

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



The Outlook

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Once Lost, Now Found

Marks of a Healthy Reformed Church

How Can I Understand Prophecy?

The Submergent Church

Reflections from My Sixteen Years of Experience as a Pastor

I Will Be Your God: The Covenant of Grace

Archaeology: Friend or Foe of Biblical History?

The Majestic Name of Our Covenant God: Psalm 8:9

IRBC's Philosophy of Counseling: Secondary Dominant Domains

An Organist's Perspective

Jesus, Loved and Hated

Book Review

The Outlook

July-August 2017
Volume 67 | Issue 4

	Title	Author	Synopsis
3	Once Lost, Now Found	Rev. Daniel R. Hyde	How Reformed Theology assures us.
5	Marks of a Healthy Reformed Church	Rev. Michael J. Schout	Examining why and how the gospel is to shape all we do.
7	How Can I Understand Prophecy? (2)	Rev. William Boekestein	Even though we may puzzle over or wonder how God will bring his promise to pass, God's Word encourages us to study biblical prophecy.
12	The Submergent Church	Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen	We often come up with excuses as to why the emergent church has been so popular. Read how the reason their success may be our failures. Reprinted by request from <i>The Outlook</i> February 2009.
17	Reflections from My Sixteen Years of Experience as a Pastor	Rev. Brian G. Napjapfour	Wisdom, thoughts and instruction for pastors, future pastors. Profitable reading for members to appreciate their pastors too.
19	I Will Be Your God: The Covenant of Grace (4)	Rev. Michael G. Brown	What Does the Bible Teach? Why Is This Doctrine Important for the Christian Life? Find out more in this article.
23	Archaeology: Friend or Foe of Biblical History?	Rev. R. Andrew Compton	The archaeology of David's kingdom.
27	The Majestic Name of Our Covenant God: Psalm 8:9	Rev. Jerome M. Julien	In reality, every area of life and therefore every discipline in life shows something about the majesty of our God.
30	IRBC's Philosophy of Counseling: Secondary Dominant Domains (8)	Dr. Jeff L. Doll	Within the Environmental Domain™ are three different realms: The Spiritual, Social, and Physical. Last time we looked at the Spiritual Realm. In this article we will concentrate on the Social and Physical Realms.
32	An Organist's Perspective	Mrs. Nancy Venema	Valuable insights into church music from the organist's point of view. Reprinted by request from <i>The Outlook</i> March 1991.
35	Jesus, Loved and Hated	Dr. Mark J. Larson	Knowing Christ, learning about him, gaining wisdom, and growing in love for him.
37	Book Review	Rev. Jerome M. Julien	Review on <i>Bible Studies on Genesis 1–11</i> by Rev. Mark Vander Hart.

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"Exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."
—Jude 3

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About the cover: "God wants us to reflect on the last things, to cultivate an apocalyptic spirituality in which our vision for the future affects our walk before God's face today." Illustrates an excerpt from Rev. Boekestein's article in this issue.

500 years after the Reformation,

we are still living in an age of Christ-less Christianity. That's the diagnosis. I believe the reformed catholic Christianity of the Protestant Reformation and post-Reformation is the cure.

But all too often we as Reformed believers come off as total freaks when people visit our churches for the first time. A visitor walks in for the first time and hears something like this: "Hi, I'm Danny, welcome to OURC. Are you supra or infra?" Or, "So are you credo or paedo?" Maybe, "Pre-, post-, or pesimistic amillennial? We here are optimistic amil." Too often we let our most rabid new members into greeting ministry too early. Instead, the "cage phase" Calvinists who are so excited about being Reformed need to be put in a cage for a year until they've been tamed. In this age of Christ-less Christianity we want to be welcoming to unbelievers, disenfranchised evangelicals, burned-out liberals, and everyone on the outside looking in an understandable, hospitable way. And we want them to come to know the assurance that Reformed Christianity brings.

It was the late-sixteenth-and early-seventeenth-century Catholic theologian, Robert Bellarmine, who said that assurance of salvation was the principal heresy of Protestantism. In the decades and centuries surrounding the Reformation this was the great question. What assurance could creatures have of their Creator revealing himself? What assurance could the pious Catholic have that he would not spend eternity in the flames of hell? And the list goes on.

We do not live in a time where everyone lives under Christendom, and hence everyone is searching for assurance within that system. We are living in a great time, though. The Reformed faith is on the march once again. People in our society are not coming to us seeking answers and assurance in the same way as in the sixteenth century. Instead, they are seeking assurance whether anything can be trusted and believed in.

You see, although we live in what we can call a post-everything culture where it seems people are unsure about everything, in reality, people evidence their deep-down need for belonging, for community, for assurance. Let me give an example of this. Russell R. Reno, a theologian at Creighton University, wrote a while back about the phenomenon of tattoos. That which was once a symbol of rebellion is now a symbol of belonging to something larger than oneself in our culture.

So what can we give people? The full-orbed message of the Reformation. And I am writing as one who—as the great hymn says—"I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see."

The Assurance of our History

First, Reformed Christianity offers the assurance of our history. Everything today is about what have you done for me lately, the brief sound byte, the tyranny of the news cycle when the next big thing takes center stage only to eclipse what once had all our attention. We are by nature "chronologically arrogant," as the great C. S. Lewis once said. When the Israelites languished under their disobedience and

impending judgment of God, Jeremiah called upon them to seek the ancient paths. As Reformed churches we can confidently say to searching people, we have deep roots historically. We can call upon family, friends, and neighbors to unite themselves to something bigger than them and us.

The Assurance of our Theology

Second, Reformed Christianity offers the assurance of our theology. Before next Sunday, stop and think about everyone who walks through the doors of where your congregation meets for worship, especially those who may be there for the first time. There are so many people coming with so many experiences. No doubt there will be someone who shares a similar story with you. For me, I was lost. I was baptized as a Roman Catholic, taken to Sunday school at Calvary Chapel, I remember going to Easter and Christmas Mass throughout my childhood and teenage years, and all through that I sought assurance that God loved me. I was converted in a Foursquare Church and then went off to college to play basketball. The church next to campus was an Assemblies of God church. After seeing the same people go forward to the altar calls to get saved or to rededicate themselves to the Lord week after week after week, I thought, "There has got to be more to the Christian faith than this." There will be people who, like me, turned to investigating religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, agnosticism, and every -ism under the sun.

What brought me assurance? The gospel. I came to realize that no amount of works a la the Roman Catholic system, no amount of intellectual investigation of religion, and no amount of seeking emotional assurance via my

Pentecostal church could bring the assurance I sought. That was, until one day I was introduced to the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 70, "What is justification?" The answer is, "Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone."

The Assurance of our Liturgy

Third, Reformed Christianity offers the assurance of our liturgy, that is, our way of worshipping the triune God. As you know, Rome likes to say, "We've had the Mass for two thousand years." Well, in Reformed churches we can say confidently, "We've had the Psalms for three thousand years, like the entire people of God."

I remember walking in a Reformed church for the first time. I've never told Mike Horton this, but it was Christ Reformed, which was then meeting in Placentia. I felt like I had walked into heaven. Remember I had seen the smells and bells of Rome and the signs and wonders of Pentecostalism. It wasn't until I sat in a service saturated in the Word like a Reformed church, with reverent worship, that I found what I had been looking for. I had no idea how to hold a hymnal, how to read a note, when to stand, when to sit. But it was amazing.

The Assurance of our Piety

Fourth, Reformed Christianity offers the assurance of our piety. Have you gone to your local Christian bookstore lately or received a

catalog in the mail from the large publishers? What's in them? Mostly Christian living, right? But it's what some have called law-light. You know, how to be a better you, finding your purpose in life, Christian dieting, women's issues, men's issues, teen issues, how to get over your issues with having issues.

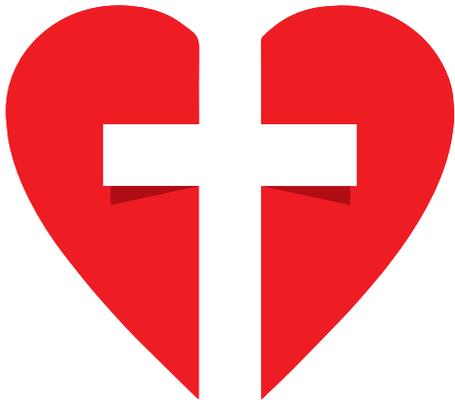
The Reformed Christian faith is not merely a bunch of doctrine. It's not merely head knowledge. As my friend and mentor, Joel Beeke, describes our faith, it is a religion of head, heart, and hands. Our life is described so wonderfully by the two opening questions of the two great Reformed catechisms. The Heidelberg Catechism opens, "What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." We belong to the Lord; we are his bondservants. The Westminster Shorter Catechism opens, "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." We exist as clay, molded for the maker's pleasure.

People walk into our churches beat down, ashamed, defeated. We get to say to them that God makes the dead alive, the blind to see, the enemy his friend. And now that you belong to him, live with joy and gratitude to the glory and praise of your maker and redeemer.

As you conclude reading this article and we go our separate ways, I pray you will be equipped to be used of God to communicate the truth of that great hymn to all unbelievers, pilgrims, and outcasts who walk through your church's doors: "I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind, but now I see."

Rev. Daniel Hyde

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Over the past couple of years, the leaders at the church where I serve have been developing a vision statement. Perhaps that surprises you? Isn't that the sort of thing larger churches with multi staffs busy themselves with? Don't we have more important things to do, namely, ministry of the Word and sacraments?

Crafting a vision statement isn't one of the marks of the church, nor does it make a church healthy. But in my opinion, the process has forced us to ask some questions we might not otherwise ask. Such as, why do we do what we do? Is there anything we do that we shouldn't be doing? What aren't we doing that we should? And what can we do better?

Self-evaluation is a normal part of any successful business. Yet, sometimes we can go years and even decades in the church without really looking in the mirror. This is not to advocate a church as business model but simply to point out that it's easy to feel healthy when we might not necessarily be healthy. Like the guy who goes in for his annual physical only to discover he has a tumor.

Taking inventory can be hard. I don't like to find weaknesses, and it means extra work. Who wants more council meetings when we're already busy enough? Besides, isn't being conservative and confessional a whole lot better than the vast majority of other churches in America? Why spend time looking at areas to improve when it takes so much time and energy just to maintain what we've already got?

In the next several installments of articles, I hope to develop a vision statement for all of our churches according to Scripture. Obviously, each congregation will need to personalize it for themselves. No two churches are exactly alike. We all have a unique set of strengths and weaknesses, and our contexts vary depending a host of factors.

But is there, broadly speaking, certain marks that make a church healthy? How is health measured? What is true for all churches, and what is particular to some? And perhaps even more fundamentally, does the Bible even address the idea of a healthy church?

In this article I want to introduce you to our vision statement to get your wheels turning. Perhaps your church already has one or is in the process of developing one. Or maybe this is totally foreign to you. It could very well be that you think this is a giant waste of time.

But hear me out. I think you'll be the better for it. Even if you come away thankful for what you do and find little or nothing to change, at least you will have put in the necessary work to take inventory of your church to make sure that what you are doing is based on the Word of God for the glory of God.

The vision statement of the church I serve reads as follows: Grace United Reformed Church seeks to be a gospel-shaped community of biblically grounded, confessionally Reformed worshippers, disciples, and witnesses of Jesus Christ.

We've developed four major coordinates: worship, fellowship, discipleship, and outreach. The

modifier for all of these things is the gospel. The foundation is the Word of God. And we stand and speak within a confessional history.

Worship is the chief end for which we've been created. It is the core of what we do as Christians and serves as the high point of our pilgrim experience.

We've been called in the gospel to the fellowship of the church. We're united not on the basis of race, politics, or interests, but the Word of God and the blood of Christ.

As we grow in our walk with the Lord, we need continual discipleship and renewal. The goal is not stagnation but forward movement.

And we've been commissioned to spread the good news to those around us. Instead of huddling up, we need to venture out. The gospel is something we receive and give away.

We must not be driven by pragmatism. Yet neither can we turn a blind eye to our culture and context. Rather, we must be faithful to the Scriptures, centered upon the gospel, while finding ways to communicate our message to a dying world in ways that are always truthful but also thoughtful.

In my own context, many of our young people have left membership in a confessionally Reformed church, choosing bigger and broader evangelical churches. And while we can criticize all the things that are wrong with those churches, perhaps we'd be wise to ask: Is there anything wrong with ours?

Why are our young people leaving? Is it as simple as, "Well, they are Millennials, after all"? Or is there something we're not doing to attract them? Could it be that we've left them with insufficient answers to the questions they've always

had but never dared to ask? Is it possible that they're bored with our churches because we're bored with our churches? Or that we're stuck in maintenance mode, just trying to stay clear of liberalism, and we've focused only on what we're not instead of who we're called to be?

I don't have all the answers. I'm not even sure I'm asking the right questions. But in the articles that follow, I want to explore this further. I want to let the Great Physician diagnose the condition of our churches by seeing what the Bible says are the marks of a healthy church.

What is the goal of the church? Why do we meet Sunday after Sunday? What is our purpose? And how do we get there? It is to these and other questions we'll explore next time.

More specifically, I want to examine why and how the gospel is to shape all that we do. If we don't get this right, everything else will miss the mark.

So please join me in praying that God would show us both our true diagnosis and the remedy. It's one thing to know you have a problem. It's quite another to find an answer.

I believe the Word has answers, and I know that God promises to give grace to the humble.

May God be pleased to send his Spirit to bring both reformation and revival, for the health of our churches and the glory of Christ.

Rev. Michael J. Schout

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All of us think about the end times. When we reflect on what will happen, not only when we die, but also when this present age ends, some combination of ideas, images, hopes, and fears flood our minds. And this is good. God wants us to reflect on the last things, to cultivate an apocalyptic spirituality in which our vision for the future affects our walk before God's face today.

For that to happen well our eschatology, our doctrine of the last things, needs to be drawn from Scripture and not reflect our prejudices or wishes. But when we study the last things, especially those things connected with the end of this present age and the beginning of the next, we have to engage prophecy, a genre of Scripture that presents a host of interpretive challenges. But we don't need to read the prophets unarmed.

To understand the prophets we need to study them through the grid of a biblical hermeneutic. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. And even if we have never used the word we all have a hermeneutic. We all study the Bible with certain assumptions, following definite rules or at least impulses (even if we couldn't articulate them). This is why two people can read the same passage and arrive at very different ideas, especially when studying prophecy.

It is for lack of a biblically informed hermeneutic that some visions of the end are so complicated or wildly speculative that the author's intent is completely corrupted.

To better understand the Bible's portrayal of the end times it is critical to think through a number of issues that we have to face when interpreting prophecy.

The Bible Is a Story of Redemption

Neither the Old nor New Testament prophets spoke of the future merely to tell about a few spectacular events beforehand. Instead, they were instilling a piety by means of the story of God's redemption in the past, present, and future.

Still, it is possible to lose sight of the big picture on account of scintillating or perplexing prophetic details. In fact, this happens all the time. In my in-laws' home hangs a large framed mosaic puzzle. Each piece contains several tiny scenery photographs. You could study that

framed puzzle with your nose a few inches away from the glass inspecting the individual photos. But when you step back from that mosaic you realize that the purpose of the individual images is to build a larger composition, in this case a map of the entire world.

Likewise, it is possible to study the end-times messages of the prophets simply for their ability to tell the future. But when you read their words as part of a grander mosaic, you realize that they are telling a story that is meant to inspire confidence in the meticulous, skillful, patient saving work of God. Prophecies that have been fulfilled and promises still to be realized bolster our confidence that God will continue to take "one from a city and two from a family" and build a holy kingdom called Zion made up of people from all nations (Jer. 3:14, 17).

God does record prophecy to "show His servants the things which must shortly take place" (Rev. 22:6; cf. Rev. 1:1). But these things must never be isolated from the grand story they are helping to tell. "Prophecy encourages us regarding the future, not by giving us the news headlines in advance, but by pointing to our victorious God, who has already won the decisive heavenly battle."¹

The Story Starts at the Beginning

When we think about the end times, we naturally think, “Revelation.” If we do consider the Old Testament we might include Daniel or other prophets. But long before the ministry of the apostle John or the later prophets, the Bible introduced themes that, perhaps unexpectedly, help inform our understanding of the end.

Think about how the concept of death seems to intrude on the otherwise serene beginning of God’s story. In the Bible’s second chapter, in the context of so much good (Gen. 1:31), God warned of the possibility of death (Gen. 2:17). In the third chapter animals died (Gen. 3:21).² In the fourth chapter men began to die. In the book of beginnings we hear about a place where the dead go called Sheol (Gen. 37:35). God told Abraham that when he died he would go to his fathers in peace (Gen. 15:15); at death he was “gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8). After just a few pages we begin to wonder what happens to dead people. Are they gone forever? How will God answer the cry of the blood of those unjustly taken from the land of the living (Gen. 4:10)? What is Sheol, whence was Abraham gathered, and will those resting in peace ever wake?

Or, consider the important end-times theme of the kingdom of God. The Old Testament tells us that God is a king (1 Sam. 12:12) who is establishing a vast kingdom. He began gathering kingdom citizens when he rescued Adam and Eve

from the devil’s tricks. He has since been preserving a faithful seed from their posterity, also adding those from the other families of the nations—slowly at first, more rapidly after Pentecost. But one day, as Jesus taught us to pray, his kingdom will come (Matt. 6:10). He will return to earth, his people will reign with him, and he will exercise “the kingdom of his power in all the world.”³

Likewise, the Old Testament tells us that God will conquer death and build a kingdom of life through his Messiah (Deut. 18:15, 18, 19; Acts 3:17–26), who will bring about the Day of the Lord (Dan. 7:10, Joel 2:1, 11, 31), adjudicate a final judgment (Mal. 3:1–7), and raise to life every deceased person to either shame (Isa. 66:5–6) or glory (Job 19:25–27).

The message of the end is interwoven throughout the entire story, even its beginning. To understand the end we have to be students of the whole Bible.

The Prophets Were Masterful Storytellers

To understand the language of prophecy we need to wrestle humbly and diligently with several literary features of prophecy.

The Prophets Used Language and Forms Suitable to Their Time

The symbolic language of the prophets can be challenging. But rather than being a hurdle it can be a great gift. Symbolic language engages our interest and stirs our imagination. With richly figurative language Isaiah predicted that “there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch

from his roots shall bear fruit” (Isa. 11:1; English Standard Version). The symbolism powerfully calls to mind ideas of revival, vibrancy, organic fruitfulness. Likewise, the robust symbolism of Revelation draws us into the story and floods our minds with powerful images of Christ’s victory over evil. We should give thanks for apocalyptic symbolism and allow the context to determine when prophetic language should be taken literally.

Especially with prophecies that will be fulfilled in the far future, we should expect that the forms of the prophet’s ideas might “have undergone radical changes” though their “essential central idea will still be realized.”⁴ For example, when Ezekiel prophesied that a restored people would worship God on his holy hill, it is perfectly fitting for him to describe this end-times revival in terms of the construction of a temple (Ezek. 40–48). In doing so, he follows a form long established in the construction of the tabernacle after the people’s new birth from Egypt. But it is too simplistic to suspect that the form of Ezekiel’s prophecy would not change by the time of its fulfillment. “This historically and culturally conditioned form is completely overlooked when people in all seriousness propose that the prophets predict for our time a rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and reinstatement of animal sacrifices and a final battle fought with horses and chariots and spears and swords.”⁵ God’s word is never broken (John 10:35), though the form of its fulfillment can change.



Despite their abstract language and impermanent forms, the prophets always communicated a central message. For example, in portraying a wolf and lion grazing with a lamb (Isa. 65:25), Isaiah does not draw our attention to new feeding patterns of carnivores in heaven but to the other-worldly peace that will characterize the heavenly age to come.

The Prophets Tell Stories in Layers

Students of prophecy often ask whether a prophet was speaking about an event that has been fulfilled already or one that has yet to be realized. Very often, the answer is yes. The prophets' messages often featured multiple layers in which "the earlier fulfillment is itself prophetic of the later fulfillment."⁶ Remember, the entire story finds its ultimate filling up only at the end. So Joel's prediction that someday God's Spirit would powerfully move his people to prophesy *and* that the earth, moon, and heavens would be violently disturbed (Joel 2:28–32) was realized at Pentecost (Acts 2), but

not completely. Pentecost itself is a harbinger for the mighty stirring of the Spirit at "the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31).

Likewise, in Jesus' end-times speech in Mark 13, rather than insisting that the entire discourse was fulfilled by the Roman invasion of A.D. 70, or that it only points to the end of the age (or dissecting the passage into the parts that purportedly only speak to either event), "It might be simpler to take the whole as immediately, but partially . . . fulfilled in the Jewish War, but also to recognize that the events of that war point forward to the end of history."⁷ Has Martin Luther King's dream from 1963 been fulfilled "that one day . . . little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers"? Yes, and no. Partly, but not perfectly. So it often is with biblical prophecy.

The Prophets Spoke to an Original Audience

The prophets were primarily preachers.⁸ As watchmen (Ezek.

3:17) and shepherds (Jer. 3:15) they urged God's people to return to him so that he might heal their backslidings and deliver them from his judgments and give them rest in his good land. They were surgeons who dissected the hearts of God's people to expose their disease and refer them to the Good Physician. "The prophets had, first of all, a message for their contemporaries. They were watchmen on the walls of Zion, to guide the destinies of the ancient people of God, and to guard against the dangers of apostasy."⁹ For this reason, many prophecies are contingent on the actions of people. Through the prophets God says, "If you . . . then I . . ." (e.g., Jer. 15:19).

All Scripture, including prophecy, is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). God doesn't give us prophecy so that we can build elaborate timelines or speculate on the precise manner in which

God will keep his word. He speaks about our future so that we will live faithfully in the present. He speaks to the contemporary audience to develop in us a robust vision for the end.

The Story Is All About Jesus

If we are tempted to focus on the more mysterious, futuristic parts of biblical prophecy we should remember that at its core, the prophetic message was “always centered in the Kingdom of God, or the work of redemption through Christ.”¹⁰ When Paul was on trial for preaching a message of repentance to the Gentiles he told his judge that “to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22–23). Jesus himself said, “For assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matt. 13:17). Peter echoed Jesus when he said, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you” (1 Pet. 1:10).

Twice, on their way to Jerusalem, Jesus told his disciples that he would be betrayed and suffer body-and-soul-rending grief before rising from the dead (Luke 9:21–22, 43–45). When they could not understand what he was saying Jesus marshaled the testimony of the prophets: “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished” (Luke 18:31). Still

the disciples missed the prophets’ focus on God’s promise to secure the kingdom through his Suffering Servant.

If the entire prophetic ministry revolved around the future comings of Christ, why did almost no one—including the apostles—get it when he came? It can be rightly said that only a small percentage of Old Testament prophecies explicitly “describe the Messiah or even the new covenant era.”¹¹ But when taken as a whole, and especially as they began to be fulfilled, and when the Holy Spirit was poured out, Christ began to shine through every prophecy (John 12:16; 13:7, 19; 16:12–13). After the outer prophetic layers had been peeled back Peter could preach, “But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). Significantly, when the New Testament speaks of the ministry of the prophets it almost uniformly is focused on how they foretold the person and work of the Messiah. When we read prophecy we need to understand that the message, while ostensibly about future events, is most essentially about God and his saving work through Christ.¹² It is not coincidental that the book of Revelation begins with a heart-stopping vision of Jesus ministering among the churches (Rev. 1–4) and ends with his promise to come back soon (Rev. 22:7, 12–13, 16, 20).

The Story Concludes with a Revelation

When we study end times we tend to think about the book of Revelation. As we’ve seen, John’s Revelation is only one of the many places in Scripture that gives us a vision of the future. But it is a critically important prophetic book.

How Should We Study Revelation?

William Hendriksen has persuasively argued that John’s Revelation consists of seven sections that each span the entire time period from Christ’s first coming to his second coming. In other words, the book is not arranged in strictly successive chronological fashion as one might expect. And yet, as the book progresses, especially starting at Revelation 12, God increasingly reveals the deeper spiritual battles that the church faces in this present age. The book is like a movie that seven times returns to the opening scene and records the same story from a different angle, retelling the plot with increasing depth.¹³

What Does Revelation Teach Us?

Revelation itself prevents us from charting out a continuous history of successive events that will yet come to pass. John’s Apocalypse should not be read like a codebook that can be unlocked to tell the details of tomorrow’s news today. Instead, we should read it as God’s encouragement to a marginalized people that despite the dark forces of evil and our own flagrant weaknesses Christ will be ever among his people, leading them to victory against his enemies and ours. Through its masterful use of words and images, Revelation drives home this much needed exhortation: He who, by faith in the Son of God, overcomes the trials of this life will not be disappointed by his reward in the life to come.

God’s Word encourages us to study prophecy. We will sometimes puzzle over the prophets’ use of unfamiliar symbols. We will not always be able to determine beyond doubt which events have been fulfilled and which are awaiting

fulfillment. We cannot possibly presume to know with precision how God will bring his promises to pass. But in prophecy we can see God as the supreme storyteller whose word “calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Rom. 4:17) and who exists as comfortably in the future as he does in the present and the past. Through prophecy he says to us, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by our name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa. 43:1–3).

Questions

What is your impression of the ministry of the prophets and the parts of the Bible that they wrote? Does their message tend to resonate with you or does it feel strangely inapplicable?

What is hermeneutics and why is it important?

Reflect on some of the most important points of the creation-fall-redemption-restoration scheme of the story of Scripture. What benefits are there in seeing Scripture as a story?

How do the following Old Testament passages, and others that might come to your mind, help to contribute to a biblical eschatology? Daniel 7:9–14; Joel 2:1–11; Job 19:25–27.

Note some examples of symbolism in Revelation 1:9–16. Is it necessary for these symbols to be understood literally in order for them to communicate powerfully? What impression do these symbols give of the glorified Christ?

Is there biblical evidence that the Old Testament prophetic message is all about Jesus? If so, why did his own disciples, and so many people today, not use their message to trust in Christ?

Are there ways in which John’s Revelation is susceptible to abuse?

What is the basic message of Revelation and how does the book develop that message?

How does the message of Revelation comfort you?

1. Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 233 (italics in the original). Consider another illustration. Suppose, in order to run some errands, I decided to leave my young children home alone for a few hours. Before leaving I might say to them, “Dad will only be gone briefly. I have to pick up some things for our home from the post office, the grocery store, and the hardware store. If you work hard cleaning the house while I’m gone, I’ll be here before you know it to play the game you have been asking about.” My point in telling my children where I hoped to go was not so that they could argue about which store I would go to first, second, or third, or so that they could speculate on the sort of items I would buy at each store. I told them my plans to assure them that I left for their good and that I would return soon. I hoped to encourage them to work hard in my absence and to anticipate a good evening when I came back. With similar goals did God inspire the prophets with visions of the future.

2. That God killed animals to provide skins for Adam and Eve is insufficient to prove that this was the first death. “Calvin and most reformed theologians were of the opinion that eating meat was permitted to humans even before the flood and the fall . . . The animal world had already been placed under human dominion in Genesis 1:28, an act that certainly includes, especially with respect to the fish of the sea, the right to kill and use animals. Immediately after the fall God himself made garments of animals skins (3:21).” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 575.

3. Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 191.

4. Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), 151.

5. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 232.

6. McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 234.

7. *Ibid.*, 235.

8. Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 228.

9. Berkhof, *Principles*, 149.

10. *Ibid.*, 149.

11. Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), 232.

12. Cf. Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 229.

13. William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998).

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Several years ago, when I pastored a church in Michigan, another nearby minister rose to international popularity as an “emergent” poster boy. His name is Rob Bell, his large mega-church was Mars Hill in Grandville, MI, and he had authored the books *Velvet Elvis*, *Sex God*, and *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*. The purpose of this article is not to discuss or critique the “emergent” movement but to ask some hard questions about our own non-emergent, confessionally-reformed churches.

With church buildings on nearly every corner, the Grand Rapids area can hardly be described as “un-churched.” Several NAPARC churches exist in the area, including many URCNA churches. So I asked myself why Mars Hill was attracting so many while many of our churches were struggling? There were, and still are, many ways one could answer that question: Rob Bell was a gifted speaker with a certain charm and charisma. Our entertainment-saturated culture made their worship style more attractive to many. People increasingly lack spiritual discernment. People could worship there without feeling as though they were being judged. People could worship there “anonymously” without any meaningful oversight. All of these are true and I’m sure there are any number of other factors that might explain such a phenomenon.

But here’s one other possibility that I considered for why such a church attracted so many: might it be that many join emergent

churches because our churches are submergent?

A submergent church is a church that exists under the radar. For all its internal activity, it is virtually invisible to the community. Outreach, evangelism and missions are budget items, but nothing more. A submergent church is lethargic, apathetic, self-focused with a “we’ve arrived” attitude that refuses to evaluate itself or its ministry. It’s a church satisfied with the answer, “that’s the way we’ve always done it before.” It’s a church that takes “negotiable” things (adiaphora) and makes them non-negotiable, or refuses to deal with deficiencies in those things that actually are non-negotiable. It’s a church that wears the cloak of “conservatism” but underneath is the corpse of traditionalism.

I came to realize that the real threat to non-emergent, conservative Reformed churches is not the “emergent-church-movement” but the “submergent-church’s-lack-of-movement.”

Is your church a submergent church? I encourage you to think about and evaluate your own church in these

following areas: the church and worship, the church and one another, and the church and the world.

The Church and Worship

To state it positively, our worship must be passionately God-honoring and Christ-centered in which we meet in covenantal dialogue with our Creator and Redeemer. We, God’s people, gather corporately before him to offer praise, petitions, confession, and offerings while God speaks words of forgiveness and salvation, calling us to a life of faith and obedience.

Negatively, our worship must avoid what God described in Isaiah 29:13 and repeated by Jesus in Matthew 15:8,9: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

These things—what our worship ought to be and what it ought not to be—are non-negotiable.

Jesus responded to the Samaritan woman’s question about worship with these words: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24).

To worship “in spirit and truth” is, for Jesus, non-negotiable. What does this mean? Hendriksen rightly explains it this way:

“In such a setting, it would seem to us, worshipping in *spirit and truth* can only mean a) rendering such homage

The elders can regulate worship so that the essential elements are done in truth, but they cannot make a hypocrite sincere.

to God that the entire heart enters into the act, and b) doing this in full harmony with the truth of God as revealed in His Word. Such worship, therefore, will not only be spiritual instead of physical, inward instead of outward, but it will also be directed to the true God as set forth in Scripture and as displayed in the work of redemption.”¹

This means worship is *not* entertainment. It is not tailored to draw a crowd. Nor is worship primarily evangelism. The purpose of worship is not to recruit unbelievers but for believers to sincerely offer God what is due him, and be instructed and fed by him through word and sacrament.

This was the practice of the New Testament church. They came together for worship and edification (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:24–25), then, in obedience to Jesus’ great commission, went to evangelize the world. Worship was the “fuel” for evangelism.

If these things describe a vibrant, healthy worshiping church, then how is your church doing? To worship with sincerity is admittedly a difficult thing to evaluate. Still, I do wonder what is happening in a person’s heart when we begin worship with singing that great hymn “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” and it looks as though he or she is singing about their next dentist appointment. I cannot judge such a thing, but it *appears* as though there’s little praise going on. And, of course, with others the opposite might be the case. A person may *appear* to be very engaged when inside he or she is

not. The elders can regulate worship so that the essential elements are done in truth, but they cannot make a hypocrite sincere.

Though only God can change hearts, the elders are responsible to ensure that our worship is done in truth. “Our preachers are faithfully preaching the whole counsel of God!” we say. “We have catechism sermons.” “The law is read each Lord’s Day.” As important as these things are in worship, there is more. In particular, I’m thinking about music. This ought to be a matter of real concern. The URC Church Order states in Article 39: “The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. Hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity may be sung, provided they are approved by the Consistory.” What songs are being sung from your second hymnal, or “floppy” book? Do they meet this criterion?

In a submerged church the elders are unwilling to biblically



and confessionally evaluate the songs being sung, while being equally unwilling to biblically and confessionally evaluate new songs being written. The conviction seems to be: old hymns must be good (some aren't), and anything contemporary must be bad (some aren't). If, in your church, C. Autin Miles' *In the Garden* has greater appeal than Stuart Townend's *In Christ Alone*, pardon my bluntness but you've got problems. The former, written in 1912, makes allusions to the scene of Mary meeting the resurrected Jesus at the empty tomb, though this can be easily missed by the singer.² Beyond that illusive imagery, the song can hardly be said to "faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity." In comparison, the latter, written in 2001, does a much better job reflecting biblical and confessional truth.

This refusal to do the hard work of evaluation is either due to laziness, stubbornly clinging to personal taste, or a fear of man that is greater than a fear of God. Whatever the case, it is a mark of a submergent church.

A further consideration of music concerns accompaniment. In some circles one gets the impression that the only God-sanctioned instrument for worship is the organ. Any effort to integrate other instruments to accompany the singing of God's people is, at best, met with suspicion; at worst, fiercely opposed. By demanding organ only, taste and tradition is raised to the level of commandment, making what is negotiable non-negotiable.

When these and other matters are not able to be discussed and evaluated by the leadership, when there is an unwillingness to biblically and confessionally consider the various aspects of worship, the church has submerged into tired, worn-out traditionalism.

The Church and One Another

Another area for evaluation is how we relate to one another as fellow church members. Scripture speaks clearly—and so God takes seriously—our mutual fellowship in the body of Christ. Notice the following passages:

Hebrews 10:24–25: "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together."

Romans 12:9–10: "Let love *be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

Galations 6:1–2: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Galations 6:10: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus instructs us on how to deal in a godly way with someone who sins against you. Added to this, Peter says, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for *'love will cover a multitude of sins.'*" (1 Pet 4:8)

What is biblically non-negotiable is that our relationships with one another be characterized with love, encouragement, building up, restoring, forgiving, warning, and admonishing. Does this describe you and your church? Sadly, some churches have an undercurrent of anger, bitterness, and possibly even hatred—a condition that will negatively affect your fellowship, your worship, and your witness.

This is contrary to the will of God for His church:

Ephesians 4:31: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you."

Hebrews 12:15: "... looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;"

Galations 5:15: "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

Where these things exist in the body of Christ, they must be dealt with. Believers need to love one another enough to humbly admonish one another or, if unable to admonish, to forgive! Elders need to love Christ enough to firmly deal with those who would ravage his bride. Where such ungodliness remains unchecked, members and visitors will take notice and eventually search for a more loving fellowship while that church submerges into irrelevance.

Another aspect of this is the congregation's attitude toward the leadership of the church, toward its pastors and elders. Christ gave the church pastors and elders "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12) And Paul instructs elders to "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

These verses, and many others, are indictments against the all-too-pervasive distrust of leadership today. The individualistic, anti-authority mindset of the world is alive and well in the church. "Who are *they* to equip me? I don't need shepherding."

These attitudes are often focused on the minister who becomes the target. "Pastors come and go, but the congregation remains." With that attitude, one has no reason to listen to the pastor. He's seen as the hired

hand rather than Christ's ambassador to the flock (2 Cor. 5:20). Having that sinful attitude toward a minister of the Word allows one to ignore Paul's instruction: "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." (1 Tim. 5:17)

Where these unbiblical attitudes toward office-bearers exist in Christ's church, the leaders will not be able to lead with any effectiveness, and the church will submerge into irrelevance.

The Church and the World

Another important matter for evaluation is the way in which your church interacts in and with the world. When Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, he began by commending them for their witness: "And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who

believe. For **from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth**, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything (1 Thess. 1:6–8).

As the church of Jesus Christ, we are called to worship and make disciples. We make disciples within our church body through education and instruction (Bible Studies, catechism, Sunday school, etc.). But, sadly, this seems to be where the vision of some churches end. While we certainly should be training our children, studying God's Word, and growing in our knowledge and understanding, we need to see that there is more.

Our vision must be greater. We are to go to the nations and make disciples: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

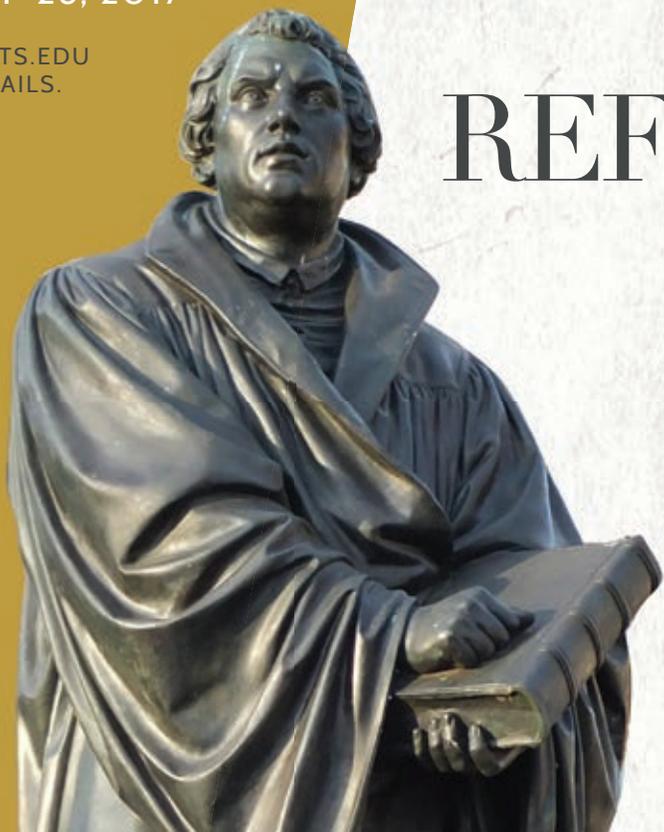
Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18–20).

A submerged church lacks such a vision. Its vision is one of simple maintenance. "As long as we have regular worship services and good preaching; as long as Bible studies are offered (whether or not I attend is beside the point); as long as I'm visited when I'm sick—then the church is healthy." Such a church is completely focused on itself. It views ministry as nothing more than a "religious cushion." As C. John Miller writes:

"The local church was intended by Jesus to be a gathering of people full of faith—strong in their confidence in Him—not a gathering of religious folk who desperately need reassurance. Perhaps seeking personal comfort is not wrong in itself. But it is desperately wrong when it becomes

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the primary reason for the existence of the local church. When that happens, the local church is no living fellowship at all, but a retreat center where anxious people draw resources that enable them merely to cope with the pains of life. The church then becomes a religious cushion.”³

For the maintenance church, right doctrine is something to be taught, but not lived. It views our Reformed doctrine defensively, as something simply to preserve and defend rather than to proclaim and promote. The vision for missions and evangelism goes no further than contributing money to the offering plate (and often without thought or prayer as to its destination).

But Jesus said we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–16). If that is who we are, then let us be that. Our vision should be offensive, not only defensive. We have the truth of the Almighty Creator God. We have the good news of his free sovereign grace—a message this world needs so desperately to hear. Our vision must be to advance that truth in order to change lives and win sinners for Christ. Our churches need to take responsibility for reaching the unreached rather than assuming this responsibility belongs to others.

One way to start changing that vision is to raise children to have hearts for missions and the lost. Years ago, when my children were still young, a couple from our church had volunteered several weeks to help an orphanage in Kenya. When they returned they gave a presentation to our church on a Wednesday evening. I made sure my children were present because hearing about the needs of children in Kenya was more important than getting to bed on time. Afterward, we picked up a photo and information about one of the boys in the orphanage whose name was

Moses. For years afterward, at our devotion time and at the dinner table, my children would pray for Moses. In that small way they were acquiring a global vision for the spread of God’s kingdom.

Such an outward vision should also shape our youth programs. What a wonderful opportunity to train our young people to be servants instead of consumers. Rather than only providing activities and pizza, let’s search and find projects for them to help others and serve. There might be an older couple in your neighborhood whose yard is covered with leaves and need them raked and bagged. There may be an inner-city organization that needs volunteers. Our churches should be training our children to think about and care about things beyond themselves, to love their neighbors, and gain a global vision.

A submerged church doesn’t even consider sending out missionaries. Jesus said the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few (Matt. 9:37), yet he has supplied our small federation with an abundance of laborers. Our church polity recognizes that for them to labor in foreign missions, they must be called and sent by the churches.

But there are very few who have actually done it. Churches need to stop their navel-gazing, acquire a global vision and send missionaries.

Neither does a submerged church think about church planting. Some confessional Reformed churches are actually growing numerically. Praise the Lord. Now what? The tendency is to build a bigger building, increase the annual budget, and try to maintain. The result is that the pastor and elders become burdened—too often over-burdened—with the inevitable increased needs that arise within the body so that there is no time or energy to engage the community. Such a church, with all its frenetic activity within the “church walls” is virtually invisible to the world. Our

churches need to recognize when this is happening and look for biblical ways to remedy this. One such way is church planting.

When our worship is truly in spirit and in truth, when members truly love one another, when our vision sees our community and the world as our mission field, then the inevitable human weaknesses within the church body will be more easily overlooked. Instead of fights, anger and bitterness, our focus will be on much greater things. Our vision will be refocused on the reputation of Christ and the advancement of His kingdom.

I suspect that like so many other “movements” in church history, the emergent church movement will eventually submerge into nothing more than an interesting footnote. My fervent prayer is that our confessionally Reformed churches that have received such a blessed inheritance will not only be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), but also “a city that is set on a hill **that cannot be hidden**” (Matt. 5:14).

Now that would be truly emergent!

1. William Hendriksen. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Vol 1. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 167.
2. Miles’s account of the writing of this hymn can be found in *101 Hymn Stories* by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1982), 124.
3. John C. Miller. *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 20.

(The author recently edited the above article that was originally printed in the February 2009 issue of *The Outlook*.)

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Reflections from My Sixteen Years of Experience as a Pastor

Since April of 2001 I have been a minister of the gospel, and throughout my sixteen years of life as a pastor, I have collected thoughts that I would like to share with my fellow pastors and with those who desire to be pastors someday. Of course, there are more than sixteen reflections that I have gathered, but, for the sake of brevity, let me share only **sixteen**.

Pastoring is a calling from God. Having a degree from a seminary is not a guarantee that you have this ministerial calling. Some people graduate from seminary but are not in the ministry, or do not stay long in the ministry, because they do not have this pastoral calling.

The God who has called you to the ministry will also provide for you. He will prepare you for the ministry. He will give you a congregation to serve. And he will sustain you throughout your life in the ministry.

Don't accept a call to pastor a congregation unless you are convinced that the Lord is calling you to serve that church. Why? Because when problems arise from that congregation, your strong conviction of God's calling will encourage you to continue serving that church amid

difficulties. You can say, "Lord, you have called me to serve you in this church, and I know you will sustain me."

God resists the proud in the ministry. Thus, expect God to humble you. Sometimes he humbles his servants through infirmity. All accomplished pastors that I know have a form of affliction that keeps them humble before God. God will use the ministry to sanctify you. God's main goal in your life is to conform you to the image of his Son Jesus Christ.

Your wife can be a great help to you in the ministry. If you are a pastor and not yet married and desire to get married, look prayerfully for a godly woman who will serve with you, not hinder you. If you were already married when you became a minister, help your wife understand the

nature of the ministry. You may want to consider buying her *Letters to Pastors' Wives: When Seminary Ends and Ministry Begins* by Catherine J. Stewart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013).

Your family is your priority over your ministry. As Paul indicates in 1 Timothy 3:4–5, "He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" If you neglect your family, your congregation will suffer eventually.

God has called you primarily to preach his Word and pray. Therefore, learn to delegate your other responsibilities to others so that you can focus on your primary work. As Christ's disciples say in Acts 6:2–4, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Don't stop learning about your vocation. In the midst of your busy schedule, set aside time regularly to read books or articles that will help you become a better servant of the Lord. Attend pastors' conferences where you can fellowship with and learn from like-minded ministers about the ministry.

Don't underestimate the wisdom of experienced ministers. Seek their advice and listen to them. They can save you from committing mistakes or making wrong decisions. Find an older pastor who can mentor and encourage you in the ministry. A young pastor has the tendency to think that he knows a lot, but the longer you stay in the ministry, the more you will realize how little your knowledge is.

No matter how hard you try to serve your congregation, you will always have a member who will complain about your service. Remember that you cannot please everyone in the church, and you are not to please people but God. Don't let your critics stop you from doing the Lord's work. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

When necessary, don't be afraid to confront a member of your congregation who has offended you (Matt. 18:15). When the offense is not dealt with, it can become worse. Keeping your resentment to yourself is not good for your heart, both physically and spiritually. So, don't avoid confrontation but deal with it in

a Christlike manner, trusting that God will bring reconciliation.

In the ministry you will encounter someone who will dislike you for no good reason. And that person can be one of your church leaders. I remember talking to a fellow pastor of another congregation. He told me that one of his elders just doesn't like him and he did not know why. This elder treats him unfairly and negatively. When dealing with people like this elder, seek by God's grace to always take the high road. Don't pay these people back with evil for the evil they do to you (1 Pet. 3:9). Instead, pray for them and show more the love of Christ to them.

Don't think that God needs you in the ministry. The truth is you need him more than he needs you. His work can continue without your help. Be thankful to God if he is using you in the building up of his church. To be a minister is a great privilege from the Lord. Think about this: you are serving the Maker of heaven and earth.

The condition of your body can affect the life of your congregation. If you are not healthy, you cannot function well in the ministry. Hence, don't neglect your body. Eat well. Exercise regularly. Get enough sleep. At times ministry can be stressful. Learn to rest and relax, or else you will burn out and cannot continue in the ministry.

Pay careful attention to yourself. Realize your tendency to commit sins that can disqualify you from the ministry. "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). As you shepherd your congregation, shepherd your own soul. Don't be too busy about the ministry that you neglect the One who has called you to the ministry.

When you feel discouraged and about to quit, remember that what you do for the Lord is not in vain in him. When you don't see the fruit of your hard work in preaching, keep in mind that God's Word will not return to him void. His Word will always accomplish the purpose for which God has sent it (Isa. 55:11).

Therefore, my fellow pastors, let me encourage you with the words of the apostle Paul: "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

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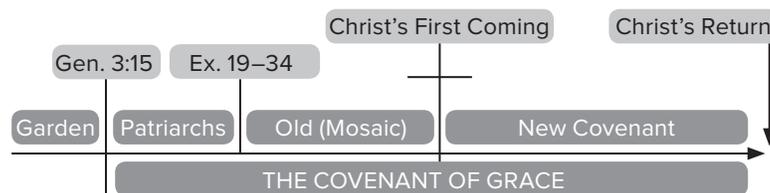
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The covenant of grace is the one covenant through which all believers are saved. It began in Genesis 3:15 with God's promise to send a Savior and runs throughout redemptive history until Christ's second coming. Although it was administered differently during different epochs of redemptive history, its substance remains the same in all periods. In other words, in both the Old Testament and New Testament the way in which God saves sinners is always the same: by his grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone. Christ is the one Mediator of the one covenant of grace that unifies the one people of God in all periods of redemptive history, as shown in figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Timeline of the Covenant of Grace



Before Christ came into the world, the covenant of grace was administered by type and shadow (i.e., symbolic pictures of the reality). Believers put their trust in God's promise to send the Messiah. Since the time of Christ, however, the covenant of grace is administered in more fullness, in the new covenant, as believers put their trust in the Messiah who lived, died, was raised again from the dead, and ascended into heaven.

The covenant of grace is the historical outworking of God's eternal plan of salvation in the covenant of redemption. As we learned in earlier in our series, the covenant of redemption was made before the foundation of the world among the persons of the Trinity and fulfilled through Christ's active obedience and atoning death. It was for Christ a covenant of works. Just as there was a covenant of works with the first Adam, so also there was a covenant of works with the second Adam, Christ. His obedience under this covenant is the foundation of the gospel and of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is essentially the application to sinners of the benefits earned by Christ. Through this covenant that Christ mediates, God brings his people into communion with himself and promises them, "I will be your God and you will be my people." His promise is not on the basis of their obedience but on the basis of Christ's obedience. It was works for Christ so that it is grace for us. "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

Like the covenant of works, the covenant of grace is made

between God and humans. A big difference between these two covenants, however, is that the latter has a Mediator between God and his covenant partners, whereas the former does not. Christ is that Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). This makes the nature of these covenants very different from one another. The covenant of works is based on law and requires perfect, personal obedience. Its condition is, "Do this and you will live" (cf. Lev. 18:5; Gal. 3:12). The covenant of grace, by contrast, is based on God's promise to save sinners. Its condition is "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31; cf. Rom. 10:6-13; Gal. 2:16). In the covenant of grace, God pronounces sinners justified and righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ imputed to them and received through faith alone. Figure 2 shows the distinction between the covenants of works and grace.

Figure 2. The Distinction Between the Covenants of Works and Grace

	COVENANT OF WORKS	COVENANT OF GRACE
Parties	God and Adam	God and believers and their children
Time made	Eden	First promised in Genesis 3:15
Condition	Perfect obedience	Faith in Christ, the One who was perfectly obedient
Mediator	None	Christ
Promise	Glorified life	Justification and glorified life

Contrary to the teachings of classical dispensationalism, the Bible does not teach two plans of salvation for two peoples of God (that is, Israel and the church), but rather one plan of salvation for one people of God throughout redemptive history. God's one plan of salvation is in the historical outworking of the covenant of grace.

Thus, we may define the covenant of grace as *the covenant between God and believers with their children in which he promises salvation through faith in Christ, who merited their salvation by his obedience in the covenant of redemption.*

What Does the Bible Teach?

While the covenant of grace is more fully revealed in Genesis 12, 15, and 17 with God's covenant to Abraham, which is then fulfilled in two great stages, the old (Mosaic) and new covenants, its "mother" or "seed" promise is in the protevangelium of Genesis 3:15. This becomes clear when we examine four features of God's promise in this text.

First, God terminated the sinful relationship between Satan and the woman. The Lord says to the Serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman." God declares that he will not allow the devil to remain in covenant with the man and the woman, which is essentially what happened in the fall. In his tempting of the woman (Gen. 3:1–6), the Serpent casts doubt on God's goodness and truthfulness by challenging the covenant stipulations. "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?' . . . You will not surely die." He tried to derail God's kingdom plan to bring his image bearers to glory. He sees that God made Adam his servant in the covenant of works, so he tries to forestall the coming of the eternal blessings by getting Adam barred from the Tree of Life. He knows that if he can get Adam to violate the covenant of works, then God (being just by nature) must judge him according to the stipulations he made. At first, the Serpent's scheme seems to work. He manages to persuade the woman (and consequently Adam) to disbelieve God and enter into league with himself. Yet, after Adam's fall, God does not permit that sinful relationship to continue. He puts enmity between the Serpent and

the woman. Reconciliation between God and humans would be made through a new covenant, since the original covenant of works was violated and broken. But the devil did not realize that God had planned to send a second Adam who would bring his kingdom project to completion.

Second, the Lord puts enmity between the Serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring. He promises to form a community of people for himself whom he will set apart from the offspring of the devil and one day rescue from the latter's fierce hostility. The Hebrew word for "offspring" (or "seed") dominates the book of Genesis, appearing at least thirty-seven times in chapters 12–50. This indicates God's faithfulness to his promise to form a community of believers and their children called out from the world and the offspring of the devil. This community can be traced throughout redemptive history and into the new covenant, not by bloodline, but by those who believe in God's promise. As Paul says to Gentile Christians in Galatians 3:29: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." Thus, Genesis 3:15 reveals God's first formation of his church.

Third, the Lord promised a Messiah who would judge the Serpent, doing the work the first Adam failed to accomplish: "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The Lord shifts from the collective offspring to a singular offspring. Like the English word offspring, the Hebrew word can refer to one's children (Gen. 4:25; 15:3), a distant descendant, or a large group of descendants. Here in Genesis 3:15, we encounter both the singular and collective senses of this word, which tells us that the Lord would not only form a people from the woman and make them his holy covenant community but also he would also from the woman bring

a Champion-Offspring who would defeat the Serpent.

That the first Adam failed in his responsibility to carry out judgment on the Serpent is further elucidated in Genesis 3:23–24, which tell us that the Lord relieved Adam of his priestly duty of protecting the holiness of the garden and gave it to the cherubim with the flaming sword. In Genesis 2:15, we are told that "the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work and keep it." In order to reach the goal of the Tree of Life, Adam was to remain obedient in these covenant responsibilities. He was to take care of the garden as a gardener and protect it as a guardian. Eden was a holy temple and sanctuary to the Lord. Protecting it from defilement was part of his priestly responsibility to the Lord. Thus, he failed in the covenant of works even before he ate of the forbidden tree. He failed when he allowed his wife to enter into league with the devil. At that point, he should have exercised his priestly authority and executed judgment on the Serpent. Consequently, "the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen. 3:23–24). Fallen Adam would continue in his responsibility to "till" or "tend" the earth (now cursed and bearing thorns) as an everyday function for life. But his holy responsibility of "guarding" the garden was taken from him and given to the cherubim as he failed in his priestly duty to protect Eden from defilement. If God's elect were to reach the goal of the Tree of Life, God would need to send a new Adam to exercise judgment on the Serpent, which is precisely what he promises in Genesis 3:15: "He will bruise your head."

The Covenant of Redemption

The Covenant of Works

The Covenant of Grace

The Common Grace Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant

The Davidic Covenant

The New Covenant

God's promise of a Champion-Seed is central to the unfolding drama of redemptive history. Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God look forward to their Messiah who will vanquish Satan and give them victory over his offspring. The Bible repeats this champion concept in stories like David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17). In this famous account, the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines comes down to these two champions, each of whom represents his people as a federal head. If David defeats Goliath, the Philistines will become slaves to Israel, but the opposite will result if Goliath defeats David. As David defeats Goliath (even removing his head!), he foreshadows his descendant Christ who would defeat Satan and obtain victory for his people.

This is why when Christ began his earthly ministry he was "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. 4:1). Like the first Adam, Jesus was also tempted by the devil to enter into covenant with him (Matt. 4:1-11). But unlike the first Adam, Jesus did not succumb to those temptations. Instead, he remained faithful and obedient in his covenant with the Father.

But Christ's victory over Satan also required him to undergo the horrors of the cross. As the Lord promised in Genesis 3:15, "he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." In order for Christ to deliver his people from the power of death, he would need to taste death himself (Heb. 2:14-16). Without suffering the wrath of God against their sins, Christ could not have made atonement for his people nor exercised redemptive judgment against Satan, as was promised in Genesis 3:15. Therefore, it is through his obedient life and atoning death that Christ trampled the head of the Serpent.



The fourth feature we observe from this passage is Adam's response of faith in God's promise, as well as God's clothing of Adam and Eve with the garments of a slain animal. Notice that Eve's name is not given until *after* God's promise in Genesis 3:15. Up to this point, she is known only as "the woman," because she was taken out of the man (see Gen. 2:23). In Genesis 3:20, however, we are told, "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she

was the mother of all living.” Where did that idea come from? It came from God’s promise to reverse the curse of death on humans through the Champion-Offspring of the covenant of grace. Adam and Eve believed this promise with true faith (demonstrated in Adam’s naming of Eve), and they were justified. God then removed the useless garments they made of fig leaves in an attempt to cover their shame, and he clothed them with the skins of an animal that had to suffer death. Their physical nakedness was not intrinsically evil but was a symbol of their spiritual nakedness. The very fact that they were trying to run away from God showed that Adam had broken the covenant of works and their own consciences were testifying against them. Nevertheless, because they believed in his promise, he provided garments for them and clothed them so that they would no longer be guilty and ashamed.

Why Is This Doctrine Important for the Christian Life?

The covenant of grace is important for the Christian life for several reasons. First, it tells us that we are not under a covenant of works and therefore do not relate to God on the basis of our own law keeping. In the covenant of grace, God promises to accept us as righteous by virtue of the righteousness of his Son, the second Adam. In other words, it draws attention to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Whereas the covenant of works (law) says, “Do this and you will live,” the covenant of grace (gospel) says, “Christ did it for you.” This allows us to go through life on the solid foundation that God receives us because of Christ. There is no greater contributing factor to our joy and comfort as Christians than the reality that God accepts us *in spite* of the fact that we still struggle with sin and disobedience. Knowing that

God loves us on account of Christ protects us from the rollercoaster of our own conscience and emotions.

Second, the covenant of grace teaches us that the whole Bible is about one thing: God redeeming a people for himself through Jesus Christ. It traces the unfolding drama from Genesis to Revelation. It shows us that the Bible is actually one book with one story, told on the stage of real human history. Without seeing the big picture that the covenant of grace provides, we will be tempted to think of the Bible as being little more than a manual for ethical behavior or self-improvement. We will tend to think of the Scriptures as a compilation of stories with a moral point, like Aesop’s fables, or as a prophecy handbook that must be deciphered by current events. The covenant of grace, however, guards us from these pitfalls by highlighting the central point and plotline of Scripture. It unifies the Scriptures and sets every story in the context of the larger story about Christ, who was promised in Genesis 3:15, came in the fullness of time, and will return again. Few things are more important for us to understand as we read God’s Word and seek to know him more.

Third, the covenant of grace reminds us that we are pilgrims in this age. The end of the story is yet to come. As Christians, we sometimes assume that our lives should be free from the trouble and messiness of this world. We tend to think that because we are Christians we should have normal lives immune, or at least less susceptible, to suffering and letdown. But the truth is that, until the consummation, there is no such thing as “normal life.”

There is a scene in the movie *Tombstone* that illustrates this rather well. Wyatt Earp goes to see his friend Doc Holliday as he lies on his deathbed, and Doc tells Wyatt how he was in love once, but the woman he loved joined a convent. “She was all I ever wanted,” he said.

He then asked his friend, “What did you want out of life, Wyatt?” With a cynical tone that came from years of difficulty and heartbreak, Wyatt responded, “Just to live a normal life.” Surprised, Doc answered, “There is no normal life, Wyatt. There’s just life.” Most people who saw the film could identify with that line, for there is no normal life free from complications; there is just life with its messiness and ups and downs. Normal life ended in Genesis 3 with the fall and disobedience of our first parents. The covenant of grace, however, with its saga of fallible sinner-saints who trusted in God’s promise, tells us about *pilgrim* life. It does not promise us that our lives in this fallen world will be free from complications any more than our neighbors,’ but it does promise us that a glorious end awaits us. The covenant of grace points us to the heavenly goal that the first Adam never reached but which the second Adam has secured for us. It tells us that this life is temporary, and the best is yet to come.

1. The Hebrew word for “offspring” or “seed” is *zera*.’
2. The Hebrew words for “work” and “keep” in Genesis 2:15 are the words *abad* and *shamar* respectively.
3. The same Hebrew words for “work” and “guard” are used in Genesis 3:23–24 as in Genesis 2:15, namely, *abad* and *shamar*.
4. The similarity between the words “woman” and “man” is also seen in the Hebrew of Genesis 2–3: the word for “woman” is *ishah*, and the word for “man” is *ish*.

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For many years, though critics questioned the historicity of the patriarchs, the exodus, and the biblical portrait of the settlement of the land of Canaan, the historicity of the monarchy in Israel was more or less assumed. But with the rise of postmodernity, many scholars began to cast doubt even on the period of David and Solomon. The 1990s proved to be a volatile time in biblical studies as the trajectories begun by postmodern literary criticism began to intersect with biblical studies. Hence any number of postmodern biblical criticisms began to emerge, including feminist criticism, womanist criticism, postcolonial criticism, LGBT criticism and queer theory, cultural criticism, trauma/victimization criticism, and the list goes on.¹

On the one hand, some of these criticisms—as bizarre as they seem—can at times provide a service to interpreters by drawing attention to details in the text often overlooked by those of us who are focused on different sets of details and categories. And yet, on the other hand, nearly all of them more frequently fall prey to postmodern deconstructionism, an approach that believes that “texts have no intrinsic ‘meaning,’ at least none that is recoverable in the case of ancient texts; the modern interpreter gives to the text whatever ‘meaning’ seems appropriate in the social context of his or her own ‘realm of discourse,’ whatever the ‘realm’ of the original author may have been.”²

When postmodern deconstructionism came to roost in biblical studies,

the historicity of the united monarchy, once accepted as factual by nearly everyone, was now called into question. Thus the modern-day postmodern critic will claim that even though the biblical authors *spoke* of a David who ruled from such places as Hebron and Jerusalem, these stories are insufficient to provide us with reliable historical information and thus cause us to doubt their reliability. These critics have been labeled as “minimalists” in that they believe the Bible provides us with minimal access to “what really happened” and contains a minimum of historical truth.

By contrast, maximalist scholars—those who believe the Bible provides us with large amounts of historical data—have responded to minimalism in two primary ways

First, they have pointed out that minimalist writers who disparage the Old Testament for its supposed ideological stance (e.g., monotheism, Jerusalem-centeredness, etc.) while at the same time praising ancient Near Eastern texts which themselves exhibit ideological stances are guilty of a glaring inconsistency. For example, the Merneptah Stele, which we considered in a previous article,³ is unashamedly propagandistic, yet minimalist scholars demand that the people and places in the Bible be verified by texts like this before accepting them as historical.⁴

Second, maximalist scholars have mustered data from the archaeological record that does indeed corroborate the biblical texts. Though we noted in our first article that the Bible does not require attestation from outside sources (it

is, after all, the self-authenticating Word of God, above which nothing is able to stand in judgment), archaeology does at times help us “respond to challenges” and “confirm the text.”⁵ In the remainder of this article, we will consider some of this data and witness how they give insight into the nature of David's kingdom and support the historicity of the united monarchy.

Ancient Extrabiblical Mention of King David

In the early 1990s, several scholars began to opine that King David was on par, historically speaking, to the legendary King Arthur. The Bible's description of David's reign was said to be a fiction invented by later kings to explain their own kingship as originating in a divine covenant granted to the eponymous ancestor of their dynastic line (so 2 Sam. 7). There are no ancient extrabiblical texts that mention the man David by name, and this is because there was no David about whom to write.

Now it is true that no ancient extrabiblical texts record anything like this: “And then I fought alongside the armies of David of Jerusalem whereupon he smote our enemies with a mighty smiting!” We do have texts that refer to individual Israelite and Judean kings by name from a later period (as we will see in our next article), but we have no such texts for David. In the case of David, however, we do have texts that mention his dynasty and possibly even reference a region made famous by his military activity prior to the death of Saul. Let us look at these examples in turn.

The site of Tel Dan, 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, is known from the Bible as one of the sites of Jeroboam's golden calves. Excavations began in earnest in 1966 and continued without interruption until 2000. In 1993, archaeologists found a fragment of a stele written in Aramaic that sent shock waves through the biblical studies guild. Its text—written in the late ninth century B.C.—made mention of the “House of David” (Hebrew *byt dwd*). The author of the text, who is not identified by name but is described as having been made king by the storm god Hadad, boasts of having defeated the king of the northern kingdom and overthrown the king of Judah. Though fairly fragmentary, the Tel Dan stele reads:

Hadad went before me [and] I went from [...] of my kings.

I killed kings who harnessed . . . chariots and thousands of horsemen,

[Jeho]ram son of [Ahab] king of Israel,

And [I] killed [Ahaz]iahu son of [Jehoram king] of the house of David.

I imposed [tribute] . . . their land . . .⁶

Tel Dan stele



Though the names Jehoram, Ahab, Ahaziahu (= Ahaziah), and Jehoram are reconstructed, what is absolutely clear is the reference to a dynastic succession going by the name “House of David” less than 150 years after the death of David himself.

The importance of this text was immediately recognized. Many scholars saw that 150 years is too short of a time for a King-Arthur-like lore to develop about King David. And for the critics who tried to demote David (even if he did exist) to the status of a “petty chieftain of little significance,” the Tel Dan stele annulled such speculation by showing the inconceivability of promoting David in less than 150 years to the full-blown eponymous ancestor of a Judean dynasty.



The “Mesha Inscription” or “Moabite Stone” (as it is commonly called) not only described the deliverance of Moab from the Omeride dynasty of Israel, it even mentioned the God of Israel, YHWH, by name.

(We will say more about “David demotion” below.) David-deniers began floundering: some challenged the translation of *byt dwd* as “House of David” and proposed a hitherto unknown and unattested Semitic god (apparently named Dod, achieved by translating the *w* not as a consonant but as an *o* vowel) as the referent in the stele. Others claimed that the inscription itself was a forgery, likely manufactured by conservative Jews or Christians trying to invent evidence for David. In the end, critics were forced to admit that there was a man named David who reigned as some kind of a king and from whom were descended the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem.

Shortly after this, scholars revisited the translation of a stele discovered



in 1868 from Dhiban, the ancient capital of Moab. The "Mesha Inscription" or "Moabite Stone" (as it is commonly called) not only described the deliverance of Moab from the Omeride dynasty of Israel, it even mentioned the God of Israel, YHWH, by name. In addition, it contained a reference to the House of David (*bt [d]wd*), although this had originally been obscured by the fact that the word house was spelled in short form (*bt*—i.e., missing the letter *y*) and the letter *d* of David was obscured. But since the Tel Dan stele had placed the Davidic dynasty on the radars of epigraphers, this new reading of a well-known text became even more widely accepted. Again, an ancient, extrabiblical text now provided witness to the historicity of a Davidic dynasty, and indirectly to its eponymous founder, King David.

Though the Tel Dan inscription and the Mesha Inscription are the best exemplars of extrabiblical references to the dynasty of David, the respected University of Liverpool Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen has also revisited a possible reading from the famous Karnak Reliefs in Thebes.⁷ After raiding Palestine in 925 B.C., Pharaoh Shoshenq I of Egypt commissioned this victory scene which covered various place names from regions in both Israel and Judah, including a southern Judean location called "the highlands of *d-w-t*." Since in Egyptian the letter *t* can be used to render the Semitic letter *d*, and since an Old South Arabian inscription spells the name of King David as *d-w-t*, Kitchen has suggested a very high probability that less than fifty years after David's death, the Karnak Reliefs of Shoshenq I speak of the area of David's military exploits in the final years of Saul's reign as "the highlands of David."

So in summary, archaeology has unearthed several inscriptions that make mention of David. Since these inscriptions cannot be dismissed as

forges or misreadings, the burden of proof is upon the skeptic to show why one should not see these texts as attesting to the historicity of David. Is there anything else from archaeology, however, which sheds light on David's reign?

Davidic Archaeology in Jerusalem

As noted above, some scholars have reluctantly admitted the existence of a man named David but have gone on to suggest that archaeology contradicts the portrait of David found in the books of Samuel. He was, in their reconstruction, not so much a king as a tribal warlord. The title "king" suggests a degree of societal organization and urbanization that is unattested, so it is claimed, in the late eleventh to early tenth centuries B.C. when the Old Testament says David existed. But is this really the case?

It should be noted that though Jerusalem is one of the most excavated cities in the Levant, few unequivocal tenth-century B.C. remains have been uncovered. One key reason for this is that pinpointing the tenth century (let alone the early tenth century when David reigned) is notoriously difficult. Traditionally, a pottery type called "red slipped/hand burnished ware" was attributed exclusively to the tenth century B.C., such that where one found this pottery type, one knew he was studying a tenth-century B.C. ruin. Minimalist archaeologists, however, began to down-date these assemblages by seventy-five to one hundred years, effectively removing sites traditionally attributed to David and Solomon from the tenth century and placing them in the ninth century B.C.⁸ Pottery found at Jezreel, however, demonstrated that red slipped/hand burnished ware had a longer lifespan than the minimalists allowed: it spanned both the tenth and ninth centuries B.C. Thus while finds containing this pottery type

cannot be limited to the tenth century, they also cannot be denied a tenth-century date unless other factors point that direction.

Having said that few unequivocal tenth-century B.C. remains have been uncovered, there is one significant find that has been attributed to the tenth century, though whether it was constructed during the that century or constructed just prior is open to debate. In the mid-2000s, Israeli archaeologist Eilat Mazar announced that she had discovered remains from the tenth century B.C. in Jerusalem, an edifice she named the "Large-Stone Structure." In a 2006 article, she asked the question: Did I find King David's palace? She has been given several different answers. Some suggest that the Large-Stone Structure is a Jebusite fortress (with some conservative scholars identifying it with the "Stronghold of Zion" that David conquered [2 Sam. 5:7]), but Mazar has her doubts. She suggests that it was built too late in the history of Jebusite occupation of Jerusalem (right about 1000 B.C.) and along vastly different architectural lines from what one would expect of a Jebusite construction. What is more, the Large-Stone Structure was built on bedrock, just outside the boundary of the earlier Jebusite city, and is thus clearly a late addition to a previously existing city plan. Instead, Mazar believes the Large-Stone Structure is best explained as the palace David built for himself (2 Sam. 5:11).⁹

If she is right, we have corroborating evidence that David is rightly termed a king since the label "tribal warlord" would not seem to reflect adequately the centralization necessary for the building of a project like the Large-Stone Structure. And while not all scholars agree with this conclusion, it is important to note that even a Jebusite construction of the Large-Stone structure does not conflict with the biblical portrait of David reigning as a king from

a centralized Jerusalem. After all, at minimum this illustrates that Jerusalem was and remained a city of prominent size and stature during the periods before and after 1000 B.C., one perfectly suited to serve as the capital of the emerging Israelite kingdom.

Khirbet Qeiyafa: A Davidic Administrative Center

In addition to Jerusalem's Large-Stone Structure, a site ca. 16 miles west of Jerusalem, Khirbet Qeiyafa, has yielded important finds from the time of David. Radiocarbon dating of olive pits from the site has shown that the site was built ca. 1020–980 B.C. Some have suggested that Qeiyafa is the location of biblical Shaaraim (Josh. 15:36; 1 Sam. 17:52; 1 Chron. 4:31) due to the two, multichambered gates found at the site. (Note that the Hebrew word *sha'araim* literally means "two gates.") But what is most significant is that Qeiyafa has characteristics best explained by viewing it as a royal administrative center on the outskirts of a larger kingdom. And who is the most likely candidate for such a kingdom?

Some scholars, unwilling to accept that a real King David began to rule a real kingdom from Jerusalem around 1010 B.C., have suggested that Qeiyafa was a Philistine administrative center, perhaps a satellite of nearby Gath ca. 12 miles to the southwest. The absence of pig bones at the site (usually found in abundance at Philistine sites) and the site's extant pottery repertoire, however, point toward the Judean hill country as the center of this kingdom. Other scholars, recognizing the unlikelihood of Qeiyafa as being Philistine, have invented a hitherto unknown and unattested group of "Saulides" who built the site as a base for their opposition of the "war lord" David in Jerusalem. But since these Saulides are exactly like Israelites, and since the only way to posit their existence

is to deny the only textual evidence we have (i.e., the Bible), it is hard to take seriously such a suggestion as anything but special pleading.¹⁰

No, Khirbet Qeiyafa is an Israelite site and provides a glimpse into the early days of David's kingdom. The multistoried administrative structure in the middle of the site could only be built in the context of an urbanized, centralized state. Qeiyafa has also yielded one of the few examples of alphabetic writing from Judah, a sherd of pottery found in 2008 inscribed with Canaanite/pre-Hebrew letters, indicating the presence of a scribal bureaucracy at the site. The massive fortifications of the site (estimated to have used some 200,000 tons of stone), make the site a perfect outpost and military staging area for David's kingdom near the boundaries of Philistine territory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, though we do not have extrabiblical writings attesting to the man King David by name, we do have extrabiblical texts describing a dynasty that descends from David. And while we do not have archaeological ruins with signs saying "David's Palace" or "David's Administrative Center Near Philistia," we do have structures and sites from the period of history when the Bible says David reigned in Jerusalem. What is more, these structures and sites make little sense apart from positing the existence of an urbanized kingdom in Jerusalem around 1000 B.C. And so, as we have seen from other periods of Old Testament history, archaeology contextualizes, complements, responds to challenges, and even confirms the beginning of the united monarchy as it is described in the books of Samuel.

1. A. K. M. Adam, ed., *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000).

2. William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know*

It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 25–26.

3. *The Outlook* 67, no. 2 (March–April 2017): 28–29.

4. Iain Provan's critique of minimalism is a must-read for any interested in countering the philosophical underpinnings of this movement. See Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015). See chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5.

5. See *The Outlook* 66, no. 3 (May–June 2016): 8–9.

6. This translation is a modification of that found in William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2: *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 161–62.

7. See Kenneth A. Kitchen, "A Possible Mention of David in the Late Tenth Century BCE, and Diety *Dod as Dead as the Dodo?," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 76 (1997): 29–44.

8. For an able critique of the so-called low chronology, see Steven M. Ortiz, "The Archaeology of David and Solomon: Method or Madness?," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 497–516.

9. Eilat Mazar, "Did I Find King David's Palace?," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32 (January–February 2006): 16–27, 70.

10. For the implications of Qeiyafa for David's kingdom, see Michael G. Hasel, "New Excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa and the Early History of Judah," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 477–96. See too Yosef Garfinkel, Michael Hasel, and Martin Klingbeil, "An Ending and a Beginning: Why We're Leaving Qeiyafa and Going to Lachish," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39 (November–December 2013): 44–51.

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The Majestic Name of Our Covenant God: Psalm 8:9

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Once a Christian school teacher told my wife and me that she believed it was important for the children in her kindergarten class to know why they were attending a school with “Christian” above the door. Hearing this, I thought, how wonderful. Here is a teacher who knows her responsibility as a teacher. Soon, I was adding, how courageous! She spoke of one mother who had taken her to task for this. She had said, in effect: “Why are you telling the children the importance of a Christian school? I don’t want my child to think he is different in any way!” What was wrong with that mother? If she had stood with her husband with that child at the baptismal font years earlier, she certainly ought to have had a deep and abiding desire that her child would know what it is to live as a covenant person. She should have!

While this is only one instance, it does point out that there is great confusion and fuzzy thinking as to the reasons for Christian education.

There was a reason why Christian schools were organized; in previous generations. They developed out of a covenantal consciousness. We are to be a distinctive people who, by God’s grace, seek to live according to God’s Word in every way. Our children, in

their formative years, need to learn this, even as do we in our advanced years.

These schools say loudly that godly parents desire their children to walk before the Lord in all of life. Secularism is the religion of the age. In the face of this, God’s people—young and old—have a distinct need. In humility we must hear God say, “You shall teach [the ways of the Lord] to your children, and shall talk with them, when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:7). While this commands their children, it also puts some parents on the spot. Many are unable to do the quality of teaching called for because they do not have the background, the understanding, or even the patience. They need help. Thus godly parents organized Christian schools.

Psalm 8 tells us something of the reason behind Christian education. In this psalm we are brought to see something of the glory of God in all of life. We look around and see the greatness of his power, the wonder of his works. We see the heavens, the mountains, the oceans, the plains, the trees, the works of God’s hands. We see man—and we say, “What is man over against all this majestic wonder?”

Secularism has its answer. So does Scripture. But these answers are very different.

The believer knows that Jehovah’s name is to be seen in all the earth. This must be seen by our youth. As God’s people, this is our confession, a confession that is seen.

Why is it that God’s people are to be concerned about Christian education? David makes it clear: the name of Jehovah, the Lord, our covenant God, is seen in all of creation. Perhaps the meaning is somewhat obscured because names do not mean much to us anymore. For us, a name has become nothing more than a tag or a title that sets as apart from someone else. The letters of the word properly arranged form a tag. In Scripture a name has significance.

By the name of someone, you know something about him. When Napoleon decreed that all the citizens of the Netherlands were to have a surname (though the royals had them), the common people often developed a surname from something about themselves: where they lived or what they did.

When we speak of God’s name, we are speaking about all that God is. God’s

name speaks of his power. It speaks of his justice, condemning sin. His name speaks of his grace: He is the God of our salvation. All of this and ever so much more is bound up in the name of God. And so when we sing "How excellent is thy name" we are singing about all that God is, not just the letters arranged as a tag. As David looked about, he saw the reality of God. When we are given the eye of faith by grace through redemption, we are able to see that there is nothing in life that is neutral. Of course, there are many who make a distinction between life as everyone knows it and the area of life which they call religious. They view the former as neutral and the religious as an extra aspect of life. Yet, absolutely nothing is neutral!

An unbeliever and a believer do not and cannot approach life in the same way. Spirituality is not like a bit of frosting put on the way of the world to make it look different.

Those who champion some parts of life as being neutral do not see that all of life has a relationship to God. For instance, there are discussions and even arguments about whether creationism should be taught in school. Those against this say that creationism is religion. However, they do not or do not want to understand that evolution is also a religion—the religion of the devil.

In reality, every area of life and therefore every discipline in life shows something about God.

Consider art, for instance. Is the work of art just a way for us to express ourselves? Hardly. That is man-centered, or humanism. It is an opportunity for us to praise God with talent he has given us. And we should so use it!

What about history? Many groan at the sound of this word. For some, it is merely memorizing names and dates. But few will ever be given an opportunity to play *Jeopardy*. A Christian approach is to study and observe how God's eternal plan and purpose is being worked out.

You cannot study church history separately from the history of Europe or North America, or anywhere else in the world. God moves in strange and wondrous ways to bring about his plan. To study the Reformation means you must see it in relation to the political situation of that day, but you also must see it as God working out his perfect plan. The Renaissance, though purely humanistic and not God-centered, was used of God so that we would have the texts of the Bible in the original languages, and printed books so that the truth of Scripture could be spread. God has a goal for history, and it does not come about by chance or luck.

Then there is geography, sometimes given a new and fancy name today. It is not just merely a study so we can distinguish the continents one from another. It is the study of the distribution of natural resources so that we can see God's hand in this. But this is not so we can gloat but rather understand stewardship. We are not humanists!

We study physiology—the study of the body God has made. Every part is put together properly, and we can see that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." We learn what sin has done to our bodies, and yet we can praise the living God. Every part has a purpose. We do not study the body so we can engage in lust and vanity. The Bible tells us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

Even mathematics is not neutral. Underlying math is the order and arrangement of God. One is always one. You cannot define it in any other way. Or, take for example, the difference between 12 and 21, or 13 and 310. You understand what we are doing: we are transposing the digits. When you do this, the difference is always a multiple of nine. Always. Even in mathematics we see God's organization and order. From this we learn something about the nature of truth. Truth does not change.

Every discipline in school teaches us something about our relationship with God, if it is taught from a Christian perspective. The purpose of the teacher teaching from a Christian perspective is not first of all to teach the children the hymns of the church, though certainly this has its place. Nor is the teacher's purpose to make the children better. This is evolutionism. The teacher's purpose is to teach the students to be faithful to the Lord in all of life, to reflect the glory of God in all they do. Just as the teacher has a calling in life, so the students have a calling. They must learn how to fulfill it in whatever their task in life shall be. In school their calling is to study. Then, that education is to show them how to fulfill in life the glory of God.

We must learn how to read. For some older folks this is sometimes difficult for a number of reasons. But our offspring must learn this, as difficult as it is for some. This is a preparation for life. We must be able to distinguish truth from error. Reading is more than recognizing words. It is comprehending them. Do we act as blotters as we read, or are we able to say this is true and that is false? We must learn spelling and grammar so that we can speak and write correctly so we can communicate that God is our God. We learn other languages not only so that we can develop our mind but also so that we can communicate to others the message of truth and grace.

The majestic works of our covenant God must be shown to our youth. These are not too deep and wonderful for them. It will not do to say that our children cannot understand because these things are too hard. Remember that through David God says in Psalm 8:2, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies" (New International Version). We all know that there are many in this world who oppose the truth of God. Even our little ones must learn, so they can understand at their own level and in turn glorify God.

Take a walk with your children and show them the beautiful evidence of God's hand. Show them the vastness of the heavens and all that the heavens hold. Show the tiny evidence of life as it is seen in early spring. Observe them studying and learning in class. How will they live in God's world? They need a God-consciousness for all of life. We live in an amazing time. How full must be their God-consciousness!

There is a current and strange philosophy about education that says there are so many things children cannot understand. We live in an age in which it is popular to dumb down many things. After all, the works and being of God they cannot understand, we are told. David didn't agree. Such an attitude denies Scripture, and more, it is insulting to our youth. Our youth can speak of space, euthanasia, stem-cell research, and they can understand them. But let's not trouble them with the things of God in all of this? And though the world has become very small, nothing less than a Christian education will give guidance for covenant living.

True, there are many arguments for passing by the Christian school. We have heard them all. Some say that mathematics is mathematics, spelling is spelling, history is history. Others remind us that there are Christian teachers in public schools. Indeed, there are, and thankfully so. Yet, they are in a harness so they cannot do the complete task of educating because non-Christian education is built on an evolutionary foundation, a Godless philosophy of life. They cannot even motivate the students to praise God. Still others piously submit that their children can bear witness to the Light life. But these children and young people feed a proper understanding of Life before they face the difficulties of life.

What do we want for our children? Above all, it should be a firm foundation for all of life. We must want what is best for them. This is not just things! Covenantally this means a knowledge of God and open

opportunities to serve him. This necessitates a Christian education.

You realize, of course, that such an education is not a guarantee. There are those who say, "My children go to the church activities, catechism, worship, and I send them to the Christian school. They should have no problem in life." AH of this is no guarantee that all will turn out well. They must know God, not just about him. Yet, all of this education is our responsibility. It is heeding God's commands. Has not God said, "Train up a child in the way he should go"? By this training and causing them to be trained, we are praising our covenant God! And of course there must be godliness in the home, too.

There is also a goal in our education. Our song of praise becomes that of Psalm 8. This means that we praise our covenant God. When we survey the heavens at night and during the day, do we see in them the greatness and power of God? Do we see ourselves as small and powerless over against our great God? Or, do we think ourselves as great because we have so much, and even a name and place in society? If so, where is our praise?

When you and I survey history, current events, and political movements, do we become fearful? Remember God has a goal and therefore a purpose in all that he does. He is working so that he will arrive at his goal. He is not weak and powerless. See his power in the heavens, and see his program through his providence. We hear of ISIS, and we see what it does. We shudder, but even in this God is working out his purpose so that goal—the Last Day—will come about and we shall know eternity with our God through Christ.

Of course, we can praise God for his wonderful work of salvation, and we should. That in itself is amazing. But we must see the name of our Lord in all the earth. We sing, "This is my Father's world." This is what Psalm 8 is all about. But if we fail in giving children this education, they do not receive a well-rounded education.

When we are faithful we are saying with the psalmist, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

Yet there is more to this praise. It includes and involves a commitment to the cause of Christian education. By no means do we desire a private school so we can think we are much better than others. We are, in reality, no better than others. Rather, being the Lord's people, we are different. We are people who belong to the Lord. Knowing our weaknesses, we want our children to be trained to fulfill God's calling in life as wholehearted servants of our majestic God—the God of the covenant, in line with his covenant demands. All of this grows out of a spiritual reason and commitment. It turns into a prayerful concern.

This is much more than saying, or having a bumper sticker saying, "I support Christian schools." This means that we are concerned about what and how our children are being taught. This means that we know what Christian education is and that we pray for the teachers, students, staff, and board. We pray that they will develop in their calling. This means we do our best to help financially. This God-centered education is getting more and more expensive. Some can't afford it. God's people must help. There is need to give visible support so our youth will see how important this is to us.

Remember, what we do as children of the King is being done to our King. We desire the very best for our offspring. Of course, we desire that they may know Jesus Christ as Savior. But there must be more: they must see the majestic God of the Bible as being the center of life, the center of all being.

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In the last issue we began discussing the Secondary Dominant Domains™ of IRBC's philosophical model of counseling. The Secondary Dominant Domains™ consist of the Environmental Domain™ and the Productive Domain™. Within the Environmental Domain™ are three different realms: The Spiritual, Social, and Physical. Last time we looked at the Spiritual Realm. In this article we will concentrate on the Social and Physical Realms.

The Social Realm

The Social Realm™ within the Environmental Domain™ primarily represents God's superintendence over the three basic institutions he ordained for establishing and maintaining order in human affairs. The basic institutions are the family, church, and government. When these institutions are neglected or corrupted, problems arise in people's lives. Several terms have been attached to these three institutions to make them more descriptive in connection with their importance and role within IRBC's training model. Let's take a moment to familiarize ourselves with them: The Primary Social Institution™, the Basal Social Institution™, and the Foundational Social Building Block™.

The Primary Social Institution™ is the visible church. God has designed this institution to be his primary instrument in bringing about the salvation, edification, and sanctification of the elect in order that they might fulfill the ultimate purpose for which mankind was created: the glorification and enjoyment of God. The Bible and members of the invisible church are the means by which the Holy Spirit accomplishes this divine objective. The head of the church is Jesus Christ, her Savior and Lord.

The Basal Social Institution™ is government. God uses this institution in a general way to establish and maintain order in the family, church, and society at large (state). God brings this gift of order to human beings in a general way through the realm of (mediate) general revelation via the human conscience. The conscience is an inward "regulator of law and order" built into the fabric of the spirits of the finite creatures who were created in the image of an infinite, eternal, moral, and orderly being: God (*imago Dei*).

This "regulator" functions in connection with God's timeless moral law (i.e., the Ten Commandments) and the order and operations¹ of the members of the Trinity in connection with the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*). God uses the unseared conscience working in connection with the capacities of reason and memory to establish law and order among human beings, as well as enable them to fulfil their role in exercising dominion over his creation.

The Foundational Social Building Block™ of the Primary Social Institution™ (church) and the Basal Social Institution™ (government/state) is the family. It is the institution from which the other two are built. There is no institution that God has established among men that can surpass the family's influence and related success in evangelism, discipleship, education, or industry. For this reason Christians must stand united and defend the biblical definition of the family, especially in light of the 2015 United States Supreme Court decision to redefine marriage. Of course, we must also seek to be used of the Lord to defend and restore the

other two institutions as well. One of the practical ways this is done at the grassroots level is by shining forth associated truth via the ministry of biblical counseling.

Looking for origins of counseling-related issues arising in the Social Realm™ within the Environmental Domain™ also involves looking beyond the three basic institutions and taking into account the collective actions of persons functioning (legally or illegally) to promote agendas and philosophies which run contrary to God's truth. The collective actions of people bent against truth often appear in the landscape of our lives today via radical organizations with outspoken activists or by strategically orchestrated rallies and protests. Because the blatantly negative activities and messages arising from these entities pose a threat to the security of morally sensitive and orderly beings, they need to be considered. The bad fruit which proceeds from these entities oftentimes causes a great deal of unrest and fear in the lives of, especially, the elderly—inner tension that often sets their hearts searching for peace and safety. Both can be found in the bosom of the Wonderful Counselor who brings forth this glorious fruit through pulpit ministries and the ministry of biblical counseling.

The Physical Realm

The Physical Realm™ represents the fixed physical structures in the various geographical landscapes across the face of the earth, the prevailing climate or weather patterns in various regions of the world, and devastating events (natural disasters) which occur through the forces of nature (e.g., tornados, earthquakes, tsunamis). The seasons are also considered

within this realm because they, along with the things just mentioned, can also be contributing variables to counseling-related problems in the lives of God's people (e.g., Seasonal Affective Disorders).

Along with his using the truth of Scripture to minister to counselee's problems arising in this realm, the Holy Spirit, via the instrumentation of a biblical counselor, can also effectively bring associated truth from the realm of general revelation to bear in their lives. For example, it has been determined (by true science) that some people living in regions where sunlight is limited suffer from depression resulting from a deficiency of Vitamin D in the body. The prescription in such a case would not be to repent of sin but to supplement one's diet with vitamin D3 or the utilization of a safe lamp that enables the body to produce this vitamin in which it is deficient.

Along with thinking about the three realms within the Environmental Domain, it is also helpful to utilize some identifiable defined boundaries within these realms instead of thinking about each of them globally. These identifiable defined boundaries assist in guiding research in the field and collecting data for the everyday biblical counselor. The prefixes macro-, meso-, and micro- are terms used to describe the approximate sizes of the various identifiable defined boundaries within the realms.

The prefix macro- represents a thing, condition, or an event which is large or exceptionally prominent in scope, while micro- is indicative of something small. Meso- is the intermediate designation signifying something in the middle or between macro and micro.

An example of a familiar macro-environment event occurring within the Physical Realm™ with which we can all relate is the worldwide flood recorded in the seventh and eighth chapters of Genesis. This event radically altered the physical contour



of the earth as well as the life of the creatures which dwelt upon it. Second Peter 3:6 says, "The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." The various geographical and atmospheric alterations that occurred as a result of the Noahic cataclysm have and continue to affect all of earth's inhabitants. The negative effects on the earth's physical environment caused by the Fall and the flood certainly account for some of the extreme prevailing climactic conditions in certain regions, as well as some of the severe weather we encounter today. Such weather-related variables can have direct counseling-related implications that should be explored by counselors, especially in cases of depression.

An example of a meso-environmental problem with variables rooted in the Spiritual Realm™ would be a Christian working in a factory with co-workers who are predominately pagan. Such an environment can be the source of many problems in a counselee's life.

A micro-environmental problem which is social in nature (Social Domain™) might involve a Christian teenager who is a social butterfly living with Christian parents who are very quiet and subdued. Such a disparity can lead

to frustrations and misunderstandings in the lives of those involved. Neither the parents nor the child are necessarily sinning by expressing themselves in association with their varying personalities. The counsees in such a case might benefit more from a session wherein a comprehensive discussion ensues about the different personalities represented in the family and the best way to relate to them, rather than one wherein the counselor spends the majority of his time delivering admonitions encompassing biblical principles of humility and/or communication.

Conclusion

It is my hope that as you have interacted with some relatively deep and complex truths and concepts (in an accelerated fashion) via this article, you have gained a deeper appreciation for the depth of God's wisdom in creating for his children a multidimensional environment in which they can live in fellowship with him and each other. Although sin has radically altered the three realms God created to encompass and give expression to environment, there is still hope for restoration.

Every time a sinner is saved and faithfully taught and trained in the light

An Organist's Perspective

of the full counsel of God's Word, he or she becomes an instrument in the hand of God for the restoration of the institutions that structure environment (i.e., family, church, government) and the realms which encompass and give expression to it (i.e., spiritual, social, physical). May God be pleased to restore within his church around the world a burning conviction to obey the Great Commission given by our chief commanding officer, Jesus Christ. And may it be that this conviction be expressed, in part, through the ministry of Reformed biblical counseling solely for his honor and glory: Sola Deo Gloria!

1. Zacharias Ursinus, in his analysis of the Trinity in his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (1591), expressed two ways that the three persons of the Godhead are distinguished from each other: 1) by their works (ad intra) and 2) by their mode of operating (ad extra). Wilhelmus à Brakel, in *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (1700), listed five ways in which they are different: (1) in personal properties, (2) in names, (3) in order, (4) in the manner of existence, and (5) in the manner of operation. Finally, Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology* (1938), affirmed the points made earlier by Ursinus about ad intra (i.e., unbegottenness, generation, and spiration all matters connected to manner of existence, divine order, and manner of operation as it pertains to the covenant of redemption) and ad extra (the unified yet ordered works of creation and redemption).

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Leading the Congregational Singing

Why is it that in some congregations the singing is so strong and powerful, while in others it is so feeble and lifeless? The acoustics of the sanctuary may have something to do with it; the size of the congregation may also play a role. But perhaps a partial explanation lies in the musical accompaniment of the organist.

Many people think of the organist's contribution to worship in terms of carefully chosen and well-played preludes, offertories, and postludes. While these may enrich the worship service, the chief responsibility of the organist is to accompany the congregational singing. Naturally the organists alone cannot be praised or blamed for the state of the congregation's singing, but they are in an especially important position to effect for good or ill the congregation's songs of praise of the Lord.

What are some of the necessary components in developing good congregational singing?

First, the organist must recognize that playing the hymns well depends upon careful attention to the text. Before playing a hymn the organist should study the text of the song and determine a particular tempo and mood which is consistent with it. This should be done in preparation for the service. Frequently, organists are tempted to say what an organist once observed to me, "Oh, the hymns are easy . . . I don't worry about them." But this is a serious mistake. As organists we have a responsibility to accompany the congregation in a way that serves the spirit and style of a hymn, enabling the singers to enter more fully into the meaning expressed by the text of the song. Nothing less than this is demanded of an organist who seeks to assist the congregation in the worship of God.

I have found that singing along with the congregation helps in determining whether the tempo is too lively or slow, or whether the congregation is being given a sufficient break between stanzas. With many songs the textual phrases do not precisely coincide with the musical phrases. Even if the voices take a breath at the end of the musical phrase rather than the textual phrase, as long as the organist carries through, the text will be better understood. The organist must determine the tempo and be accurate in the time values. A steady beat should be maintained, since consistency in timing helps the congregation sing with confidence. It is ordinarily inadvisable to slow down (ritard) at the end of any stanzas except the last. The swell box should also be left open to avoid sudden or unwanted changes in volume.

Occasionally, for ease in singing, the hymn may need to be transposed to a lower key. If the organist does not feel confident in doing this extemporaneously, consult other hymnals (they may already have the selection in a different key) or take the time to rewrite it yourself.

The introduction to the hymns should generally be the entire song or at least the first and last phrases. The tempo of the introduction should also be exactly the same as the tempo for the singing. A registration somewhat softer than that chosen for the congregational singing will often be used.



Generally use the bright, clear principal stops—the 8', 4', and 2' stops. Mixtures may be added for more powerful hymns or on the last stanza when the words are appropriate. It is wise to avoid a 16' manual tone with some rare exceptions. The pedal part should also be played in the octave in which it is written, and the bass line should not be doubled with the left hand.

The occasional use of free accompaniments and descants will provide variety and stimulate congregational singing. Some free accompaniment, however, tends to be too unconstrained and remote from the melody and thus hinders rather than promotes congregational singing. This is most effective on well-known hymns and should not be played on more than one or two stanzas. The “Amen” should be played in a positive manner and in the same rhythmic pulse; the volume should not be reduced for the “Amen.”

Prelude, Offertory, and Postlude

In addition to playing for the congregational singing, the organist must select appropriate music for the prelude, offertory, and postlude.

In selecting music for the prelude, offertory, or postlude, the organist should be especially attentive to the question as to what is most fitting as an accompaniment to the congregation's worship of God. In these days when

the desire for entertainment and performance has crept into our view of worship, we must be primarily concerned with the contribution which the music will make to a worship which is “in spirit and in truth.” The great issue, therefore, is not, “Will the congregation enjoy this?” but rather, “Is this music worthy of God?” The congregation may well enjoy and appreciate a selection, even admire the beauty of the melody, but this does not necessarily mean that it assists the worship of God. It might just as well mean that the congregation has been distracted from the worship of God! This has significance for the way the prelude, offertory, and postlude should be viewed.

The function of a prelude is to provide a suitable atmosphere for the preparation of heart and mind for worship. Thus, the prelude is not an opportunity for the organist to provide a recital, nor is it simply a time for background music while people file into the church sanctuary.

The offertory should not be a selection designed to draw the attention of the congregation away from the act of worshipping God through the giving of our gifts. Perhaps a selection could be found that deals with the theme of the sermon or that calls attention to some aspect of God's character or work for which he is to be praised and worshiped.

Similarly, care should be exercised in the selection of a postlude. Frequently

this is not the case and postludes are almost an afterthought. Perhaps this is the reason postludes are often simply loud and fast. Though it may be true that the postlude does not add anything directly to the worship of the congregation which it follows, it can easily belie or even nullify what was said and done in the worship service. If the dominant mood, for example, of the service was quiet and reflective, a quiet chorale would be better than a loud toccata. A composition based upon the closing hymn also works well to remind the congregation of the theme of the sermon.

An organist will discover that, once decisions about these selections are based upon their contribution to the worship service, the decisions themselves will be easier to make. An appropriate variety in musical selections will result and individual likes and dislikes will be *minimized*.

In addition to the selection of preludes, offertories, and postludes, the church organist should be able to demonstrate proficiency in technical skills and flexibility. Organs differ considerably, and the organist is expected to adjust the registration to get the full use of the instrument. Sometimes there is an unexpected circumstance in the worship service—the minister skips a song (it happens!) or a technical problem with

the organ occurs—which the organist must be ready to deal with without hesitation. Of course an organist ought to be dependable. Accurate timing of the prelude, for example, is important so that the service begins on time.

Introducing New Songs

The remainder of this article is not devoted to the organist's accompaniment of the congregational singing or contribution to the worship service by way of preludes, offertories, and postludes. In the following I would like to address the issues of learning new songs and the responsibility for choosing music that is worthy of God in worship.

In all hymnals there are always "favorites" and "unknowns." In congregations that have recently purchased new hymnals, there will likely be even more new and *unfamiliar* songs. What are some of the ways in which the congregation can learn these new songs?

The congregation's first contact with an unfamiliar piece probably should not be in an attempt to sing through it. If only a few congregational members are familiar with a song, then it is hardly a congregational expression of praise to sing it during public worship without preparation. The congregation should first become familiar with the song by listening to the tune and reading the text. The organist could assist by using an arrangement of such an unfamiliar song for the prelude, or the choir could use it as an anthem. Perhaps the minister could even announce that in a week or two the congregation will be singing this selection so that there would be an opportunity to become familiar with it in advance of its use in worship.

Another method would be for the organist to play the song through once or twice while the congregation would read the words and hum along. After a new hymn has been introduced it should be sung again in a week or two. The minister might also suggest that the organist play only the melody.

An older tradition, and one still practiced in some churches, provides for a congregational practice time before the worship service itself. This provides an excellent means for learning new hymns or hymns which are seldom selected. This can also be done at fellowship gatherings or in the context of Bible study societies.

Furthermore, the Christian home and school should be places where psalms and hymns are learned and sung. I find this to be an especially appealing approach. Perhaps a new song could be introduced each week as part of the families' devotions. By singing from the congregational hymnbook in these settings, parents and children are prepared for public worship. As in the churches, alternative hymnbooks should be discouraged and opportunities seized to learn the songs of the congregation. Sadly, many people have hymnals in their homes that are seldom used. However, the Christian home is the primary place for children to become acquainted with the congregation's songs of praise. By singing these songs together, not only in public worship but also in home and school, children would also be taught that worship extends beyond the Lord's Day and throughout the week. They would also be taught—provided that songs coincide with those approved for use in public worship—that all worship of the Lord requires mental alertness and that the choice of music is always important. Though this may be difficult in some homes where no one believes he is able to accompany the singing, in most households there is at least one person who is able to pick out the melody and in many households there may be several who play musical instruments. Children enjoy playing hymns, and these should be included in their repertoire as they are taught to play their instruments.

Music Worthy of God: Who Is Responsible?

It is not only the organist who is responsible for the selection of appropriate music. This is also the responsibility of others in the covenant

community—fathers and mothers (as we have just seen), Sunday school teachers, Christian school teachers, Young People's leaders, and so on. Those who are responsible for selecting appropriate music should remember that children are quite capable of learning good music and should be encouraged to do so.

However, the final responsibility for determining what music is worthy of God in the worship of his name rests with the church's council. Office bearers in the church are responsible to study the biblical principles for worship and how these relate to the music which plays such an important role in the church's worship. They should make sure that these principles govern the choices made not only by the minister of the Word but also by the organists in their contribution to the worship of God.

In all of our churches, it is time that we gave renewed attention to the question of our use of music in the worship of God. Councils must insist that ministers of the Word, choir directors, organists, and youth leaders all give special attention to the question, "Is this music worthy of God?" and not to the more popular question, "Does this please me?"

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Jesus brings division. He understood that this would be the case. He did not want his disciples to misconstrue the impact of his coming into the world: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matt. 10:34).¹ He knew that people would either love him or hate him, and this would affect even the closest of relationships within the family: “For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household’” (Matt. 10:35–36). We have to be prepared for the fact our commitment to Christ may rupture the closest of relationships.

For Him or Against Him

Jesus has always brought separation. We see this everywhere in the Gospels, and we see it today. People either cherish him or loathe him. The English Reformed theologian John Owen made the same observation in the seventeenth century. Writing about Christ, Owen affirmed, “It is he whom the souls of his saints do love for himself, for his own sake, and all other things of religion in and for him.” Things are much different though for them who “are not renewed.” “The truth is . . . that Christ, in the mystery of his person and in the glory of his mediation, is the only thing that they dislike in religion.”²

Owen reflected upon the real state of the unregenerate: “Those who are not spiritually renewed cannot love the Lord Jesus Christ in

sincerity, yea, they have an inward, secret aversion from the mystery of his person and his grace.” Where then do such people place their love, since it is not focused upon Christ? Owen went to the heart of the problem by directing attention upon the disordered love of fallen man: “It is self which all their affections center in, the ways whereof are too long here to be declared.”³

Christ’s birth brought division. The magi from the East came to Jerusalem looking for him who had been born king of the Jews. When they found him in Bethlehem, they fell down and worshiped him (Matt. 2:11). Herod the Great, by contrast, sought to destroy him (Matt. 2:13). His miracles set people against one another. When he healed the paralytic, the multitudes glorified God, while the scribes accused Jesus of blasphemy (Matt. 9:1–8). His teaching tore people apart: “There was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings” (John 10:19). “Many of them said, ‘He has a demon and is mad.’” “Others said, ‘These are not the words of one who has a demon’” (John 10:20–21).

A Position with Consequences

It is not possible to be neutral about Christ. Jesus made it quite clear: “He who is not with me is against me” (Matt. 12:30). He who does not love him stands in opposition to him.

This is an issue of fundamental importance. On what side of the aisle do I find myself? Do I cherish him, or do I have a secret aversion

to him? The presence of love for Christ or a lack thereof anticipates what is coming in the future. Paul concludes his first letter to the Corinthians with a solemn declaration: “If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him” (1 Cor. 16:22, Harper Collins Study Bible). At the same time, he affirms in his final letter as he anticipated martyrdom: “There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

Jesus was either treasured or abhorred down to the final days of his earthly ministry. We see this in the last week of his life preceding the crucifixion. There is both devotion and animosity, allegiance and opposition. It is all there—in the anointing of Jesus in a private residence on Saturday and in the public miracles in the temple on Monday. The adoration for him and the malice directed at him as an infant continued down to the end.

Let us then consider in greater depth the events of two important days in the life of Jesus as his earthly ministry drew to a close.

The Anointing of Jesus on Saturday

“Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom he had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper” (John 12:1–2a). The parallel passage in Mark 14:3 tells us that “he was in the home of Simon the leper.” It seems apparent that Jesus had healed Simon from a disease that humanly



speaking is incurable. Simon then invited Jesus to supper to give him honor, an opportunity to express thanksgiving for all that Jesus had done for him. He held Jesus to be precious and dear.

Something remarkable then happened. There was an unimaginable expression of care and devotion on the part of Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha, something that Jesus said would never be forgotten. It would be “spoken of in memory of her” throughout the world wherever the gospel would be preached (Mark 14:9). “There came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over his head” (Mark 14:3). The apostle John, an eyewitness, adds this statement: “Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair” (John 12:3).

The oil had come from the Himalayas near modern India and Nepal. The expenditure was significant. She had just spent in a matter of minutes what would amount to an annual wage for the average working man.

Her affection and allegiance to the Savior ran deep, and her actions reflected the kind of spiritual perception that few people had. She knew that Jesus, perhaps sooner than most people realized, was going to be buried. The Messiah was going to die.

In the same house at the same event, we find Judas, a man without love. He did not care for Jesus, and he most certainly had no concern for the poor, although he pretended to be a man of charity and compassion for those in need. He objected to what Mary had done, even though it was none of his business as to what Mary decided to do with her own resources. “But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’” (John 12:5). The reality is that Judas only cared about Judas. His affections centered in himself. The apostle penetrates to his core motivation directing his readers to what was really going on: “This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it” (John 12:6).

It is interesting that Judas and his warped perspective caught on, at least for the moment. “But some were indignantly remarking to one another, ‘Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they were scolding her” (Mark 14:4–5).

Jesus rushed to her defense and provided the true perspective of what she had done: “Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have me” (Mark 14:6–7). He then added, “She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for the burial” (Mark 14:8).



Jesus needed this expression of love and encouragement in the private confines of the home of Simon the leper. When Mary wiped his feet with her hair, he found strength in her love for the coming ordeal. There would be a renewal of his fortitude as he remembered that there were disciples who truly cherished him.

People would be for him, and people would be against him in the coming week. Even the thieves who were crucified with him would take opposite sides. One of them would revile him (Luke 23:39), while the other would realize that he is the Savior and would bring the fateful petition: "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Let us though restrict ourselves to what happened on Monday in a public event in the temple.

The Miracles in the Temple on Monday

Jesus had entered Jerusalem on Sunday in a remarkable public manifestation of himself as the Messiah (Matt. 21:10). Riding upon a donkey in joyful celebration, he fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah: "Behold, your King is coming to you; he is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). A vast crowd went before him and followed from behind him (Matt. 21:9). "As he went, many spread their clothes on the road" (Luke 19:36). All of this reflected ancient traditions associated with kingship in the Old Testament. David and Solomon rode a mule, the offspring of a male donkey (1 Kings 1:33–35); and the soldiers placed their clothes on the ground under the feet of Jehu and blew their trumpets declaring him to be king (2 Kings 9:13). There was the explicit declaration of the part of the multitude of the disciples that Jesus indeed is the Messiah: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Luke 19:38).

What a day it had been! It had been filled with jubilation, and his disciples had been determined to give to the Lord the honor that was his due. Now it was Monday, and Jesus had entered the temple. "The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them" (Matt. 21:14). Surely his miracles would prove the case: this has to be the Messiah! Certainly they would see that this was the very thing that Isaiah had foretold, "The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isa. 35:5–6a).

Once again, as it had always been the case, the people were divided about him. The children understood what all of this had to mean. They were "crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'" (Matt. 21:15). They knew enough to begin to praise God for the Son of David who was standing before them. The Sadducees and the Old Testament scholars had no worship to offer. "When the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out . . . they were indignant and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?'" (Matt. 21:15–16a). Just



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as he had defended the devotion of Mary, Jesus came to the defense of the children by quoting from the psalmist: "Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise?'" (Matt. 21:16b).

How are we to understand this? Mighty works were done in public view. The blind could now see, and the lame could now leap for joy. The children rejoiced, and the elites grumbled. The children loved him, and the Sadducees hated him and within days would hand him over to the Romans to be put to death.

The Explanation for This

Jesus explained how the babes could have understanding, while the wise were blinded. Early in his ministry, Jesus "began to rebuke the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent" (Matt. 11:20). He pronounced woes upon Chorazin and Bethsaida, and he declared that Capernaum would "be brought down to Hades" (Matt. 11:21, 23). Astounding miracles had been performed in all three cities along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, but there had been no response to speak of—no change in their thinking and no correction in their conduct. It was as if Jesus had never even been there. The people continued in their unbelief, indifferent to his message of repentance. Their minds were left without understanding, and their hearts were cold and unfeeling.

They were hearing but not understanding; they were seeing but not perceiving (Matt. 13:14). How can we even begin to have some understanding regarding such blindness in the presence of such light?

Jesus reflected upon the root cause of such incredible unbelief in his prayer that immediately follows his rebuke. "At that time Jesus

answered and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes'" (Matt. 11:28). Jesus uncovers the deepest recesses of the heart. There are people who are wise in their own eyes. They, or so they think, are the wise and prudent ones of this world. Pride fills the inner man and is reflected in the haughty look. God is revolted by what he sees and brings judgment upon it hiding truth from their understanding: "You have hidden these things from the wise and learned" (Matt. 11:28, Harper Collins Study Bible).

Blessing comes to the babes, the humble in heart, people who know that they are spiritually bankrupt and have nothing with which to commend themselves to God. Jesus had made this point in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). Now on this occasion, he thanks the Father that he is pleased to reveal truth to those who walk in lowliness before God: "You have revealed them to little children" (Matt. 11:26, New International Version).

The Instruction That We Need

The lesson is clear. We must not be wise and prudent in our own estimation lest justice be our portion. There remains an enduring moral principle that comes to us in the Word of God: "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). This is not only a warning but also a word of encouragement. If we take the posture of a child and humble ourselves and sit at the feet of Jesus as his disciples, God will be pleased to pour grace into our lives and to reveal truth to us.

How can you and I become more like Mary, who had deep spiritual insight and a heart that cherished her Savior? We need to emulate

her conduct. We all remember the occasion when Martha welcomed the Lord into her house (Luke 10:38). While Martha became "worried and troubled about many things" and the serving of her guests (Luke 10:41), Mary decided to prioritize. She chose to do the most important thing in the entire world. "She had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word" (Luke 10:39).

May we never forget what Jesus said about Mary who gave herself so completely to Jesus and his teaching: "There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42, New Living Translation). When all is said and done, Christ is the indispensable thing. Mary discovered in the Lord the real meaning of life. May we have the wisdom to know that Christ and his teaching is all that really matters about life in this world. Learning about Jesus is the foundation upon which we grow in our love for the Lord.

May we all experience the reality of the apostolic benediction in our lives: "Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 6:24, Harper Collins Study Bible).

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical citations are from either the New King James Version or the New American Standard Bible.

2. John Owen, "The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded," in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 7 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1979), 473–74.

3. *Ibid.*, 474.

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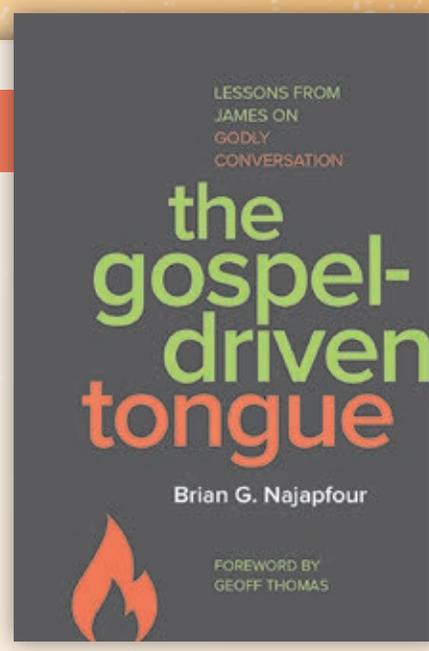
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