialism). While there might be a general agreement among evangelicals that Christ will return, none of the details matter anymore. As the old joke goes, the church is left with “panmillennialism”—hoping it will all “pan” out in the end.

## **THE EFFECTS OF DENYING THE RAPTURE**

Losing the doctrine of the rapture affects the church’s ministry in multiple ways. Always remember that doctrine affects practice. Surrendering the rapture not only means losing normal interpretation, a problem that will ripple throughout one’s theological system, but it also affects local church ministry and practice. The New Testament labors to connect the rapture to a broad understanding of living life for the Lord and His glory. Here are some implications for church ministry when Israel’s prophetic future is discarded, normal hermeneutics are rejected, dispensationalism is disposed of, and the rapture is forgotten.

A loss of the rapture means a loss of the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ. The rapture becomes the “blessed hope” only when the church awaits Christ’s return with expectancy and anticipation. The scriptural reality is that nothing else needs to happen prophetically before the rapture of the church. The church can truly pray with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).<sup>4</sup>

Imminency means that Christ could return at any moment and that nothing in prophecy needs to occur before the rapture. Imminency does not mean God is prevented from doing something prior to the rapture if He desires. This author has, for example, stepped into the voting booth hoping that he was not casting a ballot for the Antichrist. God controls the agenda and the means to accomplish His will on earth. But everything in Scripture points to the conclusions that the rapture could be at any moment, the rapture is near (certainly nearer today than yesterday), and the church

should be anticipating Jesus' coming.

A loss of imminency means the loss of a primary New Testament motivation for righteous living. Multiple New Testament passages connect the any-moment return of Christ with godly living. Paul instructs Titus to be “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing [epiphany] of our great God and [even] Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). This guidance immediately follows an admonition to live godly by negatively “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and then, positively, “we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (v. 12).

John encourages believers as children of God that it has “not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). This encouragement is immediately followed by a reminder that knowledge of the soon return of Christ affects how one lives. John continues, “And

everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (v. 3). These statements are preceded by John’s admonition: “Now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears [Parousia], we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (2:28).

A quick check finds similar instruction in other rapture passages, such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (see verses 7–12) and 1 Corinthians 15:51–57 (see verse 58). A reasonable conclusion is that the imminent return of Christ is used consistently as a motivation for both Christian living and godly service. The promise of Christ’s coming should provide incentive for us as believers to serve the Lord with all our hearts. Any leader can tell you that you often get what you inspect, not usually what you expect. Christ’s promise of imminency should motivate us to greater heights of ministry for Him. Parents who travel leaving children home alone under-



stand that certain things happen at home while “the cat’s away,” but the day of accountability is coming when the parents return home. The rapture is presented to the church as that moment of accountability that may come at any time without warning.

A loss of imminency affects preaching and the urgency of the message. The call by today’s preacher to “repent and believe” should be heightened by the urgency that time is short and that Christ will soon return for His church. This is both a motivation for the ministry and an appeal for the unbeliever. Remember that the fields are ripe and ready to harvest. The day will come when the harvest is over.

The church has had a sense of urgency throughout its history. Even the disciples thought Christ would return soon, perhaps even in their lifetimes. The imminency of His return should motivate the church both as individuals and corporately. He is coming.

Soon. This truth should invigorate and energize your pulpit ministry.

There certainly are other ministry areas where the loss of a future for Israel will affect our practice in the local church. Remember that what you believe does indeed affect what you do. Doctrine matters, and it changes how we think and what we do in ministry. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

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Dan Brown is a senior professor and the chairman of the Practical Theology department at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife Mary Jo live in Ankeny, Iowa, and have four daughters and thirteen grandchildren.



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- <sup>1</sup> “Orthodoxy” refers to correct doctrine.
  - <sup>2</sup> “Orthopraxy” refers to correct practice, or one’s manner of living.
  - <sup>3</sup> Preterism is the view that prophecies have already been fulfilled in history. Those who hold this view often do not agree on which historical event fulfills which prophecy.
  - <sup>4</sup> Scripture quotations are from the NKJV.





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## Heart to Heart

**Malinda Duvall**



## Time to Land the Learjet

If you were to ask me what I would have liked to have done with the last sixteen years, God has allowed me to do exactly that by letting me be involved with the FBFI. As I transition out of my job over the next

several months, I have so many people whom I want to thank for these sixteen wonderful years.

When Pastor John Vaughn, then FBFI president, introduced me to the board in June 2008, he said that for me to take this job was like being given the manual to a Learjet and being told to fly it. Was he ever right!

And then I went to flight school and started reading the manual.

When Pastor Vaughn retired as pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina, all his ministries moved out of the church office to make way for the next pastor. The FBFI Home Office moved to my home, and he worked out of his home, giving new meaning to the term “FBFI Home Office.”

God has given me so many great flight instructors along the way. Of course, God is always the best teacher. Early on when the learning curve was huge, my husband, Roger,

would pray with me daily at breakfast about my job and would remind me to ask the Lord for help for every next step. I can't thank both the Lord and Roger enough for all the help they've been to me and the FBFI over the years. During this transition, Roger has spent many hours keeping that Learjet engine running—managing the financials, setting up computers and printers, replacing my webcam when my puppy chewed through the wires, and far too many other things even to list. God has clearly placed him in his position as FBFI treasurer as I transition out of my job.

As another one of my instructors, Pastor Vaughn spent much time early on teaching me FBFI procedures, policies, and history. He showed me repeatedly how a godly person should respond to difficult situations, what graciousness looks like, and so much more. It's been such a privilege to have worked closely with him.

Meeting all the “suits” at that first board



meeting was quite intimidating until it occurred to me that they were godly men, and there was no reason to be afraid of them. It's been a pleasure to work with Kevin Schaal (FBFI president/CEO) and the FBFI board, and to see firsthand their gracious and kind responses to many difficult situations through the years. They have all become my very good friends.

Does my chaplain family know how much I love them and how much I will miss them? They have taught me so much. (Military acronyms are a language all their own, and the chaplains have been so patient with me during what can only be described as language school!) God has allowed me to attend Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership (CHBOLC) graduations at Fort Jackson, to be present at Mike Shellman's retirement ceremony in Washington, DC, to see CH (MAJ) Josh Cox and CH (MAJ) Seth Hamilton at a battalion jump after attending Seth's promo-

tion ceremony at Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg), visit CH (COL) Gary and Carissa Fisher at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, attend chaplain retreats and chaplain training, and on and on. In 2008, FBFI had twenty-nine men listed as chaplains. Today we have more than eighty people on our list of endorsed chaplains. Joe Willis, FBFI Endorser, has done an amazing job of building relationships with each one, caring for and counselling them and their families, helping with their career paths, and representing them in Washington, DC. He has defied all the jokes I initially heard about working for a retired army colonel and has been just the opposite—a great communicator and so helpful as I filled out all the paperwork for the Department of Defense for our military chaplains. He's given me hundreds of hours over the phone helping me care for our chaplains and their families.

Behind the scenes, FBFI has a large ministry-minded team who has worked hard

through the years to make the Fellowship what it is today. Several other team members are also currently transitioning out of their roles. Our accountant, Mike Terelmes, has done the year-end financial board review for more years than I know about. He has recently transitioned out of his job only because he's 86! Steve Skaggs just passed off the *FrontLine* magazine Publications Editor baton to Chuck Bumgardner. Steve has been so easy to work with as he and I have worked to get each issue "off my desk" and on to our graphic designer, Mike Moreau. In addition to maintaining *FrontLine* magazine's reputation of excellence, Mike has helped me with countless smaller FBFI design projects that were beyond my skill set, always with a positive, upbeat, and "happy-to-help" attitude. Thankfully he's not transitioning out of his job yet.

And there's Tom Carter. In God's perfect timing He sent Tom to help set up the FBFI computer several times—initially when I got

a new computer and again last year when it totally crashed due to a power surge and Windows upgrade occurring at the same time. Last year's crash took two weeks with both Tom and Roger working to restore everything to good functionality.

I still have no idea what it takes to get a Learjet off the ground, but I do know that the FBFI Home Office has an amazing crew who has gone above and beyond—the extra mile—to make it a smoother flight for all of us. At one point, my good friend David Shumate kindly shared a Far Side comic with me that helped me realize that no matter what, I couldn't make the “wings stay on” this plane, and I couldn't make the “wings fall off.”

I could tell so many great stories from where I sit. One of my favorites is about the day I received a letter on correctional facility stationery from Victory City, California. The person wrote asking for a *FrontLine* subscription. Being baffled as to who this

might possibly be, I called Ron Smith, who lives in Victory City, and asked if he had any idea. “Oh yes. I have Sunday services in that facility, and that man comes to our church there.” After checking with Ron, I wrote a very generic letter back and set the writer of the letter up with a subscription. Ron promised me that the receiver would read every word, from cover to cover, since the inmates weren’t allowed to have electronics in the facility. Sure enough, I received a second letter requesting a book that had been advertised in *FrontLine*. Yes—he even read our ads. I wrote him another short, generic letter and sent him the book. It shouldn’t have surprised me when I received a third letter from him stating that he had been looking for a godly wife! I let him know I was happily married. As a result of those letters, we have sent hundreds of *FrontLine* magazines to Ron Smith to use in his ministry there in the Victory City Correctional Facility.

As I'm now circling to land, I'm so thankful that I was given the manual to this Learjet. The time has come to pass that manual on to my friend and the next FBFI Home Office manager, Suzanne Fell, in a few short months. As exciting as it has been for me to be a part of this ministry, it also has been very exciting to see how God has sent Suzanne to us. She has a good flight ahead of her.



Malinda Duvall, second from left, with a group of chaplain's





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## At A Glance

Layton Talbert

# Words for the Word: The Multivocal Bible

**P**salm 119 is characterized by a concentrated and repeated use of seven alternative expressions for Scripture: *word, law, testimony, judgment, commandment, statute, and precept*. What are the differences among these terms? Or are there any? Are they just random poetic expressions to avoid redundancy? All these words surface throughout the Old Testament and they exist for reasons beyond mere poetic variety. Synonyms possess both overlap *and* distinction. Overlap is what makes them synonyms; distinction is what makes them separate words. For example, *animals, organisms, creatures, wildlife, fauna, livestock, denizens, beasts, living things,*

*critters*, and *varmints* are largely synonymous; but they are certainly not identical, nor can they be indiscriminately interchanged.

Psalms 119 (and Psalm 19) paints a picture of the diverse character of Scripture. Psalm 119 is a thesaurus of words for the Word of God. The addition of each synonym adds a facet to our understanding of how Scripture functions. The better we understand the multifaceted character of the Word of God, the more appropriately we can respond to it.

Psalms 119 is an acrostic made up of twenty-two sections of eight verses each. Each of the words discussed below appears about once in every eight-verse section. The brief explanation and application of each term includes additional passages so you can further explore each facet of God's words.

## **"WORD": THE BIBLE AS GOD'S PERSONAL COMMUNICATION**

*"Words" are expressions of God's thought,*

*emphasizing the fact that God has spoken to man.* Two Hebrew words (*dabar* and *‘imrah*), both translated “word,” are the most basic terms for speech, emphasizing (respectively) the action of communicating and the content of that communication. The Bible is not merely a record of what ancient people thought about God, religious advice written by devout men. It is the personal and direct communication of the words of God to man. As in human speech, the form of that communication may vary greatly. For example, we refer to the ten “commandments” in Exodus and Deuteronomy, but they are literally presented (in Hebrew) as the ten “words” (Exod. 20:1; 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4). “The ten words are *what* God said; they are ten commandments because of *how* God said them” (Kalland, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:180). The other synonyms below convey some of the variety of those different forms of God’s speech. It is significant that one of the titles for Christ in the New Testament is “the

Word of God” (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13), because He embodies the personal communication and self-revelation of God to man (Heb. 1:1–2). See also Isaiah 45:19; 48:16; Deuteronomy 29:29; Psalm 119:89, 105, 162.

## **“LAW”: THE BIBLE AS GOD’S INSTRUCTION MANUAL**

*“Laws” are God’s authoritative teachings, emphasizing that God instructs His people how to live. To us “law” means rules and regulations, but at its root God’s law (*torah*) is divine teaching. God’s law is His instruction for our guidance, but not merely in the sense of suggestion or advice. God’s teaching is authoritative direction from the One who created us and created life to work in a certain way.*

*Torah* became the summary term for the Mosaic covenant (embodied in Exodus 20–40, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy), which includes much more than the Ten Commandments. Consequently, *Torah* came

to denote the whole Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy) as one of major divisions of the Hebrew Bible comprised of “the law and the prophets” (see Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 22:40). But God’s *torah* is also a central feature of the new covenant, by which God implants His *law* in the hearts of His people (Jer. 31:31–33). When the psalmist exclaims, “O how I love thy law [*torah*]! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97), he is not describing a preoccupation with biblical dos and don’ts; he is passionate about discovering God’s teaching and perspective on everything. See also Psalm 119:34, 72, 165.

## **“TESTIMONY”: THE BIBLE AS GOD’S AFFIDAVIT**

*“Testimonies” are God’s witness to what is so, emphasizing the reliability of all He says in the Bible.* Many passages in God’s Word function exactly as a testimony does in a court of law. “Testimonies” (*‘edōth*) are those portions of God’s Word in which He tells us what hap-

pened in the past or what will happen in the future, what He is like or what we are like. In short, everything He says about anything is His “testimony” to the way things were, are, or will be. The Scripture is God’s sworn affidavit as to the way things really happened, really are, and really will be in the future; and it is His reliable and eternal witness to His own unchanging character. Every “testimony of the LORD is sure” (Ps. 19:7; see Ps. 93:5)—that is, His testimonies are completely reliable and trustworthy; they stand as a witness to the reality of God’s recorded character and activity and to the dependability of everything He says.

This term is frequently used with the verb “to keep” (Ps. 119:2, 22, 88, 129, 146, 167, 168). How does one “keep” a testimony? To keep God’s testimonies means that I order my life and conduct and decisions according to what God says is so. Eve believed the serpent’s testimony about the character of God and acted accordingly. Whose testimony about



God will we believe? See also Psalm 119:24, 46, 99, 111, 138.

## **“JUDGMENT”: THE BIBLE AS GOD’S VERDICT**

*“Judgments” are declarations of God’s just decisions, emphasizing the settled value system of God as the all-wise Judge.* When we read about God’s “judgments” (*mishpat*), we probably think in terms of punishment. But God executes “judgment” in the same sense that a judge examines a case, weighs evidence, and renders a verdict: the judge’s decision may be favorable or unfavorable, but it is always binding. God’s “judgments” (also “ordinances” in Psalm 119:91) reflect His evaluations and His settled decisions.

Like “testimony,” this term frequently appears with the verb “to keep” or “to do” (Deut. 7:11–12; 11:1; 26:17; 30:16). How do I “keep” or “do” God’s judgments? By making my decisions and ordering my conduct



in accordance with *God's* decisions and *God's* value system, not mine and not man's. See also Psalm 119:7, 106, 160.

## **“COMMANDMENT”: THE BIBLE AS GOD’S RULE BOOK**

*“Commandments” articulate God’s will, emphasizing His authority to give orders with the expectation of full compliance.* The word “commandment” (*mitswah*) means what it says, so to speak. It is the word for an *order*—a directive, an imperative, a mandate. There is probably no term for God’s words so readily understood and so instinctively resisted. Advice, we value. Instruction, we appreciate. Requests, we will consider. But commands tend to raise our hackles.

Commands are reminders of who is in charge. They are also God’s gracious way of saving us from the consequences of our foolishness and sinfulness. Only a madman flouts divine authority. That’s why those who

fear God and keep His commandments are accounted wise people of great understanding (Ps. 111:10). See also Psalm 112:1; 119:10, 32, 35, 47–48, 73, 115, 127, 151, 166, 172, 176.

## **“STATUTE”: THE BIBLE AS GOD’S BLACKLIST**

*“Statutes” express God’s restrictions, emphasizing the fact that God places boundaries and that those boundaries are non-negotiable.* The psalmist’s constant cry regarding this term is that God would “teach” him His “statutes” (Ps. 119:12, 26, 33, 64, 124, 135, 171). A “statute” (*khoq*) refers to that which is appointed for conformity or fulfillment (see Exod. 5:14; 12:24; Lev. 10:11, 13–15). In prophetic and poetic usage, “statute” has the idea of a limitation or boundary (see Job 14:5; 26:10; 38:8–11; Prov. 8:29; Jer. 5:22; 31:35–36; 33:25), a divinely appointed restriction or border not to be breached.

Outside Psalm 119, the most common verbs

associated with this term are “to observe,” “to heed,” and “to walk in” God’s statutes, living life circumspectly within the boundaries He has set. Every parent knows that children find security in knowing where the boundaries are and what is off-limits. Do you constantly look for loopholes and ways of justifying what you want to do? Or do you, like the psalmist, long for the security that comes from knowing and staying within God’s boundaries? See also Psalm 119:5, 16, 71, 80, 112.

## **“PRECEPT”: THE BIBLE AS GOD’S CHECKLIST**

*“Precepts” are specific responsibilities laid on God’s people, emphasizing His right to assign our duties.* This word (*piqudim*) is always used in the plural form and is found only in the Psalms (24x). It is a form of a verb (often translated “visit” or “inspect”) that means to have oversight (Num. 4:16) or to inspect and take action. It pictures portions of God’s Word as containing our Teacher’s assignments, our

Physician's prescriptions, our Captain's charge, our Master's tasks, our Father's chores for us.

Such duties can take many forms. What areas of duty or oversight has God assigned to you? Pastors are appointed oversight of their flocks (1 Pet. 5:1–3; Heb. 13:17); husbands and wives are assigned mutual responsibilities toward each other (Eph. 5:25–33); fathers are charged to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4); and children have duties to their parents (Eph. 6:1–2). See also Psalm 119:168, 173.

## **“FEAR”: THE BIBLE AS GOD’S SELF-REVELATION**

*“Fear” highlights the identity of the One who speaks in Scripture, emphasizing the reaction of the righteous to the words of God. This word (yir’ah) is often used in the verbal form (e.g., “to fear the Lord”) and is the most fundamental description of biblical religion. It is the usual word for fear, dread, and even terror*

(Gen. 32:11; Exod. 9:20; 14:31). In the context of a believer's relationship to God, the word does not merely denote a reverential awe but also encompasses a genuine fear to disobey, because disobedience brings consequences and mars our relationship with God (Gen. 42:18; Deut. 4:10; 5:29; Neh. 5:9, 15; Jer. 5:22, 24; cf. Acts 5:5, 11). On its most basic level, the "fear of the Lord" means *taking God very seriously*; and we take God seriously only when we take His words seriously and believingly.

Some debate whether this phrase is intended to be understood as a synonym for the Word of God (see Ps. 19:9), or whether it merely denotes one's reaction to God Himself. Several considerations suggest that it should be viewed as a synonym for God's Word: (1) the purposeful structure of the terms in Psalm 19 (law, testimony, statutes; commandment, fear, judgments); (2) the fact that in Psalm 19 *fear* is embedded within the series of synonyms rather than concluding it; (3) the par-

allelism with *judgments* (note that both statements in Psalm 19:9 end with a characteristic of the Scripture itself rather than a description of its effect on us); and (4) the fact that other passages equate fearing God with knowing God *through His words* (Prov. 2:1–5; 9:10). The use of this expression as a synonym for Scripture is unique to Psalm 19. Even though this expression does not reappear in Psalm 119 as one of the standard expressions for Scripture, the psalmist nevertheless tightly ties his fear of the Lord to the words of God in Scripture (Ps. 119:38, 63, 79, 120).

## **CONCLUSION**

The point of differentiating these synonyms is not to force strict lines of distinction in every single occurrence. They are, after all, synonyms with a degree of overlap. But when these words appear in symphony (as in Psalm 119), they give a fuller voice to the character of God's words and to the nature and function of Scripture. Writing about Psalm 119, Derek

Kidner observes, “The synonyms belong together, and we should probably not look for each to show its distinct character at each occurrence, but rather to contribute, by its frequent arrival, to our total understanding of what Scripture is.”

---

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# With the Word to the World

Jim Tillotson

## Are You a Needer or a Nodder?

What does it take to get you to stop telling people who Jesus is and what He has done? A busy schedule, ridicule, someone telling you he is not interested, a struggle with personal sin that has taken away a desire to share? When is the last time you shared the gospel with a lost person?

Second Timothy has been referred to as Paul's last will and testament. We know from 1:16 that Paul is in chains in a Roman prison, and we learn from 4:16 that he was abandoned by those he had invested in. In 2:1–4, Paul gives some great advice on how to keep on sharing the gospel without quitting.

### **BE STRONG IN THE LORD**

First, we are to be strong in the Lord (v. 1).

This is an imperative. We are not to work up this strength within ourselves. Instead, we are to be strong by means of the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Our source of strength is to be the Lord, not ourselves. Ephesians 6:10 says, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” If God is to be the source of our strength, then we must guard the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, meditation, and prayer. Often these suffer because we are so busy getting things done. It makes sense that you can’t do God’s work without God, but even in ministry, many try to do so.

In Exodus 33, God comes to Moses and offers to send an angel ahead of him and the Israelites and give them the Promised Land. They could have everything they ever wanted, but God would not go with them. Later in the chapter, Moses says, “No way.” He doesn’t want the Promised Land if God will not go with him. And then he says in verse 18, “Show me your glory.” How many of us are content

going through life giving a nod to God, but not really feeling that we need God?

It's interesting to observe those in Scripture who merely gave a nod to God—men whom we will see in heaven but who lost their sense of need for God. I'm referring to men such as Lot, Samson, Saul, Jonah, and Solomon, compared with those who recognized their need for God, such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and David. Do you need God? If God made you the same offer He made to Moses, would you take it? If you could have everything you wanted without a close walk with God, would you do it? Are you doing it?

- What is the difference between those who need God and those who give a nod to God? When we compare Lot with Abraham, we find that “needers” love what God loves and hate what God hates. “Nodders” secretly love what God hates and tolerate what God loves.

- Needers need time with God. Nodders take time with God lightly.
- Needers enjoy their devotions. Nodders skip their devotions.
- Needers want to serve God. Nodders want God to serve them.
- Needers are dependent on God. Nodders handle things on their own.
- Needers pray all the time.  
Nodders pray when they are desperate.
- Needers are others-focused. Nodders are self-focused.
- Needers are focused on eternity because their greatest love is in heaven.  
Nodders are focused on the earth because their greatest love is here on earth.
- Needers seek their greatest joy later.  
Nodders seek their greatest joy now.
- Nodders do not care about the lost.  
Needers do.

## **TRAIN OTHERS**

Second, we see that we are to be training (v. 2). We all should be involved in teaching those who can teach others. We are to take what others have invested in us and pass it on. The Greek word for “commit” is an imperative and carries the idea of depositing something valuable for safekeeping. There should be a continuous process of spiritual reproduction: being taught and then teaching.

## **ENDURE HARDSHIPS**

Third, we are to endure hardships. The reason many do not share the gospel now is that they quit a long time ago. William McRaven, a four-star admiral and Navy SEAL, gave advice regarding quitting. His advice was to avoid looking six months down the road, but to try to do one’s best in the moment, taking things one step at a time. He said that it’s easy to quit during SEAL training. You just have to ring the bell three times and you are out. You don’t

have to talk to anyone. You don't have to give any reasons. You can just quit.

In tough times there is always a way out, and that's to quit. It's just deciding that you're not going to tackle this problem. A recruit once asked McRaven what the key was to making it through SEAL training. Was it running more? Swimming more? Lifting more? McRaven said, "No, the key is to just not quit."

As we read in 2 Timothy 2, we are to endure hardship. What are the things we must endure as we share the gospel? We might have to endure a lack of results or people gossiping about us. We may have to endure fellow Christians putting us down. Will these things get you to quit sharing the gospel, or will you endure? Not everyone you share the gospel with will get saved, but every one of the people who never hear the gospel will die and go to hell.

In the Greek, the idea behind enduring hardship is to suffer evil or pain along with someone else. We must rely on God to help us in our

witnessing opportunities. Even if God is the only encouragement we have, He is enough. We also must build friendships that will encourage us to share the gospel. Friends can get us to do what we would never do on our own. The Christian life was not meant to be lived in isolation. Hebrews reminds us that we need to attend church so we can provoke one another to love and good works. We should not go to church just to provoke each other.

I hope this has been some food for thought. If we have quit taking the Word to the world, may we start again by God's grace.

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Jim Tillotson has served as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, since June 2015. Previously he was the senior pastor of Meadowlands Baptist Church in Edmonton, Alberta, for eighteen years. During his time in Canada he led Meadowlands Baptist in planting three new churches and helped start a Christian school and a Bible institute.







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# Regional Reports

## **NORTHWEST REGIONAL FBFI FELLOWSHIP**

*Greg Kaminski*

We want to thank Pastor Steve Hicks from Galilee Baptist Church for hosting this year's Northwest Regional FBFI Fellowship. The church, as always, was a great host to us with delicious meals and wonderful accommodations. Several from the school at Galilee attended different events of the conference. So many were blessed this year with great preaching and sweet fellowship.

Rand Hummel was our keynote speaker. The messages were amazing and helpful to all who came. This year's theme was "Mentoring." Many of the messages were for the family and helping us in our ministries. It was a very treasured time of refresh-

ment and fellowship. We look forward to next year's meeting with Pastor Don Johnson on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, to be held April 14–17, 2025.



## **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA REGIONAL FBFI FELLOWSHIP**

*Dan Pelletier*

A good group of brothers and sisters joined us for the 2024 Northern California FBFI Regional Fellowship. This year's theme was "Creative Outreach" with a focus on fresh

ways to get the gospel into our communities. Evangelist Mike Redick (who serves in Southeast Asia) was the keynote speaker. We also enjoyed workshops on ministry through crisis pregnancy centers, Hispanic ministry opportunities, evangelism through community chaplaincy and GriefShare groups, and using the Freedom That Lasts ministry to reach out to those who deal with life-dominating sins. Pastor Randall Shanks led the music with a focus on “The American Gospel Song from 1850–1900.” Some of those who joined us came from as far away as Arizona and Colorado. Pastor Geoff Stiekes and his wife, Tracy, were wonderful hosts as we met at Campbell Bible Church where they have been serving for the past several years. The National Conference on Hispanic Outreach (NCHO) led by Dr. Dan Wokaty of MGMI & Team Mobile Seminary planned their meeting in Hayward, California, to follow our meeting on the next day, adding a fresh dimension to our desire to be creative in reaching out to our



state with the gospel of Christ.

Next year's meeting is already set to be held at Calvary Baptist Church in Marina. Pastor Tim Knauf will be the host pastor. The keynote speaker is Cary Schmidt, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Newington, Connecticut. The dates are set for March 24–25, 2025.



## **SOUTH REGIONAL FBFI FELLOWSHIP**

*Doug Wright*

Catawba Springs Baptist Church hosted the FBFI South Regional Fellowship on March 11–13, 2024. Catawba Springs has hosted the fellowship before, adding to their reputation as gracious and caring hosts. Pastor Chuck Woodruff was in his last few months as the pastor at Catawba Springs, but he and his staff had things well-prepared and worked hard to make the meeting a success. Part of its success resulted from the music and preaching of Evangelist Ron DeGarde. Ron preached for the church on Sunday and in several sessions. Members of Catawba Springs joined us for the evening sessions. Ron's family and their team provided excellent music.

In addition to Evangelist Ron DeGarde, the other speaker for the general sessions was Pastor Kevin Schaal, who pastors Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Glendale, Arizona, and serves as the president of the FBFI. Their

preaching and the workshops centered on the conference theme – “A Heart of Surrender, A Life of Sacrifice (Rom. 12:1–2).” The meetings were well-attended, and we enjoyed having a good number of displays. A special blessing was seeing Dr. Fred Moritz and his wife, Judy, at some of the meetings. Many of us have prayed for Dr. Moritz and we enjoyed fellowshiping with him. Next year’s South Regional meeting will be held in Jonesville, North Carolina, at Swan Creek Baptist Church, on March 17–19, 2025.





# Chaplain's Report

**Tavis J. Long**

## Fair Winds and Following Seas

Dear Malinda,

Perhaps the greatest asset of any organization is to have people of industry—people who are hard-working and diligent. Often, those people are the ones who serve so faithfully but never receive fanfare or recognition. For the past sixteen years, you have been one of those people. The Foundations Baptist Fellowship International and all its subsidiaries would have failed long ago in their respective missions if it were not for you and your industry.

Your ministry as the office manager for the FBFi will probably never receive the full reward and recognition on earth that it deserves. What you have done for chaplains in both the community and the military, and for

their families, both immediate and extended, has been a herculean effort. The yeoman's work you have dedicated your life to has certainly garnered spiritual rewards, but in many ways has also contributed to the peace of our nation as you have been the impetus to getting good men to serve in our nation's armed forces and communities. In this capacity, you have been a co-laborer with those of us who wear the cloth of our nations and communities, and who have been evangelizing and discipling those in uniform.

Your steadfast, unassuming ministry is not much different than that of the British during World War II. In July 1940, the German air force had just begun their relentless bombing of London in what became known as the Battle of Britain. It was during this harrowing battle that Winston Churchill took to the air waves to speak to Londoners. In an address on BBC on July 14, 1940, Churchill spoke of a war of the Unknown Warriors. He acknowl-

edged that not every heroic deed done in that battle would be documented. There would be some who would do their job and never receive the credit they deserved. In his address, Churchill said,

This is no war of chieftains or of princes, of dynasties or national ambition; it is a war of peoples and of causes. There are vast numbers, not only in this Island but in every land, who will render faithful service in this war, but whose names will never be known, whose deeds will never be recorded. This is a war of the Unknown Warriors . . .

There is some application of Churchill's words that can be made to how you have so faithfully prosecuted your ministry over the years. So much of what you have done in securing chaplain endorsements, completing endless numbers of forms, collating quarterly reports, and writing timely correspondence will never receive the attention and accolades

it truly deserves. But we know you did not do any of it for recognition. You did it because you love your nation and your Chaplains, and because you are a committed co-laborer in Christ. But do not be mistaken: though your name might be unknown in the history of our nation, we know that you served with purpose and you served well. You advanced the peace of our nation in ensuring our nation had faithful chaplains to serve her both in peace and in war.

We conclude by recalling the words of General George S. Patton. Upon taking command of the United States Third Army prior to the allied invasion of France, General Patton delivered to his troops perhaps one of the greatest motivational speeches of all time. He called on his Soldiers to do their duty and to remember that no job was unimportant or insignificant. He said, "All of the real heroes are not storybook combat fighters. . . . Don't ever think that your job is unimportant. Every

man has a job to do and he must do it. Every man is a vital link in the great chain.”

Malinda, you are not a Soldier, a Sailor, a Marine, an Airman, a Coastguardsman, or a Guardian. You are not a hospice caregiver, a policeman, or a firefighter. You are not clergy. But your role in ministering to those of us who serve these communities was vital in the great chain of ministry that you enabled.



From the bottom of our hearts, your chaplains and co-laborers in Christ thank you! Fair winds and following seas. Your nation owes you a great deal of gratitude and so do we.

The FBFI Chaplains

The FBFI currently endorses seventy-six chaplains and chaplain candidates. Fifty-nine are military chaplains, and seventeen are local community chaplains. Our chaplains are located throughout the United States and around the world.

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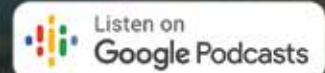
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# Evangelist's Perspective

Jerry Sivnksty



## The Wealthy

First Corinthians 4:8 states, “Now ye are rich.” What a profound truth to ponder as God’s children—we are rich! You may not have a large bank account. You may not own stocks, land, gold, or silver; but as a Christian you are rich. I recently read an out-of-print book by Jack Shuler entitled *Shuler’s Short Sermons*. Jack Shuler had a way of writing that causes the imagination to see vividly the



scenes he portrays. I trust as you read what this man wrote that it will thrill your soul, because it shows us what true wealth is.

~~~

I clambered up the rugged mountain summit and gazed into the mysterious ravine where the Oregon screams rudely for right of way as it thunders over its supporting rock and through its guiding chasms to find the charming quietness of the grand old woods. On and up I climbed to where the weathered pine erected its pointed tent against the terror of the storm. Then, looking up into its battered boughs, I perceived its needled fingers dripping solid silver over my eyes, for the winged seraph who goes about to light each star was at his route, and the light of heaven's majestic chandelier that swings from the ceiling of an infinite dome spilled through the branches, danced upon the water and chased the gloomy phantoms of the forest into hiding among the caves. And as I gazed the whisper came again, "All this is yours."

Then I entered the fragrant halls of a floral paradise just at rise of sun. There were the flowers; and as the windows of dawning opened on golden hinges I watched them wash their pretty faces in the early dews and bend their delicate heads to catch the morning message of the breeze, nature's faithful embassy to that botanical region. Then, hastening to adorn themselves in stunning vesture, they stood upon the emerald carpet beneath an aerial drapery of overhanging blue, robed in garments woven of sunbeams, fretted with silver and ornamented with glistering pearls, until every inch of air from earth to cloud was heavy with perfume and radiant with reflected charm. The playground of angels; the garden of God! And blinded by the excessive glory, I could only hear the voice say, "All this is yours."

And as I journeyed, far beyond the confines of this world, until all sense of time and place was lost, in my hand I held the blessed

Book, and read, and pondered, until, escaping the terrestrial, I found myself ushered into the celestial. I saw the perfection of heaven declare the imperfections of earth, for the grandeur of the throne of God reflected in the river of life dulled the beauty of that sun upon the sea. And the Daystar, Christ Jesus, rising up, sent all the constellations falling to the dust in embarrassment; and the garlands about the shoulders of the redeemed, plucked from the fields of Eden, smothered the fragrance and stifled the glory of those flowers of earth. And then I knew that though the guarded beauties of our world have dazzled the eye, eye hath not seen it. And though the majestic symphonies of men have charmed the ear, ear hath not heard it. And though the secrets of knowledge have entranced the mind, mind hath not found it. For what shall it be in that day when the redeemed mount up along the glittering circle of the stars and enter through the gates of pearl and file in grand procession down the streets of

gold, heirs to God's mansion and throne and crown? What shall it be when, with perfect eye, we see Him face to face? What shall it be when, with perfect ear, we hear His commendation? What shall it be when, with perfect mind, we shall know as we are known? That will be an experience rich in glory!

“Now ye are rich.” The Maker of all things has said, “I go to prepare a place for you.” The One who painted the splendor of all earthly beauty and veined the strata with imponderable treasure is not building us a shanty. He who possesses all materials and means combines His perfect artistry to pledge that we who trust Him and with patience wait for Him shall not be poor. For presently our greatest Friend and only Savior shall come and take us home. And then the golden strand shall come in sight, and the harbor. Then the shout of greeting, the song of triumph, our mansion—and Christ. Behold our wealth!

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I trust your life will be filled with joy as you see your eternal wealth in Christ.

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Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC 29684 or via e-mail at [evangjsivn@aol.com](mailto:evangjsivn@aol.com).



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