

PNEUMATIKOS

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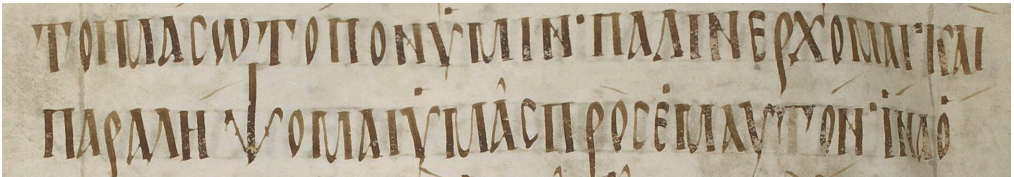


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Cover: John 14:3b from Codex Cyprius.

[Καὶ ἐὰν πορευθῶ ἐ]τοιμάσω τόπον ὑμῖν, πάλιν ἔρχομαι καὶ παραλήψομαι ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἑμαυτόν· ἵνα ὅ[που εἰμι ἐγώ, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἦτε.]

Codex Cyprius is a ninth-century manuscript of the Byzantine text-type. It is notable for its preservation of all four Gospels in uncial script. Codex Cyprius is housed at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris and public domain images of the manuscript are available online through the library's website.

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FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of *Pneumatikos* features articles from affiliates of Chafer Theological Seminary and reviews material from several disciplines, contributed by reviewers with diverse backgrounds.

Andrew Woods, president of Chafer Theological Seminary, presents the second part of a two-part series on Jesus and the rapture. This article supports the claim that Jesus spoke of the rapture in John 14:1–4.

E Dane Rogers, a student at Chafer Seminary, has written an article defending the doctrine of eternal security in the Gospel of John in response to an influential work by J.C. Davis.

Paul Miles, editor-in-chief of *Pneumatikos*, explores the parables of the mustard seed and leaven and shows how these short sayings develop the postponement, not the inauguration, of the kingdom.

J. Morgan Arnold, another student at Chafer Seminary, evaluates the concept of the 15-minute city. Arnold brings functional, ethical, and biblical considerations into his analysis and concludes that this unsettling trend is built on a faulty worldview.

Abigail Van Huss, a Ph.D. student of archaeology at Ariel University in Israel, reviews a book by Chafer's archaeology professor, Titus Kennedy, on Bible lands. Andrew Friend, affiliated with the Central States Church Extension of IFCA International, reviews Daniel Goepfrich's book on hermeneutics. Paul Miles reviews Jillian Ross' book on allusion in Judges. Mark Mills, a Greek professor at Chafer, reviews Mark Perkins' book on the genitive absolute. Olivier Melnick, a Messianic Jewish speaker, reviews Barry Leventhal's posthumous dissertation on the problem of evil and the Holocaust. Daniel Weierbach, founder of C4C Apologetics, reviews a film on creationism.

Paul Miles

JESUS AND THE RAPTURE PART 2: JOHN 14:1–4 RECONSIDERED

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Keywords: *rapture, John 14, church fathers, upper room discourse, dispensationalism, pretribulation rapture, πορεύομαι, παραλαμβάνω, μονή, μένω*

Abstract: *Part 1 of this series concluded that Jesus did not refer to the rapture in Matthew 24:40–41, but this does not preclude Him from speaking about the rapture elsewhere. This article argues that Jesus spoke of the pretribulation rapture in John 14:1–4, focusing on key phrases like “my Father’s house,” “many mansions,” and “I go to prepare a place for you” in John 14:2, as well as “I will come again” and “receive you to myself” in John 14:3. The article begins with some preliminary reasons for seeing the rapture in John 14 and ends with some critiques of alternative interpretations of this passage.*

JOHN 14:1–4

This article will attempt to argue that Christ spoke of the rapture of the church in John 14:1–4. These verses say:

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so,

I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.

This article will attempt to make this argument by noting several preliminary reasons why interpreters should be open to a rapture teaching in this passage, by contending that the details of the text favor a rapture interpretation, and by noting the inadequacy of the views advocating a non-rapture interpretation of John 14:1–4.

PRELIMINARY REASONS

There are five preliminary reasons why interpreters should be open to a rapture interpretation in John 14:1–4 even before attempting an exegesis of this passage. These reasons include the significance of the Upper Room Discourse, the eschatological flavor of the discourse, the eschatological interpretation of John 14:1–4 found in the early church fathers, the passage’s congruity with the Jewish marriage analogy, and the parallels between John 14:1–4 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.

Significance of the Upper Room Discourse

As previously explained, the position of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25) in Matthew’s overall argument plays a significant role in ascertaining whether Christ is speaking of the rapture in Matthew 24:40–41. Similarly, the position of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17) in John’s overall argument plays a significant role in discerning whether Christ is speaking of the rapture in John 14:1–4. John explains his purpose in writing his Gospel in 20:30–31. These verses say, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” First,

John writes for the *Christological* purpose of convincing his readers of Christ's divine identity through a selective record of His signs. Second, John writes for the *soteriological* purpose of invoking his readers toward faith in Christ. John desires for unbelievers to "believe" in Jesus and for believers to keep on "believing" in Him for purposes of their practical sanctification.

To this end, John unfolds the heavenly genealogy of Christ in his prologue (John 1:1–18) and the divine identity of Jesus through a record of His seven signs and discourses (John 1:19–11:57). This section is sometimes referred to as the Book of Signs. As predicted in the Old Testament (Dan. 9:25), Christ showed up on an exact timetable (Luke 19:38–39, 42, 44) to present His messianic credentials to the nation during the Triumphal Entry (John 12). At this point, the nation of Israel formally rejected Christ as their king. John 12:37 accentuates Israel's unbelief when it says, "But though He had performed so many signs before them, *yet* they were not believing in Him."

John's record of this national rejection at the Triumphal Entry (John 12) then leads to his recording of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17). There Christ reveals a new or mystery age known as the Church Age. Although the development of Church Age doctrine is fully accomplished in the Pauline epistolary literature, Christ reveals many Church Age truths in seed form in the Upper Room Discourse. Paul's teaching would bring these seeds to full maturity. Thus, in this discourse, Christ noted, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:12–13). Chafer explains:

The discourse embodies, in germ form, every essential of that system of doctrine which is distinctively Christian. Being addressed to Christians, it does not present truth which is peculiar to Israel, and being addressed to those who are saved, it does not present any feature of salvation by grace which is made possible through the death and resurrection of Christ, which truth is implied. This portion is like a seed plot in which all is found

that is later developed in the epistles of the New Testament. It serves as Christ's farewell address to believers—those whom the Father has given Him out of the *cosmos* world.¹

Thus, the Upper Room Discourse contains many seed truths that are given greater clarification and explanation in the epistles.² Such examples include the believers' oneness in Christ (John 17:20–23; Eph. 2:11–22), the Spirit's permanent residence in the believer (John 14:16; Eph. 4:30), the believer's union with Christ (John 14:20; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:1–14), the believer's opposition to the world (John 15:18–19; Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17), the necessity for the believer to stay in fellowship with Christ (John 13:10; 15:1–17; 1 John 1:5–7, 9), abiding in Christ as a prerequisite for fruit bearing (John 15:1–7; Php. 4:13), the believer's election (John 15:16; Eph. 1:4), Christ as the ultimate model of sacrificial living and service (John 13:1–20; Php. 2:5–11), the necessity of divine discipline in the believer's life (John 15:2; Heb. 12:5–11), Satan as the god of this age (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2), the defeat of Satan at the Cross (John 12:31; 16:11; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14), the Spirit as the inspirer of all Scripture (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21), the Spirit as the illuminator of all Scripture (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:14; 1 John 2:20, 27), Christ's provision of peace in the midst of adversity (John 14:27; Php. 4:7), the necessity of the Spirit's convicting ministry as a prerequisite for salvation (John 16:7–11; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4), the normalcy of tribulations in the present age (John 16:33; Jas. 1:2–4), the believer as the ultimate overcomer (John 16:33; 1 John 4:4; 5:4–5), Christ's present session at the Father's right hand (John 14:12–14; 17:5; Heb. 8:1; 10:12–13), the power of prayer (John 14:12–14; Eph. 6:18–20; Jas. 5:16), the inerrancy of Scripture (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16), and the disclosure of eschatology (John 16:13; 2 Thess. 2:1–12).

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948; reprint, [8 vols. in 4], Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 3:25. See also 5:140–42, 145–46, 166.

² *Ibid.*, 5:143–66.

Since the Upper Room Discourse reveals church age truth in germ form, it should come as no great surprise that Christ would also disclose in this discourse how the earthly program of the church will conclude. Christ provides this very teaching through an initial and brief reference to the rapture in John 14:1–4. Conversely, because the focus of the Olivet Discourse is upon Israel’s future restoration, it is less likely to find a rapture passage in Matthew 24–25. The different literary emphases between the Olivet Discourse and the Upper Room Discourse are captured on the following chart:

	Olivet Discourse	Upper Room Discourse
Scriptural location	Matt. 24-25	John 13-17
Parallel passages	Mark 13; Luke 21	Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22
Location of address	Mount of Olives	Upper Room
Time of address ³	Third day of the Passion Week	Sixth day of the Passion Week
General focus	Farewell address to Israel	Farewell address to the church
Specific focus	Israel’s future	Divine provision for the disciples after Christ’s imminent departure
Discourse prompted by	Christ’s prediction of temple’s destruction (Matt. 24:1–3)	Christ’s announcement of His soon departure (John 13:1)
Explanation of which section of Scripture?	Previously written Old Testament	Unwritten New Testament

Eschatological Flavor of the Upper Room Discourse

Those who deny that John 14:1–4 is a rapture passage often point out that John’s Gospel in general and the Upper Room Discourse in particular are not focused upon eschatology. While it is true that John and the Upper Room Discourse do not focus on eschatology to

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 1494–95.

the same magnitude as Matthew's Gospel and the Olivet Discourse, it is an overstatement to say that John's Gospel and the Upper Room Discourse make no eschatological contribution. At least three reasons can be given as to why an eschatological insertion should not be surprising in John 13–17.⁴ First, eschatological statements can be found sprinkled throughout John's Gospel as well as in the Upper Room Discourse. Examples include references to the two final resurrections (John 5:29; Dan. 12:2; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:4–5), Israel's future acceptance of the future Antichrist in lieu of the true Christ (John 5:43; Dan. 9:27a), Christ's promise to preserve and resurrect the believer in the last day (John 6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:25–26), and the coming of the Spirit who will disclose "things to come" (John 16:7, 13).

Second, John likely bypassed many eschatological statements that Christ made in the Upper Room Discourse since they were not germane to the apostle's purpose in writing. John, who wrote his gospel roughly 60 years after the discourse was given, did not write for the primary purpose of disclosing eschatological truth. Rather he wrote for the main purpose of encouraging faith in Christ (John 20:30–31). Given John's candid admission of selectivity employed throughout his Gospel (John 20:31; 21:25), he could have very well omitted many eschatologically oriented statements made by Christ in the Upper Room Discourse that had no direct bearing upon his Christological and soteriological purposes in composing his Gospel.

Third, according to Edersheim's reconstruction of the events in the upper room, Christ's promise in John 14:1–4 is followed closely on the heels of two eschatological promises.⁵ The first of these is Christ's promise in Matthew 26:29: "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." The second of these is the reading of Psalm 118:26

⁴ George Gunn, "John 14:1–3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?," paper presented at the Pre-Trib Study Group, December 4, 2006, Irving, Texas, 11–13, accessed January 4, 2024, https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/Gunn-John_14-1-3-The_Fathers_House.pdf.

⁵ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 8th and rev. ed., 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 2:513.

in the progression of the Seder celebration.⁶ This psalm says, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.” This verse has tremendous messianic and eschatological implications (Matt. 21:9; 23:39). Thus, these two promises furnish the eschatological context for Christ’s revelation of the rapture in John 14:1–4. In sum, the preceding reasons indicate that the Upper Room Discourse exhibited the appropriate eschatological background for Christ to unveil the rapture in John 14:1–4.

Church Fathers

Among the earliest church fathers support exists for a “heavenly and eschatological” interpretation of John 14:1–4. George Gunn cites and quotes five Ante-Nicene fathers who interpreted John 14:1–4 in this manner. They include Papias (ca. 110), Irenaeus (ca. 130–202), Tertullian (ca. 196–212), Origen (ca. 182–251), and Cyprian (d. 258).⁷ Thus, Gunn concludes:

So we see that, from the earliest years following the death of the apostle John, through the mid-third century, the promise of John 14:1–3 was seen in terms of a future coming to receive believers to heaven. The antenicene fathers did not think that this promise had been fulfilled either in Christ’s own resurrection or in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And since the promise was seen as something to be fulfilled in conjunction with the believer’s bodily resurrection, they clearly were not thinking in terms of multiple comings being fulfilled at individual Christians’ deaths, much less of a spiritual coming at the salvation of each individual Christian, but of a future day when all believers will be raised to receive their rewards.⁸

⁶ Arnold Fruchtenbaum expounds on Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26: To bring the Passover observance to a close, the Seder guests sing Psalm 113–118, especially focusing on Psalm 117 and 118. While singing, they drink the fourth cup, called *Hallel*, or “the cup of praise,” which gives this last part of the Passover observance its name. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, 2nd ed. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2018), iii.432.

⁷ Gunn, “John 14:1–3,” 7–11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

Gunn further observes:

Interestingly, references to John 14:1–3 virtually disappear when perusing the writings of the Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers. This is a bit surprising, given the abundance of material in these later writers when compared with the Ante-Nicenes. I would assume that with the rise of Augustinian amillennialism and its optimistic interpretation regarding the present arrival of the Kingdom of God, the kind of hope held out in John 14:1–3 ceased to hold relevance.⁹

It seems that the plain and eschatological interpretation of John 14:1–3 was evident among the earliest commentators, but that the passage seemed to become increasingly swept aside as theological winds shifted toward nonliteral hermeneutics and inaugurated eschatology.

Jewish Marriage Analogy

Christ's relationship to His church is analogous to that of a groom to his bride (Eph. 5:22–33; 2 Cor. 11:2). Thus, the New Testament uses the Jewish marriage custom as an analogy to depict the relationship between Christ and the church. Seven aspects of this relationship are evident.¹⁰ First, the groom travels to the home of the bride's father and pays the *betrothal contract* price for the hand of the bride. This step is the equivalent of Christ's death which paid the price necessary for the church to enter into a relationship with Him (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Second, during the *betrothal period*, the groom is temporarily separated from the bride in order to prepare temporary dwelling places in his father's house. These dwellings would eventually be indwelt by the groom and his new bride.

This step represents Christ's Ascension and the beginning of the church age. Here, Christ is temporarily separated bodily from His church as He is preparing temporary dwelling places for His bride in

⁹ Ibid., 30, n. 24.

¹⁰ Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 164–69.

His Father's house (John 14:2). Just as the fidelity of the groom and bride are tested during this time of separation, the church's loyalty to Christ is currently being tested as the church is tempted to succumb to false teaching and worldly conduct (Jas. 4:4; 2 Cor. 11:2).

Third, at an unknown time, the groom returns to the bride's home. Upon his return the groom is accompanied by escorts, is preceded by a shout, and comes to collect his bride and take her to his father's house. This step is the equivalent of the rapture of the church, when Christ, accompanied by angels and preceded by the shout of an archangel (1 Thess. 4:16–17), will come at an unknown time to take the church to His father's house in heaven to the temporary dwellings He has prepared for her (John 14:3).

Fourth, the bridal party returns to the groom's father's home to meet wedding guests who have already assembled. This step is the equivalent of the raptured church being taken to heaven in order to greet Old Testament saints who are already in the presence of the Lord.

Fifth, during the *consummation of the marriage* stage the wedding party waits outside the marital chamber while the new couple enters into this chamber in order to physically consummate their new union. This step is the equivalent of the church's marriage to Christ. Thus, at this point, the church is no longer merely the bride of Christ but now has formally been married to Him.

Sixth, the groom emerges from the marital chamber announcing to the wedding party the reality of this new physical union. The groom then returns to the marital chamber to be with his bride for seven days while the wedding guests continue to celebrate outside the marital chamber. This step is the equivalent of the church after the rapture being hidden with Christ in heaven for seven years (Dan. 9:27), while the events of the Tribulation transpire on the earth below.

Seventh, the groom and the bride emerge from the marital chamber unveiled and in full view of the wedding party. The bride has been veiled to the wedding party thus far. This step is the equivalent of Christ and the church returning to the earth at the conclusion of the seven-year Tribulation period, unveiled (Col. 3:4) and visible to the entire world (Rev. 1:7; 19:7–9).

With this background in mind, interpreters should be open to a rapture interpretation of John 14:2–3. John 14:2 describes step two when Christ departs and goes to heaven to prepare heavenly dwellings for the marriage. John 14:3 describes step three when Christ returns to receive His bride, the church, in the rapture and takes her to His Father’s house in order to inhabit the new dwellings. In other words, John 14:2–3 seems to be an exact fit regarding steps two and three of the Jewish marriage custom analogy. Thus, John 14:2–3 seems to be depicting Christ’s Ascension, His building of temporary heavenly dwellings, and His return for the church in the rapture.

Parallels Between John 14:1–4 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

A final preliminary reason as to why interpreters should be open to a rapture interpretation of John 14:1–4 is the parallel that this passage has with 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, which is a well-known rapture text. The late Mennonite commentator J. B. Smith demonstrates an extensive relationship between John 14:1–4 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Both passages use eight identical vocabulary terms and concepts in the same order.¹¹

John 14:1–4	Verse	1 Thess. 4:13–18	Verse
trouble	1	sorrow	13
believe	1	believe	14
God, me	1	Jesus, God	14
told you	2	say to you	15
come again	3	coming of the Lord	15
receive, you	3	caught up	17
to myself	3	to meet the Lord	17
be where I am	3	ever be with the Lord	17

¹¹ J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, ed. J. Otis Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961), 311–13.

Interestingly, when Smith compared the vocabulary of these two passages to Revelation 19:11–21, a Second Advent text, he found no similar parallels. He noted, “Hence it is impossible that one sentence or even one phrase can be alike in the two lists. And finally, not one word in the two lists is used in the same relation or connection.”¹² Smith explains the significance of the parallels between John 14:1–4 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18:

The words or phrases are almost an exact parallel. They follow one another in both passages in exactly the same order. Only the righteous are dealt with in each case. There is not a single irregularity in the progression of words from first to last. Either column takes the believer from the troubles of earth to the glories of heaven. It is but consistent to interpret each passage as dealing with the same event—the rapture of the church.¹³

Other commentators who have drawn similar parallels between these two passages include J. H. Bernard, James Montgomery Boice, Arno C. Gaebelin, Arthur Pink, Rudolf Schnackenburg, F. F. Bruce, R. V. G. Tasker, and W. E. Vine.¹⁴

Preliminary Conclusion

Even before an exegesis of John 14:1–4 is attempted, five preliminary observations should cause an unbiased interpreter to be open to a rapture understanding of John 14:1–4. These preliminary observations include the role that the Upper Room Discourse plays in revealing church age truth in seed form, the eschatological flavor of the discourse, the fact that the eschatological and heavenly interpretation of John 14:1–4 is found in the early church fathers, a rapture interpretation of John 14:2–3 fits the Jewish marriage analogy, and extensive parallels can be found in between John 14:1–4 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.

¹² Ibid., 312.

¹³ Ibid., 312–13.

¹⁴ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, 162–63.

TEXTUAL DETAILS OF JOHN 14:1–4

Now that these preliminary observations have been noted, an exegesis of John 14:1–4 will show that this passage represents Christ revealing the rapture for the very first time in biblical history. This sub-section analyzes John 14:2–4 and attempts to show that these verses are best understood in accordance with a rapture interpretation.

John 14:2

There are several phrases in this verse that must be properly defined. They include the expressions “my Father’s house,” “many mansions,” and “I go to prepare a place for you.”

My Father’s House

Although much ink has been spilled seeking to discover the meaning behind Christ’s expression “My Father’s house,” perhaps the most simple and straightforward explanation is that offered by Renald Showers. He writes, “The Scripture indicates that God’s unique dwelling is in heaven (Deut. 26:15; Ps. 33:13–14; Isa. 63:15; Matt. 5:16, 45; 6:1, 9). In light of this, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg concluded that in John 14:2 ‘The Father’s house is His heavenly abode.’”¹⁵ It is to this location that Christ returned following His Ascension in order to enjoy His preincarnate position of glory (John 17:5) at the Father’s right hand (Ps. 110:1) and seated on His Father’s throne (Rev. 3:21). This abode is the most likely interpretation of the Father’s house in John 14:2.

Many Mansions

As many commentaries have noted, “mansions” does not represent the best translation of the Greek noun *monē* (μονή). This mistranslation ultimately emanates from the Vulgate’s use of the Latin term *mansiones* in its attempt to translate the Greek term *monē*. Tyndale followed the Vulgate by using the English word “mansions.” The word “mansions” was later picked up and used by the KJV and other early English

¹⁵ Ibid., 155.

translations. However, *monē* has more to do with a temporary dwelling such as a watchhouse or an inn.¹⁶

I Go to Prepare a Place for You

Christ is going to the same place where He came from. John's Gospel and the Upper Room Discourse clearly state that He came from heaven (John 16:28a; 17:5) and that He is going back to heaven (John 13:1; 14:12; 16:28b). Thus, the term "I go" could only refer to the Ascension. Interestingly, the same Greek verb *poreuomai* (πορεύομαι) that is translated as "I go" in John 14:2 is used elsewhere in the New Testament to depict Christ's Ascension (Acts 1:10–11; 1 Pet. 3:22).¹⁷ In sum, John 14:2 teaches Christ's return to the very heaven from which He came in order to prepare temporary dwellings for His disciples.

John 14:3

Several phrases in John 14:3 also must be properly defined. They include the expressions "I will come again," "and receive you to myself," and "that where I am you may be also."

I Will Come Again

Because the Greek verb *erchomai* (ἔρχομαι) translated as "come" is in the present tense, some have suggested that this coming had to do with something that transpired in the immediate future of Christ's original audience rather than something destined to take place in the distant future, such as the rapture of the church. However, there are two better options for understanding the present tense of *erchomai* that still contend that Christ is speaking here of the rapture. First, the present tense could be an example of the futuristic present. This linguistic convention transpires when a future event is so certain that the biblical writer presents the future event as if it were a present reality. Wallace explains:

¹⁶ Friedrich Hauck, "Ménō," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4. 9 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 582; Pausanius *Description of Greece* 10.31.7 (ca. AD 143–161).

¹⁷ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, 155.

The present tense may be used to describe a future reality ... The present tense may describe an event that is *wholly* subsequent to the time of speaking, although as if it were present ... Only an examination of the context will help one see whether this use of the present tense stresses *immediacy* or *certainty*.¹⁸

Second, the present tense may be used here to communicate imminency. Swete notes, “The present tense ‘I come’ is used rather than the future, for the Return is regarded not as a distant event, but as one ever imminent and at hand.”¹⁹ In fact, it is common in Johannine literature to use the present tense of *erchomai* to describe the future coming of an eschatological event due to that event’s certainty and imminency (1 John 2:18; Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:11; 16:15; 22:7; 22:12; 22:20).²⁰

The word “again” (*palin* πάλιν) is also significant. It indicates that Christ will come back in the same way He left. According to Lenski, “The coming again is the counterpart of the going away; visibly Jesus ascends, visibly He returns, Acts 1:9–11.”²¹ Thus, Constable concludes, “Since Jesus spoke of returning from heaven to take believers there, the simplest explanation seems to be that He was referring to an eschatological bodily return (cf. Acts 1:11).”²²

Another possibility is that John through his use of *palin* was indicating that Christ’s Second Advent would be just as tangible, physical, and literal as His First Advent. According to BDAG, *palin* refers “to repetition in the same (or similar) manner, *again, once more, anew* of someth. a pers. has already done.”²³ Thus, “Just as His first coming

¹⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 535–36.

¹⁹ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Last Discourse and Prayer of Our Lord: A Study of St. John XIV–XVII* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 8.

²⁰ Gunn, “John 14:1–3: The Father’s House: Are We There Yet?,” 22.

²¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *An Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), 974.

²² Thomas L. Constable, *Dr. Constable’s Notes on John*, 2024 ed. (Plano, TX: Plano Bible Chapel, 2024), 380.

²³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. πάλιν.

involved one specific coming, not repeated comings, so His future coming would involve one specific coming.”²⁴ Therefore, the expression “I will come again” in John 14:2 indicates that Christ in the future will come singularly and bodily just as He came the first time and just as He ascended.

And Receive You to Myself

The verb *paralambanō* (παραλαμβάνω) translated as “receive” refers to Christ coming again to take the disciples to be with Him. According to BDAG *paralambanō* means, “to take into close association, *take (to oneself), take with/along... I will take you to myself* J 14:3... *with me to my home*.”²⁵ Showers observes, “It is interesting to note that the verb translated ‘receive’ in Jesus’ promise is used in the New Testament for the action of a bridegroom taking his betrothed wife unto himself (Mt. 1:20, 24).”²⁶

According to TDNT, the preposition *pros* (πρός) translated “to” is defined as follows: “πρός with the Accusative... This is very common and denotes movement ‘towards.’ ... Spatially, ‘to or towards someone or something,’ primarily with an intransitive or transitive verb expressing movement.”²⁷ Thus, the clause, “And receive you to Myself,” refers to Christ’s return to remove believers spatially and to take them to be with Him.

That Where I am You May Be Also

The Greek word *horou* (ὅπου) translated “where” refers to a specific place or location. According to BDAG, the word refers to “a specific location in the present” and is “used in connection w. a designation of place.”²⁸ Thus, Jesus will return to take the believer to a place where He

²⁴ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, 157.

²⁵ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. παραλαμβάνω.

²⁶ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, 157.

²⁷ Basel Bo Riecke, “Πρός,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 6. 9 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 721.

²⁸ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ὅπου.

is. This place can hardly be the earth since there would be no need for Him to build the heavenly dwellings spoken of in the preceding verses.

Further, Morris explains the overall significance of this purpose clause: “The construction emphasizes purpose ... He is speaking about a firm divine purpose. It is God’s plan that Jesus will come back in due course in order that He and His followers may be in heaven.”²⁹

John 14:4

Here Christ says, “And you know the way where I am going.” The Greek verb *hypagō* (ὑπάγω) that is translated as “going” is a verb used repeatedly in John’s Gospel in reference to Christ’s return to the Father. According to BDAG, the verb is “used esp. of Christ and his *going* to the Father, characteristically of J ...J 7:33; 16:5a;... 10, 17... 13:3... 8:14a;... 21b, 22; 13:33;... 36b... 8:21a... 14:28... 13:36a; 14:4, 5; 16:5b; 1J 2:11.”³⁰ Thus, the employment of the same verb here is most likely in reference to His Ascension.

Summary

What all of these textual details reveal is that Christ would return through His Ascension to His Father’s heavenly abode. While there, He would prepare temporary dwellings for His disciples. However, He would also return for His disciples at a future time. His return would be just as personal as His First Coming and Ascension. Upon His return, He would physically take believers to be with Him by spatially drawing them to Himself. The ultimate purpose of this event is so that believers can dwell in their prepared, temporal, heavenly places as well as be with Christ in the specific heavenly place where He is. All of this information would serve as a tremendous comfort to the disciples who were greatly troubled over the announcement of His soon departure (John 13:1). In fact, John 14:1 makes it clear that Christ unfolded the

²⁹ Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 492.

³⁰ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ὑπάγω.

reality of this glorious event for the specific purpose of comforting His distressed disciples.

Of course, such revelation of this phase of Christ's return represents a mystery truth never previously disclosed. Its description is out of harmony with any past revelation concerning the Messiah's Second Advent. Arno Gaebelein explains:

But here in John 14 the Lord gives a new and unique revelation; He speaks of something which no prophet had promised, or even could promise. Where is it written that this Messiah would come and instead of gathering His saints into an earthly Jerusalem, would take them to the Father's house, to the very place where He is? It is something new. And let it be noticed in promising to come again, He addresses the eleven disciples and tells them, "I will receive you unto Myself, that where I am ye may be also." He speaks then of a coming which is not for the deliverance of the Jewish remnant, not of a coming to establish His kingdom over the earth, not a coming to judge the nations, but coming which concerns only His own.³¹

It should come as no surprise to find such a mystery revelation in the Upper Room Discourse. As previously mentioned, this discourse represents church age truth in seed form awaiting the epistolary literature in order to receive fuller amplification. Chafer has written, "The Upper Room Discourse, in which the above passage is found, is the seed-plot of that form of doctrine which is later developed in the Epistles. It is not strange, therefore, that the Apostle Paul takes up this great theme for further elucidation."³² Not only is this true with respect to other truths germane to the church age, but it is equally true regarding the event that will terminate the church's earthly program, the rapture of the church. This is the very event that Christ disclosed in John 14:1-4.

³¹ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of John: A Complete Analytical Exposition of the Gospel of John* (NY: Our Hope, 1925; reprint, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1965), 268.

³² Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:111.

INADEQUATE ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF JOHN 14:1–4

Thus far, a rapture interpretation of John 14:1–4 has been defended by noting several preliminary observations and by showing that the details of John 14:1–4 speak of the rapture. However, the case for the rapture in John 14:1–4 will now be strengthened by exploring the inadequacies of the other major non-rapture interpretations of this passage. Many faulty attempts have been made to de-eschatologize the passage. Such inadequate interpretations include the views that John 14:1–4 is speaking of the death of the believer, the believer’s individual salvation, Christ’s resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). After the problems with these positions are explored, some problems associated with the non-pretribulational eschatological positions will be briefly discussed.

Believer’s Death

Some people believe that John 14:1–4 has nothing to do with the rapture of the church. Rather, it refers to Christ returning to receive the believer’s soul into heaven every time a believer dies.³³ However, this position is fraught with problems. First, in John 14:3, “the adverb ‘again’ (... *palin*) implies that this coming will be a one-time event like the first coming was, not many comings repeated over and over every time a believer dies.”³⁴ Second, at the believer’s death, it is angels rather than Christ that transport the believer to heaven (Luke 16:22), while Christ remains in heaven awaiting the arrival of the deceased believer (Acts 7:56). Thomas Ice explains: “The Bible never speaks of death as an event in which the Lord comes for a believer, instead, Scripture speaks of Lazarus ‘carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom’ (Luke 16:22). In the instance of Stephen the Martyr, he saw

³³ Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 29.

³⁴ Gunn, “John 14:1–3: The Father’s House: Are We There Yet?,” 21.

‘the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’ (Acts 7:56).³⁵

Third, at death, the Lord does not come for the believer. Rather, the believer goes to the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Php. 1:23). Gaebelein summarizes:

This error is clearly refuted by the fact that elsewhere in the New Testament the Spirit of God tells us that the believer’s death is not the Lord coming to the dying believer, but the death of a Christian means that he goes to be with the Lord; ... For the believer to be absent from the body means “present with the Lord, ... (2 Cor. v:1–8).³⁶

Fourth, the expression “I will come again and receive you to Myself” is never used anywhere else in reference to the believer’s death.³⁷ Fifth, the context of the Upper Room Discourse is the death of Christ rather than the death of the believer.³⁸

Believer’s Salvation

Others contend that John 14:1–4 has nothing to do with the rapture of the church. Rather, it refers to Christ coming to receive the new believer every time someone believes the gospel. However, this view suffers from the same problem dealt with in the prior discussion. The adverb “again” (*palin*) implies that Christ’s coming will be a one-time event like the First Coming and not many repeated comings every time someone gets saved. Moreover, this view fails to handle properly the localized language of John 14:1–4.

The vocabulary of John 14:1–4 is heavily localized. Note the terms “Father’s house” (...*he oikia tou patros*), “dwelling places” (...*monai*), “a place” (...*topos*) “where I am” (...*hopou eimi ego*), and “where I go” (...*hopou ego*

³⁵ Thomas D. Ice, “The Rapture and John 14,” *Pre-Trib Research Center*, 1–2, accessed September 10, 2024, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/41/.

³⁶ Gaebelein, *The Gospel of John: A Complete Analytical Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 266–67.

³⁷ Ice, “The Rapture and John 14,” 1.

³⁸ Ron J. Bigalke, “John 14 and the Rapture,” *Midnight Call* (August 2009): 26–29.

hupago). Jesus could scarcely have used more specifically localized language. Surely, He was referring, not to the spiritual sphere of individualized salvation, but to a location in heaven where He intended to take His disciples in the great eschatological event we refer to as the rapture.³⁹

John Walvoord similarly comments on the allegorical nature of this view:

One is at a loss to know how to comment on such fanciful exegesis. If the passage says anything, it says that Christ is going to leave them to go to heaven, not simply leave them by dying. The Father's house is not on earth, and Christ is not going to remain in the earthly sphere in His bodily presence. The expression "I will come" must be spiritualized and deprived of its real meaning in order to allow the explanation... To spiritualize the Father's house and make it "*spiritual abodes within His own person*" is spiritualization to an extreme. Obviously the believer is in Christ, but this is not the same as being in the Father's house... spiritualization in order to avoid the pretribulation rapture... extreme form of exegesis... to escape the implication that the rapture is different from the second coming of Christ to set up His kingdom.⁴⁰

In other words, to spiritualize the rapture is to spiritualize the place to where the Christian is raptured, which is a hermeneutical move that can have dangerous ramifications.

Christ's Resurrection

Still others contend that John 14:1–4 has nothing to do with the rapture of the church but rather refers to the fact that Christ would return to the believer through His bodily resurrection.⁴¹ Advocates of this view argue that it best fits the context of the Upper Room Discourse. There,

³⁹ Gunn, "John 14:1–3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?," 21.

⁴⁰ John F. Walvoord, "Posttribulationism Today, Part VII: Do the Gospels Reveal a Posttribulation Rapture?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (July–September 1976): 211–12.

⁴¹ Thomas E. Crane, *The Message of Saint John* (New York: Alba, 1980), 96.

Christ predicts His soon resurrection (John 14:18–20). Also, John records Christ’s many post-resurrection appearances (John 20:19, 26; 21:1).

However, this view also contains its share of weaknesses.⁴² First, the basic chronology of John 14:3 places the coming of Christ after His Ascension back to the Father when it says, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself ...” Earlier, it was established that “I go” refers to Christ’s Ascension. The notion that Christ’s coming represents His resurrection violates this chronology since Christ’s coming to His disciples in His resurrected body transpired before His Ascension. Second, it was previously noted that the adverb “again” (*palin* πάλιν) in John 14:3 indicates that Christ’s Second Coming would be just like His First Coming. However, the resurrection view violates this principle, since Christ’s coming after His resurrection was out of the tomb and after death. By contrast, His First Coming was from heaven. Third, it was earlier observed that the preposition “to” (*pros* προς) in the expression “And receive you to Myself” (John 14:3) communicates the spatial movement of believers from earth to Christ to be with Him. However, no spatial movement was involved when Christ resurrected and came to His disciples. Fourth, Christ’s resurrection did not take the disciples to the prepared dwellings spoken of in John 14:2–3. Ron Bigalke notes, “Although two resurrection appearances of Jesus could be called a coming again (John 20:19, 26), the comfort and promise of John 14:3 is related to an eternal dwelling place. When Jesus does ‘come again’ and ‘receive’ His disciples, it is permanent.”⁴³

Coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)

Others who contend that John 14:1–4 has nothing to do with the rapture of the church say that the passage refers to a spiritual coming of the Holy Spirit to the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Craig Keener explains:

⁴² Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come*, 160.

⁴³ Bigalke, “John 14 and the Rapture,” 27.

As the chapter proceeds, one learns that the coming again in verse 3 refers to Jesus' coming after the resurrection to give the Spirit (v. 18) ... The "Father's house" would be the temple (2:16), where God would forever dwell with his people (Ezek 43:7, 9; 48:35; cf. Jn 8:35). The "dwelling places" (NASB, NRSV) could allude to the booths constructed for the Feast of Tabernacles but probably refer to "rooms" (cf. NIV, TEV) in the new temple, where only undefiled ministers would have a place (Ezek 44:9–16; cf. 48:11). John presumably means this language figuratively for being in Christ, where God's presence dwells (2:21); the only other place in the New Testament where this term for "dwelling places" or "rooms" occurs is in 14:23, where it refers to the believer as God's dwelling place (cf. also the verb "dwell"—15:4–7)... In this context, John probably means not the Second Coming but Christ's return after the resurrection to bestow the Spirit (14:16–18). In Jewish teaching, both the resurrection of the dead (which Jesus inaugurated) and bestowal of the Spirit indicate the arrival of the new age of the kingdom.⁴⁴

The NET Bible offers a similar explanation:

Most interpreters have understood the reference to *my Father's house* as a reference to heaven, and the *dwelling places* (μονή, monē) as the permanent residences of believers there. This seems consistent with the vocabulary and the context, where in v. 3 Jesus speaks of coming again to take the disciples to himself. However, the phrase *in my Father's house* was used previously in the Fourth Gospel in 2:16 to refer to the temple in Jerusalem. The author in 2:19–22 then reinterpreted the temple as Jesus' body, which was to be destroyed in death and then rebuilt in resurrection after three days. Even more suggestive is the statement by Jesus in 8:35, "Now the slave does not remain (μένω, menō) in the household forever, but the son remains (μένω) forever." If in the imagery of the Fourth Gospel the phrase *in my Father's house* is ultimately a reference to Jesus' body, the relationship of μονή to μένω suggests the permanent relationship of

⁴⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 298–99.

the believer to Jesus and the Father as an adopted son who remains in the household forever. In this case the “dwelling place” is “in” Jesus himself, where he is, whether in heaven or on earth. The statement in v. 3, “I will come again and receive you to myself,” then refers not just to the *parousia*, but also to Jesus’ postresurrection return to the disciples in his glorified state, when by virtue of his death on their behalf they may enter into union with him and with the Father as adopted sons. Needless to say, this bears numerous similarities to Pauline theology, especially the concepts of adoption as sons and being “in Christ” which are prominent in passages like Eph 1. It is also important to note, however, the emphasis in the Fourth Gospel itself on the present reality of eternal life (John 5:24, 7:38–39, etc.) and the possibility of worshiping the Father “in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:21–24) in the present age. There is a sense in which it is possible to say that the future reality is present now.⁴⁵

This view seems to be built around at least four presuppositions. First, the phrase “My Father’s house” (*oika tou patros mou οἰκία τοῦ πατρός μου*) in John 14:2 refers to the temple. The logic behind this idea is that the phrase is used only one other time in John’s Gospel. In John 2:16, Christ uses the expression “My Father’s house” (*patros mou oikon πατρός μου οἶκον*) in relation to the temple. Second, the expression can have a metaphorical meaning since Christ used the phrase in this same context to describe His body (John 2:19–22). Paul also used temple imagery to depict the believer’s body (1 Cor. 6:19) and the church (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:20–22). Third, “dwelling places” (*monē μονή*) in John 14:2 refers to the indwelling of the Father and Son in the believer. The rationale for this point is that *monē* is used only one other time in the entire New Testament (John 14:23). This usage is just a few verses later in the very same chapter in reference to the indwelling of the Father and Son in the believer. Fourth, the verbal form of the noun *monē* is *menō* (μένω). This latter word is used for abiding or indwelling elsewhere in John’s Gospel (John 8:35) and in the Upper Room Discourse (John 15:4–7).

⁴⁵ NET Bible: New English Translation (Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 1985–86.

Before responding to these presuppositions, let us first note some general problems with the view.⁴⁶ First, as indicated earlier, the preposition “to” (*pros*) in the expression “and receive you to Myself” (John 14:3) communicates the spatial movement of believers from earth to Christ to be with Him. However, no spatial movement was involved when the Spirit came upon believers in Acts 2. Second, it was previously noted that the adverb “again” (*palin*) in John 14:3 indicates that Christ’s Second Coming would be just like His First Coming. According to Lenski, “The coming again is the counterpart of the going away; visibly Jesus ascends, visibly he returns, Acts 1:9–11.”⁴⁷ When the Spirit was poured out upon the church in Acts 2, Christ never physically returned just as He physically left. Rather, He remained in heaven at the Father’s right hand (Acts 7:55–56; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:21–22). Third, this view renders nonsensical the expression “receive you to Myself” (John 14:3). The Holy Spirit did not receive believers in Acts 2. By contrast, the Scripture routinely indicates that it was the other way around. Believers received the Holy Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 2:38; 8:15–17).

Now that these general problems with the position have been introduced, let us respond to the presuppositions that the view is built upon. First, while it is true that the expression “My Father’s house” (John 14:2) is used only in John 2:16, the John 2:16 reference to “house” is masculine (*oikos* οἶκος) and the John 14:3 reference to “house” is feminine (*oikia* οἰκία). Although *oikos* is typically used with the genitive “of God” to refer to the Temple in both the LXX and John 2:16, *oikia* is never used in this manner.⁴⁸ According to TDNT:

In the NT, too, we find both οἶκος and οἰκία; the gen. τοῦ θεοῦ is usually linked with οἶκος, not οἰκία (though cf. Jn. 14:2: ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου). As in the LXX, οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ is used in honour of the earthly sanctuary of Israel. No other sacred or ecclesiastical structure is called by this term in the NT sphere. But the Christian community itself is the → ναὸς

⁴⁶ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, 160.

⁴⁷ Lenski, *An Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 974.

⁴⁸ Gunn, “John 14:1–3: The Father’s House: Are We There Yet?,” 14.

τοῦ θεοῦ, the οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ (Hb. 3:6; 1 Pt. 4:17; 1 Tm. 3:15) and the οἶκος πνευματικός (1 Pt. 2:5). It may be supposed that this usage was common to primitive Christianity and became a permanent part of the preaching tradition... Jn. 14:2f ... This saying, which would seem to have lost its original form, is fairly isolated in the context, and is perhaps older than the sayings around it. ... the Father's dwelling has places of rest for the afflicted disciples of Jesus.⁴⁹

In sum, the coming of the Holy Spirit view is built upon connecting the common expression “my Father’s House” in John 14:2 with the temple imagery of the identical expression found in John 2:16. However, the view disintegrates when it is understood that these two expressions are not identical given the difference in gender regarding the noun “house” as employed in these verses.

Second, it is true that *monē* (John 14:2) is used only one other time in the entire New Testament (John 14:23) and that this usage is just a few verses later in the very same chapter in reference to the indwelling of the Father and Son in the believer. However, the context of John 14:2 is radically different from the context of John 14:23. Gunn observes:

Though in John 14 verses 2 and 23 occur in the same chapter, the contexts are quite different. The issue in verse 2 is the disciples’ sorrow over Jesus’ departure to be with the Father in heaven (see discussion on the expression “I go” below), but the focus changes in verse 15. Verses 15–24 form a distinct unit in the Upper Room Discourse characterized by the believer’s love for Jesus as evidenced by the believer’s keeping of Jesus’ commandments... One way of seeing this topic shift is by noting that the verb “to love” (...*agapaō*) occurs eight times in verses 15–24, but does not occur once in verses 1–14, and the verb “to keep” (...*tēreō*) occurs four times in verses 15–24, but does not occur once in verses 1–14. At the beginning of this section on loving Jesus and keeping his commandments

⁴⁹ Otto Michel Halle, “Οἶκος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 121, 131.

is the promise that the Holy Spirit would be given to the believer (verse 16). It is by means of the Spirit’s indwelling that the believer is: (1) not left as an orphan (verse 18), and (2) empowered to love Jesus and keep His commandments. It is Jesus’ sending of the Spirit to indwell believers that makes us understand... *monē*... as located in the believer. On the other hand, in verse 2, the location of the... *monē*... is fixed by where we understand the “Father’s house” to be.⁵⁰

The differences between these two paragraphs are captured in the following chart:

Section	John 14:1–14	John 14:15–24
Occurrence of <i>monē</i>	John 14:2	John 14:23
Issue	Sorrow over Christ’s soon departure	Believer’s love for Christ
Uses of <i>agapaō</i>	0	8
Uses of <i>tēreō</i>	0	4
Meaning of <i>monē</i>	Dwellings in the Father’s heavenly abode	Spirit indwelling believers

By defining *monē* of John 14:2 based upon how *monē* of 14:23 is used in a foreign context, proponents of the Acts 2 interpretation are guilty of committing a hermeneutical error known as “illegitimate total-ity transfer.” The error arises when the ‘meaning’ of a word as derived from its use elsewhere is automatically read into the same word in a foreign context.⁵¹ Words only have meanings based on the contexts that these words are found within. *Monē* of John 14:2 means something entirely different than *monē* of John 14:23, since these uses of the same word transpire in two completely different contexts. In sum, the coming of the Holy Spirit view is built upon connecting the common word “*monē*” in John 14:2 and John 14:23. However, the view suffers when it

⁵⁰ Gunn, “John 14:1–3: The Father’s House: Are We There Yet?,” 17.

⁵¹ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218.

is understood that these two words are not identical given the different contexts in which they are found.

Also, the verbal form of the noun *monē* (John 14:2) is truly *menō*, which is used of “abiding” or “indwelling” elsewhere in John’s Gospel (John 8:35) and in the Upper Room Discourse (John 15:4–7). However, equating these two words represents an exegetical fallacy known as the “root fallacy.” This fallacy “presupposes that every word actually *has* a meaning bound up with its shape or its components.”⁵² For example:

nice, which comes from the Latin *nescius*, meaning “ignorant.” Our “good-by” is a contraction from the Anglo-Saxon “God be with you.” Now it may be possible to trace out diachronically just how *nescius* generated “nice”; it is certainly easy to imagine how “God be with you” came to be contracted to “good-by.” But I know of no one today who in saying such and such a person is “nice” believes that he or she has in some measure labeled that person ignorant because the “root meaning” or “hidden meaning” or “literal meaning” of “nice” is “ignorant.”⁵³

Words are not defined by their etymology but by their context and use. Thus, it is inappropriate to arrive at a definition of *monē* based upon how the verbal form of this word is used elsewhere. As previously explained, John 14:2 is found within its own unique context.

Finally, the coming of the Holy Spirit view is substantially weakened when it is understood that the various terms of John 14:2 cannot be defined by their usage elsewhere given the unique context of John 14:1–4. This principle is true with respect to seeking to equate the “my Father’s house” with its use in John 2:16, interpreting *monē* of John 14:2 with its use in John 14:23, and defining *monē* with the verbal form’s use in John 8:35 and John 15:4–7. A rapture interpretation of John 14:1–4 is strengthened when the untenable nature of the non-eschatological interpretations is considered. These options include the death of the believer,

⁵² D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 26.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 26–27.

the believer's individual salvation, Christ's resurrection, and the coming to the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Non-Pretribulational Rapture Interpretations

In addition to the non-eschatological interpretations of John 14:1–4 described above others assign an eschatological yet non-pretribulational understanding to the passage. Examples include the midtribulation and pre-wrath positions as well as the posttribulation position.

Midtribulation and Pre-wrath

The midtribulation and pre-wrath perspectives have at least two major flaws. First, they do not handle well the promise of comfort in John 14:1: “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.” How could Christ's promise be a comfort if the church must first endure any part of the wrath of God before experiencing the blessing of the rapture? Both the midtribulational and pre-wrath views promote a scenario in which the church will be present for half (midtribulationalism) or three-fourths (pre-wrath) of the Tribulation before participating in the rapture. Second, these views fail to take into consideration the imminency or any moment perspective of the passage. In John 14:1–4, Christ fails to articulate any signs that would precede His return for the disciples. The midtribulational and pre-wrath perspectives do not handle well such an imminency emphasis. They both place signs related to the Tribulation that must take place before Christ can return in the rapture.

Posttribulationalism

Giving John 14:1–4 a posttribulational rapture interpretation⁵⁴ contains the same two problems above that are associated with the midtribulational and pre-wrath rapture views. First, the posttribulational rapture interpretation damages Christ's promise of comfort (John 14:1) since it advocates the church enduring all of the Tribulation period before

⁵⁴ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation: A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 134, 153.

experiencing the blessing of the rapture. Second, the posttribulational view contends that tribulational signs must precede Christ's promise to return thereby damaging imminency. Third, the posttribulational view makes Christ's preparation of the heavenly dwellings (John 14:2–3) unnecessary. Hal Lindsey explains:

Now if Jesus is building a dwelling place for us in the Father's house, and if we are to go there **when** He comes for the Church, how could He be speaking of an event that occurs simultaneously with the Second Advent? For at that time Jesus is specifically and personally coming to the earth (see Zechariah 14:4–9). If the post-tribulationists are right, then Jesus engaged in a futile building program. For when He comes to the earth in the second coming, He will rule out of the earthly Jerusalem for a thousand years. Since He says He is going to come in order that we may be with Him **where he is**, we would have to be with Him here on earth. Do you see the problem? The dwelling places in the Father's house would be unused. And worse by far, Jesus would be guilty of telling us a lie. For as we have seen, He is coming for the purpose of taking us to the Father's house at that time. Post-Tribulationist Robert Gundry doesn't keep this passage in context when he says, "Jesus does not promise that upon His return He will take believers to mansions in the Father's house. Instead, He promises, '*Where I am*, there you may be also.'" This makes Jesus' whole promise ridiculous. Why would He speak of preparing a place for us in the Father's house if He didn't mean that His return would take us there?⁵⁵

In sum, a rapture interpretation of John 14:1–4 is strengthened when this view is compared to the other non-eschatological interpretations of this passage. Such non-eschatological interpretations include the death of the believer, the believer's individual salvation, Christ's resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Moreover, a pretribulational rapture understanding of these verses is fortified when examining the weakness associated with other non-pretribulational views.

⁵⁵ Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (New York: Bantam, 1983), 43.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to argue that John 14:1–4 represents a promise of the rapture by noting several preliminary reasons why interpreters should be open to a rapture teaching in this passage by contending that the details of the text favor a rapture interpretation in these verses and by noting the inadequacy of the views advocating a non-rapture interpretation of John 14:1–4.

SUMMARY AND OVERALL CONCLUSION

Did Jesus ever refer to the rapture? There are two passages that are most commonly viewed as rapture statements from Christ. They are Matthew 24:40–41 and John 14:1–4. For the reasons stated throughout, the Matthean text is *not* a rapture teaching. However, interpreters *are* on solid exegetical footing in seeing in John 14:1–4 an initial and only reference to the rapture of the church in seed or germ form.

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AN INTENTIONAL THEOLOGY OF ETERNAL LIFE IN JOHANNINE LITERATURE

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Keywords: *eternal life, Gospel of John, discourse analysis, verbal aspect, Aktionsart, substantival participle, transitivity, tense-form vs. tense-function, position vs. practice, perseverance, faith alone, John 3:36, John 5:24*

Abstract: *This article refutes the arguments of J.C. Davis that the Johannine corpus does not teach or support the concept of once-saved-always-saved. Two verses are considered in detail: John 3:36 and John 5:24. In each case, the author first analyzes Davis' assertions of grammatical evidence to support his claim, then analyzes the contextual congruity of his argument before proposing a more holistic approach consistent with contemporary advances in Greek discourse grammar, as well as a consistent approach to building a theology from the textual evidence of Scripture.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to employ an intentional method of theology to the promise of eternal life presented in John's Gospel to the believer. This topic has come about in response to

a paper titled *The Johannine Concept of Eternal Life as a Present Possession*, by J. C. Davis.¹ In his paper, Davis presents the data of his research in an organized and helpful format, but his theological method is lacking, which becomes evident as he progresses from synthesis to application. In his conclusion, he affirms that “the Christian here and now has ‘eternal life’... Just as the Father ‘has life,’ the Son ‘has life’; also the ‘one who believes has eternal life...’ ”² However, Davis goes on to argue that such “eternal life” can be forfeited, and that this is “implied in the use of the present tense in John 3:36; 5:24; and clearly stated in Hebrews 3:12.”³ Davis portrays his conclusion as exegetical when in fact it is theologically derived. In response, this writer will methodically assess Davis’ claim that John’s teaching on eternal life permits that “a believer may become an unbeliever and forfeit his share in ‘eternal life.’ ”⁴

JOHN 3:36

The primary verse in question is John 3:36; thus, the first order of business is to understand John. To understand John, the data must first be restricted to John’s corpus of writing, reserving any direct consideration of Hebrews 3:12 to a synthesis with the New Testament canon or Scripture generally. After limiting the data, passages written by John may be exegeted to understand John’s use of “eternal life.” To interpret the text, the literal-historical-grammatical-contextual hermeneutic must be consistently applied to each passage.

Davis makes his first argument from John 3:36, which reads, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”⁵ The

¹ J. C. Davis, “The Johannine Concept of Eternal Life as a Present Possession,” *Restoration Quarterly* vol. 27 no. 3 (1984), 161–169.

² Davis, 168.

³ Davis, 168.

⁴ Davis, 168.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all verses are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

verse presents a positive and a negative pair of substantival participles: believing (ὁ πιστεύων) and disobeying (ὁ ... ἀπειθῶν).

One might expect an argument against eternal security to come from a definition of the second term, stating that some sort of disobedience overrides one's salvation.⁶ Davis does not make this error; he does not espouse that disobedience refers to anything other than Jesus' imperative to faith (though he makes no direct statement at all to which command(s) must be obeyed). This is consistent with other clear statements in John's corpus, such as John's purpose statement in John 20:30–31. Nearly half of the New Testament's instances of πιστεύω occur in John's writing (126 of 269 instances), and he never qualifies (i.e., "true" or "real" faith) or conditions (i.e., faith *plus* another condition) this faith.⁷ John proposes simple faith alone—plus nothing else—in the person and work of Jesus alone as the sole and sufficient condition to receive eternal life, as can be concluded by the pursuant result of possessing eternal life in John 6:47, 9:35–38, and 1 John 5:13, etc.⁸

Davis constructs his argument around John's choice of verb tense instead of his choice of vocabulary. Davis writes, "Does this interpretation [of eternal life being the present possession of the believer] lend support to the doctrine of 'once saved always saved'? No! The text says, 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life...' This affirms that *he who continues to believe continues to have eternal life.*"⁹

Verb Tense

Davis asserts a reductive and perhaps misleading understanding of the Greek tense system. He treats an issue of linguistic pragmatics as if it were merely an issue of semantics. Constantine Campbell helpfully distinguishes the two:

⁶ The obedience in this context most readily refers to the command to believe the testimony of the Son (John 3:16; 6:29; 1 John 3:23 cf. John 13:34), which at that time in His ministry was a message of the arrival of the kingdom, and Himself as the Messiah of Israel (1 John 5:10). The obedience required in this context was faith in Jesus.

⁷ cf. John 3:15, 16, 18; 6:40, etc.

⁸ Charles Bing, "The Condition for Salvation In John's Gospel" accessed June 17, 2024. <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/the-condition-for-salvation-in-johns-gospel/>

⁹ Davis, 168. Italics original.

...semantics refers to the values that are encoded in the verbal form. These values are unchanging and are always there when the particular verbal form occurs.... Semantics refers to what the verb means at its core.

...pragmatics refers to the expression of semantic values in context and in combination with other factors. In other words, pragmatics refers to how it all ends up—the way language is used in context.

The way that semantics and pragmatics relate together is a little like this: we take the semantic elements and plug them into a text that will have a range of things going on within it already, which bounce off and interact with the semantic values; the outcome is pragmatics. Pragmatic values can change from context to context; they are cancelable and not always there when particular verb forms are used.¹⁰

Davis does not draw from evidence in the context to conclude the pragmatic issue of continual action type (*Aktionsart*); instead, he depends on the morphology of the verbal inflection to claim that the present tense demands a progressive type of action. *Aktionsart*, however, is gleaned from the full sum of pragmatic clues within the context, while verbal aspect is encoded directly into the semantic value of a verb.¹¹ Here, Davis has borrowed the encoded material of the verb's tense-form for the verb's aspect and treated it as sufficient, without contextual contingency or consideration, to determine the *Aktionsart* of the verb. This is an untenable blend of *Aktionsart* and verbal aspect.

Campbell again helps to clear the waters, writing of the distinction between the two: “*Aktionsart* refers to how an action actually takes place—what sort of action it is. Aspect refers to viewpoint—how the action is viewed [by the speaker].”¹² John's use of the present tense means that he is subjectively presenting the action of the verb *from within* the action rather than *from without*. Whether or not the verb actually happens continually or not is not encoded into John's

¹⁰ Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 22–23.

¹¹ Campbell, *Basics*, 20.

¹² Campbell, *Basics*, 22.

choice of present tense verbal inflection and is thus not part of John's argument unless the context or the lexeme demands process.¹³ Neither of these are present. The addition of the word "continues" to emphasize the continual type of action (*Aktionsart*) of the present participle is warranted only when other contributing factors merit such an interpretation.

Substantival (Articular) Participle

Another problem occurs in Davis' dependence upon tense-form when one considers the use of articular participles, primarily those of substantival use, in Koine Greek. A. T. Robertson writes of the substantival participle,

The participle was timeless. Indeed, the participle in itself continued timeless, as is well shown by the articular participle. Thus, in Mark 6:14, Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων, it is not present time that is here given by this tense, but the general description of John as the Baptizer without regard to time. It is actually used of him after his death. Cf. οἱ ζητοῦντες (Matt. 2:20).¹⁴

Tom Eckman explains why this construction is often misused to imply (or over depend upon) considerations of verb tense and its corresponding *Aktionsart* and contribution to verbal aspect.

Because it's sometimes awkward in English to translate the phrase (article plus participle) using a noun, translators have often used "the one who..." But that moves the phrase back into verb territory, which seems to be

¹³ An example of a lexeme that demands process is "learn." While its verbal aspect may change based on *how* the speaker uses it (i.e., "He learned Japanese" views the process from a perspective of completion while "He is learning Japanese" focuses on the process undertaken in learning Japanese), the verb itself demands a process, and thus continual or iterative action. Viewing the action as completed (verbal aspect) does not change the fact that the action of learning Japanese occurred over a period of time.

¹⁴ Robertson, A. T. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. Logos Bible Software, 2006.

what “theologians” want to do with it. Participles in themselves, however, are not used to indicate time. They have tense *form*, but not *function*.¹⁵

Davis is not alone in asserting the possibility that this participle connotes continual *Aktionsart*. Grammarian Daniel Wallace also cites this passage as one which he believes emphasizes a “progressive force of the participle.”¹⁶ The problem with the assertion occurs when Wallace gives a possible reading the weight of a necessary reading. Tom Stegall, writing in response to Wallace’s conclusions about the present substantival participle in John, says

Wallace, who holds to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints [a possible theological presupposition], interprets the same present, articular participle construction of *ho pisteuon* exceptionally, as meaning ‘he who [continually] believes.’ His reason for treating *ho pisteuon* differently is that allegedly in John’s Gospel ‘there seems to be a qualitative distinction between the ongoing act of believing and the simple fact of believing’ ... By claiming this, Wallace is essentially admitting that his interpretation of *ho pisteuon* is theologically driven rather than a purely grammatical conclusion.¹⁷

Wallace makes a theological exception for this verse without presenting which contextual clues, if any, necessitate this exception. Regarding the general principle for substantival participles, however, Wallace writes, “when a participle is substantival, its aspectual¹⁸ force is more

¹⁵ Tom Eckman, “Can We Know We Have Overcome? Usage and Discourse Structure in Revelation 2–3” in *Grace & Truth Volume 2: Theological Essays On Bible Interpretation for the Edification of the Saints*, eds. Bradley W. Maston and E Dane Rogers (Tacoma, WA: True Grace Books, 2024), 235.

¹⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 621.

¹⁷ Thomas L. Stegall, *Must Faith Endure for Salvation to Be Sure?* (Tacoma, WA: True Grace Books, 2024), 89.

¹⁸ Here and elsewhere in the quoted material from Wallace, Wallace appears to use the term *aspect* when discussing pragmatic issues which belong to *Aktionsart* rather than verbal aspect.

susceptible to reduction in force.”¹⁹ This does not mean that the force must be fully diminished, but Davis’ assertion that this present substantival participle *emphasizes* continual action requires evidence to support his claim, though he provides none.

Wallace later writes, “the more particular (as opposed to generic) the referent, the more of the verbal aspect is still seen.”²⁰ The continual *Aktionsart* of the present substantival participle can retain some of its force, especially if its referent is specific (which it is not here), but it is difficult to make a case that the *Aktionsart* of a present substantival participle emphasizes, requires, or even has in mind a specific continuation of faith. The context only demands presence, not perseverance of faith for eternal life. Wallace also adds that “the aspect of the present participle can be diminished if the particular context requires it.”²¹ A requirement for faith to persevere to retain eternal life is nowhere affirmed in the context. The context does not require, nor even mention perseverance of faith. Perseverance of faith is not here implied; it must be imported theologically in the process of moving from exegesis to interpretation and application.

Davis cites A. T. Robertson, who identifies the participle in question as a “descriptive present,”²² providing a description of—not an implicit requirement for—the present acquisition of eternal life. He quotes Robertson saying, “Robertson understands ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον in John 3:36 as ‘has it here and now and for eternity’ and in John 5:24 exactly the same, ‘has now spiritual life which is endless.’”²³ Despite citing this evidence in contradiction to his conclusion, Davis, without presenting an argument for his disagreement with the grammarians he cites, provides a grammatically and contextually unsupported explanation of John 3:36 and John 5:24.

¹⁹ Wallace, 615. Italics removed.

²⁰ Wallace, 620. Italics removed.

²¹ Wallace, 620. Italics removed.

²² A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), 274.

²³ Davis, 163.

JOHN 5:24

Davis argues that John 5:24 also implies that faith must continue for eternal life to continue. The verse reads “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” Both verses depend on the present active substantival participle, without clear or present evidence for emphasizing progressive *Aktionsart* (continuation). John 5:24 gives more weight to an argument against Davis’ interpretation than for it.

Perfect Tense-Form

Any temporal tense information which the substantival participle retains is dependent upon the active verb.²⁴ The active verb ἔχει (*to have*) is used in both John 3:36 and 5:24. In John 3:36, where the present participle relates only to this single active verb (which is also present tense), it is possible to build an argument that the author intends both to be synchronous; certainly, the author is indicating that the act of faith corresponds to possession of eternal life. On the other hand, John 5:24 is not a simple sentence; it is a complex, compound sentence. Its subject is formed by two conjoined present substantive (articular)²⁵ participial phrases (literally, the *hearer* of My words and *believer* of the sender of me); its compound verbs are, and the present participle relates to, three active verbs: ἔχει, ἔρχεται, and μεταβέβηκεν. The first two are present; the third is in the perfect tense. The verbal aspect of the perfect tense μεταβέβηκεν (*has passed*) in relation to the present participle ὁ ... πιστεύων (*the believer*) is *static*.

Richard A. Young notes of the interpretation of perfect tense-forms,

The perfect is normally interpreted temporally as expressing a completed act with continuing results. There are problems with this definition if

²⁴ David Alan Black, *It’s Still Greek to Me* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 124.

²⁵ Both participles belong to the ὁ which begins the statement of the content of indirect discourse earlier in the sentence. These are also joined by a simple καὶ and appear to fulfill the requirements for Granville-Sharp, which would form a singular grammatical referent of this hearer-believer.

time is not a function of form, for completed acts are always past. Contextually the perfect may refer to something past (Matt. 19:8), present (Matt. 27:43), possibly future (Matt. 20:32; *John* 5:24; Jas. 5:2–3), omnitemporal (Rom. 7:2), or timeless (*John* 3:18). It seems better to view the perfect and pluperfect as members of the stative aspect in which the speaker conceives the verbal idea as a condition or state of affairs.²⁶

Michael G. Aubrey argues convincingly that the use of the perfect tense is to denote a change in state which has concluded. In a verb with high transitivity such as passing from one state into another in the present context, the agent of the active verb becomes the affected object though the voice remains active rather than passive. The result is that the perfect makes a comment about the state which results because of the verb's action. Aubrey notes, "Most highly-transitive verbs demonstrate this pattern in the perfect. Whether active-only or middle-only, they denote the result state relative to the other aspects."²⁷ Consequently, in the event structure of the clause, a perfect tense-form provides information about the state in which the verb leaves the subject. Campbell argues that this makes the perfect tense-form imperfective in aspect since the verb does not include any indication that the resulting state has a point of termination.²⁸ In fact, it appears to do this purposefully.

The clause, "has passed out of death into life" is viewed as completed transfer of state which was caused by the prior action of faith. This is not continuous, but finite. The believer, at the time of faith, has this passage of death to life completed in relation to his possession of eternal life.

Furthermore, it would be inconsistent to claim that one of the participles, *believing*, must be continuous for salvation to continue, without claiming the same for its coordinate participle, *hearing*. "He who hears

²⁶ Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 126.

²⁷ Michael G. Aubrey, "The Greek Perfect Tense-Form: Understanding Its Usage and Meaning" in *Linguistics and New Testament Greek: Key Issues in the Current Debate*, eds. David Alan Black and Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 69–70.

²⁸ Campbell, *Basics*, 52.

My words [ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων], and believes [καὶ πιστεύων] Him who sent Me, has eternal life...” If Davis’ argument for the present substantival participle is that it must be continuous or else eternal life is not continuous, then the hearing must also be continuous: “He who *continues* hearing My words, and *continues* believing Him who sent Me, *continues* to have eternal life...” If this principle were consistently applied, the results would be unrecognizable to the saving elsewhere proposed by John. It is a far better option in both instances to interpret the present substantival participle as a gnomic (general, universal) statement of fact: faith is required for the acquisition of eternal life, without reference to continual or iterative action. It is a universal principle explaining the resulting acquisition of life for the one who can be identified as a believer.

Stegall writes,

This view of *ho pisteuon* is consistent with the conclusions of leading Greek grammarians. Nigel Turner explains this use of the present-tense, particular, substantival participle, saying that in these grammatical constructions the ‘action (time or variety) is irrelevant and the participle has become a proper name; it may be under Hebraic influence, insofar as the Hebrew participle is also timeless and is equally applicable to past, present and future.’ The present-tense construction of *ho pisteuon* found throughout John’s Gospel is best understood, therefore, as having a gnomic function. According to Wallace, this use of the present tense involves generic subjects and most often occurs with ‘*generic* statements to describe something that is true *any time*.’²⁹

Davis himself provides an argument against his conclusion:

If “has life” (5:26), when used of the Father, means that “life” is now a reality for him, and “to have life” (5:26), when used of the Son, means that “life” is now a present reality for him also, by what rules of biblical

²⁹ Stegall, 89. Italics original.

interpretation or of common sense can the same reality be denied to the believer who “has eternal life”?³⁰

Davis is correct. The presence of eternal life for the believer is contemporaneous in tense-form to the presence of the Father and the Son’s eternal life. Davis recognizes the undeniability of this presence of eternal life in the believer at the time of faith. He avoids changing his theological presuppositions to coincide with this truth by defining a lexical domain for eternal life which is foreign to a plain reading of the text. He states that “a believer may become an unbeliever and forfeit his share in ‘eternal life.’ Does this mean that ‘eternal life’ could come to an end? No, ‘eternal life’ is the life of God; it will never come to an end, but the one who ceases to believe forfeits his share in the life of God. Eternal life will go on and on and all who continue to believe will continue to possess it...”³¹

The eternal life which the believer receives at the time of faith is indeed the life of God. However, John presents eternal life as a present share in the same life as is shared by God and Jesus; it is not something the believer bounces in and out of if his faith is fickle. To illustrate this point, more examples must be brought in from John’s corpus.

JOHN’S CONCEPT OF LIFE

Before leaving John’s gospel to synthesize his concept of eternal life with the rest of Scripture, it is necessary to round out John’s teaching on eternal life beyond the references cited by Davis in support of his argument, even though these references failed to adequately support his argument. An immediate disconnect exists in Davis’ assumptions and what these assumptions allow him to see in John’s writing. John speaks of the acquisition of life from Christ as a present possession, as well as a future prospect. These Davis affirms

³⁰ Davis, 165.

³¹ Davis, 168.

in his conclusions. But John speaks of present life in two ways which Davis conflates. One, is the *position* of life in Christ; the other is the *experience* of life in Christ.

Writing of eternal life, Charles Bing notes,

...we do not restrict eternal life to only salvation from hell. The Bible uses it also in the sense of God's life. As such, it speaks not just of eternal duration, but also of a divine quality of life. Consider what John 17:3 teaches: 'And this is life, that you might know God and the one whom He has sent.' Clearly, eternal life here is God's life, or a relationship that we can have with God. This corroborates with Jesus' teaching in John 3 about the new birth. A new birth gives a new life. Literally, the phrase 'born again' means 'born from above,' which denotes the reception of God's life. Eternal life should be seen not only as life with endless duration, but also as life with a divine quality.³²

In the Gospel of John, *eternal life* regularly appears in conjunction with the divine and uncreated life of God, either which He possesses, or which He imparts (cf. John 5:24–26). Each of these refer not to natural, but divine life. The Gospel of John is consumed by this idea of life, which originates from God, passes through the incarnate Christ, and goes out from him to those who have believed. This has immediate and future effects. The believer passes out of death and into life at the time of faith (John 5:24) and anticipates a future resurrection of life (John 5:29). BDAG explains this future resurrection hope as not a “*resurrection to everlasting life...but a resurrection which corresponds to the Christian's possession of life here and now, a resurrection proceeding from life.*”³³ This life is acquired by those who believe, and it renders the believer changed positionally from an object of judgment to an object of salvation (John 3:17–18). This faith puts the believer in a new position to God, not as an enemy, but as a son (1 John 3:2). This new position not

³² Charles C. Bing, *Grace, Salvation & Discipleship: How to Understand Some Difficult Bible Passages* (Grace Theology Press, 2015), 48.

³³ BDAG, 430. S.v. ζωή.

only has the promise of life future, but it also has the provision of a new kind of life here and now (John 10:10).

Position Versus Experience

Throughout John's Gospel, as the issue of life comes up, identifying what aspect of life John is discussing is necessary. Is it present positional life or experiential life? Both are acquired through faith, but positional life is nowhere predicated on *continual* faith. Faith puts the believer in the position to receive the benefits of eternal life in fellowship with the divine source of life, such that, while the believer continues to believe, he continues to experience that fellowship—life more abundant. Failure of faith does not *un*-save the believer. It cannot.

John 10:27–28 states, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” In this verse, clearly those who earlier entered in through the door of Jesus have received eternal life from Him (John 10:10), and their security is not based on themselves, but on the Shepherd (Jesus). As if this did not render one secure enough, Jesus adds in verse 29 that “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.” The security of the sheep is dependent on the Shepherd, not the sheep. And the Shepherd has declared that *no one* can dislodge the sheep from His fold.

Even John's purpose statement for his Gospel in John 20:31 demonstrates both the positional and experiential aspects of eternal life received from Jesus by faith, stating “these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” First, faith in Christ as the Son of God places one positionally in the eternal life shared by God. One may take the second clause as the result of that faith: “that believing you may have life in His name.” The purpose of John's Gospel is to show who Jesus is so that the one who believes will share in His life. That share of His life is not only a new truth about the believer, but an experience of the believer.

In 1 John, the assumption is that the reader already believes and has received eternal life. First John 5:13 affirms this. “These things I have written *to you who believe* in the name of the Son of God, so that you may *know* that you *have* eternal life” (emphasis added). The purpose in John’s first epistle is not the acquisition of positional eternal life, but the joyous experience of fellowship (1 John 1:3) made possible by the possession of eternal life which the reader has received since he has already believed in Jesus.

...we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifest to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, *so that you too may have fellowship with us*; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:2–3, emphasis added).

The fellowship of the believer with God through the life imparted to him from God is the goal of life on earth in possession of divine eternal life. This fellowship which is possible because of that possession is in view quite often in John’s writing, and it even characterizes eternal life for John. In chapter 17 of his Gospel, John records Jesus’ prayer to God the Father, writing, “You [God the Father] gave Him [the Son] authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:2–3).

Knowing God is possible for the believer; it is the goal of experiencing eternal life here. It is the anticipation of the believer into eternity, an experience which begins even before our bodies have been renewed (John 5:29). John speaks of this in his first epistle as well, writing, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). The practical experience of one’s eternal life is John’s focus after initial faith, not one’s possession of eternal life. His concern for the readers of his epistle, which he assumes to have already received eternal life through faith, is whether they are

experiencing the true joy of fellowship of eternal life, not if they are able to retain their eternal life.

CONCLUSION

Davis' conclusions are neither warranted by his research, nor the evidence provided in support of his conclusion. It appears as if the natural conclusion of his research pointed perpendicularly to his theological position, and so a conclusion which does not follow from his research was posited as an explanation rather than a resolve. Davis demonstrates quality research and constructs an excellent paper, but his conclusion is not an outgrowth of his research. Since this conclusion does not follow from the research, it appears as new information haphazardly pasted into a conclusion to defend against the natural direction in which the evidence takes the reader.

The evidential verses provided for his conclusion are not explained, and when observed closely neither support his conclusion in the plain sense reading, nor in a more technical analysis of the original language. His conclusion is simply a false statement. His interpretation of the text *does* lend support to the doctrine of "once saved, always saved." Eternal life is a present possession, as well as a future prospect. It is positionally true of the believer at the moment of faith, in the same way the physical resurrection to life is a guarantee the moment one has, through faith, passed out of death and into life.

The eternal life which the believer possesses is experienced in fellowship through continual faith, but nowhere is it affirmed, or implied, that the believer forfeits his stake in eternal life when faith fails. Eternal life is not something that can be put on and taken off like a jacket or stepped into and out of like a pair of pants; the believer's very essence has become intertwined with his new life, which is the eternal life imparted to him by Christ. An attempt to replace the values of spiritual life and death with a softened "inside or outside the sphere of life" is a distinction without a difference. There is no difference between dying again spiritually and "stepping outside of the sphere of eternal life."

In such a case, the life which God declared interminable would have to terminate.

The very fact that one shares the divine life with God does not support Davis' claim that eternal life does not end because someone, i.e., God, continues to possess it even if you forfeit it. One might argue of natural life that the life of an aborted child does not truly end, because the life of the mother, through whom his physical life came to him, continues. The eternal life of the believer is shared from God and with God, but if the believer loses his eternal life, then it would not be for him eternal life. Davis' conclusion is not exegetical but rather eisegetical. The research which Davis presents supports the doctrine of eternal security, though his statements in conclusion contradict the evidence which he proposes in support of his theology.

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THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND LEAVEN

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Keywords: *dispensationalism, kingdom postponement, parable of the mustard seed, parable of the leaven, premillennialism, parables, eschatology, Matthew 13, Ezekiel 17, Ezekiel 31, Daniel 4*

Abstract: *The parables of the mustard seed and leaven describe the interim period that resulted from Christ’s withdrawal of His kingdom offer. In the parable of the mustard seed, a mustard seed is planted (to represent the kingdom offer) but a different plant grows instead (representing the Satanic world system) which benefits the birds in the branches (representing the demonic realm). In the parable of the leaven, a woman (representing Satan) sneaks leaven (representing evil) into a large but finite amount of meal (representing the world) until it is entirely permeated by the rotting influence of leaven (representing the Satanic influence in the entire world). Support for this interpretation of the parable of the mustard seed may be found in allusions to birds in Ezekiel and Daniel as well as an ancient horticultural idiom that uses γίνομαι to describe the growth of weeds. Support for this interpretation of the parable of the leaven may be found in a study of the object referenced in the term “the kingdom of heaven is like” as well as the nature of the leaven and the woman.*

INTRODUCTION

Several interpreters have used the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven as proof texts for replacement theology. Such interpretations suggest that the numerous biblical texts promising a literal, future, and earthly Messianic kingdom are redefined by brief parabolic sayings. The eclectic hermeneutical approaches that justify such interpretations of these parables will ultimately drive the interpreter to see God replacing His promised literal Messianic kingdom on earth with a spirit kingdom that is being realized through some current experience. The problems with replacement theology are legion and more often than not resolved easily through the consistent and exclusive application of literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics, which results in the school of thought known as dispensationalism.

What then is a dispensational approach to the parables of the mustard seed and leaven? Contextually, Jesus delivers these parables after a severe rejection of His kingdom offer (specifically, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in Matt. 12; Mark 3; Luke 11–12) and they occur as part of a string of parables (in Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 13) that describe the interim period that leads up to the eventual establishment of the promised kingdom. Some dispensationalists would see the parables as revealing a spiritual facet of the kingdom, which is acceptable so long as the millennial kingdom is yet future, but another approach (taken here) is that the parables of the mustard seed and leaven describe the evil that will be prevalent until the establishment of the kingdom. The parable of the mustard seed depicts a mustard seed being planted (to represent the kingdom offer), but instead of a mustard plant, a tree grows (representing the Satanic world system) that benefits birds in the branches of the tree (representing demonic vassals of the Satanic system in the Satanic world system). The parable of the leaven depicts a woman (representing Satan) sneaking leaven (representing evil) into a large but finite amount of meal (representing the world) until it is entirely permeated by the rotting influence of leaven (representing the Satanic influence in the entire world until Messiah comes).

THE CONTEXT OF THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND LEAVEN

From the time when John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus had been offering the Messianic kingdom to Israel (Matt. 4:12–17). At the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22–50), He withdrew this kingdom offer. The withdrawal of the offer does not change God’s promises but simply postpones the fulfillment of the promises. After the blasphemy, Jesus spoke in parables to describe the postponement. The parables of the mustard seed and leaven are part of these postponement parables, so they develop the revelation that there would be an interim period after the crucifixion. Matthew and Luke record the parable of the leaven immediately after the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31–33; Luke 13:18–21). Mark has the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30–32), but not the parable of the leaven. Matthew 13 features eight parables. Jesus speaks the first four parables in public and the last four in private to His disciples. When He explains parables, He only explains them in private to His disciples. The first parable (the parable of the sower) and the final one (the parable of the new and old treasure) do not open with the formula ὁμοιώθη/ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν¹ “the kingdom of heaven²

¹ The parable of the new and old treasure uses a slightly different formula with *mathēteutheis tē basileia tōn ouranōn homoios estin* (μαθητευθεὶς τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν ὁμοίος ἐστὶν Matt. 13:52).

² For rabbinic examples of “heaven” being used as equivalent for “God,” Arnold Fruchtenbaum references: *y. Nedarim* 2:4; *m. Avoth* 5:17, p. 535, n. 2; *y. Sheqalim* 1:4; *y. Baba Mesia* 1:4; *y. Qiddushin* 4:1; *y. Baba Qamma* 6:1, 7:4; *y. Nedarim* 1:1; 1:2; 4:3; *y. Ketubot* 3:10; *b. Shabbath* 127b; *b. Rosh Hashanah* 24a; *b. Baba Qamma* 91a; 94b; *t. Makkot* 5:16; *t. Baba Qamma* 6:16; *Midrash Rabbah*: Numbers II.26; Obermann, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, p. 39; Braude and Kapstein, *Tanna Dēbe Eliyyahu*, pp. 158, 190–193; and Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, pp. 91–101; *Midrash Rabbah*: Leviticus XVI.8; *y. Kilayim* 9:1; *b. Qiddushin* 42b; *y. Yebamot* 15:4; *b. Yoma* 86a; *b. Aboth* IV.11; V.17; *t. Sotah* 5:12; 6:7; *Midrash Rabbah*: Numbers XIII.2; Pearl, *Theology in Rabbinic Stories*, pp. 114–116; Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vols. 2 and 3, pp. 95–100; *b. Aboth* I.3; *b. Yoma* 72b, p. 347, nn. 3, 5–6; *b. Berakoth* 33b; *b. Shebu’oth* 35a–36b; *Midrash Rabbah*: Deuteronomy II.31; Young, *The Jewish Background to the Lord’s Prayer*, pp. 14–15; Flusser, *Jesus*, pp. 104–105, 262–265; Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vols. 2 and 3, pp. 371–376; Borgen and Giversen, *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism*, pp. 118–122; Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book 2, pp. 184–185; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, pp. 239–240; Young, *Meet the Rabbi*, p. 27; Kaufmann, *Christianity*

bears similarity to,” so these are not kingdom parables per se, rather they serve as a public introduction that explains why Jesus is using parables and a private conclusion that admonishes His disciples to use literal-grammatical-historical intertextuality. Michael Stallard summarizes well:

...the first and last parables, the parable of the sower and the parable of the householder, respectively, serve as bookends to identify the general ideas of the entire cluster and to tie the cluster to the ongoing argument of the entire book of Matthew, taking into account the rejection of Jesus by the leaders of Israel and the subsequent development of something new in the transition from the focus on the Jews to the focus on Gentiles. The middle six parables flesh out more details with respect to these general themes.³

Mark includes two additional parables, the parable of the hidden lamp (Mark 2:21–25) and the parable of the growing seed (Mark 4:26–29). Luke also records the parable of the hidden lamp (Luke 8:16–18). The parable of the growing seed is expressed as a kingdom parable as Mark 4:26 begins “The kingdom of God is as if...” (NKJV), but the parable of the hidden lamp expounds on the purpose of parables and explanation of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:10–25; Luke 8:9–18). Luke 8:10–18 is expressed as one continuous quote, so Jesus probably gave the parable of the hidden lamp in private, but Mark does not indicate that the parable was separate from the parable of the mustard seed, so perhaps He delivered it on more than one occasion.

After the parable of the leaven, Matthew includes some remarks to transition from the public parables to the private ones, which He only gives to His disciples. Perhaps Matthew 13:34–35 closes an *inclusio* (beginning with vv. 10, ff.) to set apart the public kingdom mystery parables, which are the parables of the tares, mustard seed, and leaven.

and *Judaism*, p. 76; Versepunt, *The Rejection of the Humble Messianic King*, pp. 344–345; *b. Berakoth* 13b, 14b, 15a; *y. Berakhot* 2:1, 2:2, 2:5; Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 1:465; *m. Avoth* 3:5. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah From a Messianic Jewish Perspective* 4th ed. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2019), II.416–420.

³ Michael Stallard, “Hermeneutics and Matthew 13 Part II,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 05:16 (Dec 2001): 328.

The *inclusio* opens with Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 6:9–10; Matt. 13:14–15) and then closes with a fulfillment of a psalm (Ps. 78:2; Matt. 13:35). Matthew maintains the Septuagint translation of “I will open My mouth in parables” (Gr. Ἀνοιξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου; Heb. פִּי אֲבִיֶּזָה בְּמִשְׁלַל פְּתִיחֵי מִנְיַן מִבְּרֵאשִׁית) but corrects the Septuagint of מְנִינִי מִבְּרֵאשִׁית מִבְּרֵאשִׁית from “I will shout [solutions to] riddles [posed] from the beginning” (φθέγξομαι προβλήματα ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς my translation) to “I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world” (ἐρεύξομαι κεκρυμμένα ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου translation. NKJV). The Hebrew word מִבְּרֵאשִׁית has a range of meaning that can include the translations προβλήματα or κεκρυμμένα, but there is a distinction between the two, and Matthew specifically chooses to override the Septuagint.⁴ The Septuagint has προβλήματα, which carries the connotation of a problem that has been posed, but not yet solved (e.g., Samson’s riddle in Judg. 14:12 ff. LXX), while Matthew has κεκρυμμένα, which comes from the root κρύπτω and portrays the connotation of something not yet revealed, or covered from old. This is the nature of the mysteries of the kingdom, not that they are presented in a riddle format, but that they were unrevealed until Christ spoke them.

Psalm 78:2 MT	Psalm 77:2 LXX	Matthew 13:35
פִּי אֲבִיֶּזָה בְּמִשְׁלַל פְּתִיחֵי מִנְיַן מִבְּרֵאשִׁית	ἀνοιξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου, φθέγξομαι προβλήματα ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς.	ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τοῦ προφήτου, λέγοντος, Ἀνοιξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου, ἐρεύξομαι κεκρυμμένα ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.

The verb **בַּע** has the connotation of flowing like water, so the range of meaning of **פִּי אֲבִיֶּזָה** as applied to speech can be φθέγξομαι “I will shout” (perhaps as a waterfall) or ἐρεύξομαι “I will utter” (perhaps as a more silent creek), but Matthew chooses to use ἐρεύξομαι, perhaps

⁴ Old Church Slavonic Bibles exemplify the problems with following the Septuagint over the Hebrew Tanakh or Greek New Testament by following the Greek in the psalm with **проеѣмѣнію гл҃гоу ѣмѣрѣа**, which is an unfortunate restriction away from the inspired Greek of the New Testament, where Matthew 13:35b is more properly restricted to **ᾠρήγηδ' εοκροβένηλα ᾠ ειορηήηα μίρα**.

because Jesus is no longer shouting to Israel the command to repent, but teaching mysteries with those present to whom they are not given. For מִן־הַקֶּדֶם, the JPS has “of the past,” which again is within the range of the bare Hebrew, but it is more restrictive than the Septuagint’s ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς “from the beginning,” which is closer to ἐν ἀρχῇ of Genesis 1:1. Matthew is even more explicit with ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου “from the foundation of the world,” which should be understood as a claim to Christ’s deity.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

From a dispensationalist perspective, it is clear that Jesus offered the kingdom but did not establish it. The parable of the mustard seed describes the interim period that follows the withdrawal of the kingdom offer, characterized by the temporary reign of evil in place of the promised kingdom. The parable of the mustard seed depicts this with a mustard seed being planted (to represent the kingdom offer) after which a different plant grows instead (representing the Satanic world system) that benefits birds in the branches (representing the demonic realm). This interpretation differs from views that perceive the tree as a mustard plant representing a spiritual kingdom and the birds as holy beneficiaries of the kingdom of heaven. The following analysis will present the text, focusing on the horticultural language of the parable and exploring the intertextual allusion to the birds in the branches, thereby enriching the postponement interpretation.

The Texts

The three texts where the parable of the mustard seed occurs are Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; and Luke 13:18–19.⁵

⁵ These three passages are supplied here from the Robinson/Pierpont Byzantine text and NKJV translation with notes containing the apparatuses from Hodges/Farstad and the Society of Biblical Literature. Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, eds., *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*, 2nd ed. (Southborough, MA: Chilton Book Publishing, 2005); Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds., *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

Matthew 13:31–32

³¹ Ἄλλην παραβολὴν παρέθηκεν αὐτοῖς, λέγων, Ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν κόκκῳ σινάπεως, ὃν λαβὼν ἄνθρωπος ἔσπειρεν ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ αὐτοῦ. ³² ὁ μικρότερον μὲν ἐστὶν πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων· ὅταν δὲ ἀύξηθῆ, μεῖζον^a τῶν λαχάνων ἐστίν, καὶ γίνεται δένδρον, ὥστε ἔλθεῖν τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατασκηνοῦν ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ.

³¹ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ³² which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

Mark 4:30–32

³⁰ Καὶ ἔλεγεν, Τίνι^a ὁμοιώσωμεν^b τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ; Ἡ ἐν ποίᾳ παραβολῇ παραβάλωμεν αὐτήν;^c ³¹ Ὡς κόκκον^d σινάπεως, ὅς, ὅταν σπαρῆ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, μικρότερος πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων ἐστίν^e τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.^f ³² καὶ ὅταν σπαρῆ, ἀναβαίνει, καὶ γίνεται πάντων τῶν λαχάνων μεῖζων,^g καὶ ποιεῖ κλάδους μεγάλους, ὥστε δύνασθαι ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνοῦν.

³⁰ Then He said, “To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; ³² but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.”

^a Matt. 13:32 μεῖζον **M** **Ε**, TR, Cr; μεῖζον πάντων **M**^f

^a Mark 4:30 Τίνι **℣** **A**; Πῶς **Ε** WH Treg NIV SBL

^b Mark 4:30 ὁμοιώσωμεν **M**^{PT} **C**; ὁμοιώσωμεν **M**^{PT} **κ** **B** **A**, TR Cr

^c Mark 4:30 ποίᾳ παραβολῇ παραβάλωμεν αὐτήν **℣** **A**; τίνι αὐτήν παραβολῇ θῶμεν **κ** **B** **A**^{*vid}, WH Treg NIV SBL

^d Mark 4:31 κόκκον **℣** **A** Treg; κόκκῳ **κ** **B** **C**^{vid}, WH NIV SBL

^e Mark 4:31 σπερμάτων ἐστίν; σπερμάτων WH Treg NIV SBL

^f Mark 4:31 μικρότερος πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων ἐστίν τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς **℣** **C**; [ὁ **κ***] μικρότερον ὃν πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς [ἐστὶν **A**] **B**, WH Treg NIV SBL

^g Mark 4:32 πάντων τῶν λαχάνων μεῖζων **℣**; πάντων τῶν λαχάνων μεῖζον WH NIV SBL; μεῖζον πάντων τῶν λαχάνων **Ε** Treg

Luke 13:18–19

¹⁸ Ἐλεγεν δέ,^a Τίτι ὁμοία ἐστίν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ; Καὶ τίτι ὁμοιώσω αὐτήν; ¹⁹ Ὅμοία ἐστίν κόκκῳ σινάπεως, ὃν λαβὼν ἄνθρωπος ἔβαλεν εἰς κῆπον ἑαυτοῦ· καὶ ἤρξησεν, καὶ ἐγένετο εἰς δένδρον μέγα,^b καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατεσκίηνωσεν ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ.

¹⁸ Then He said, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? ¹⁹ It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.”

An Herb Becomes a Tree

Matthew 13:32 says, “when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree” (ὅταν δὲ αὐξηθῆ, μεῖζον τῶν λαχάνων ἐστίν, καὶ γίνεται δένδρον). Two points in Greek botanical terminology are relevant to understanding this phrase as the original Greek-speaking audience would have understood it. The first point is the distinction between herbs and trees. The second is the idiomatic use of γίνομαι when speaking of growing weeds. To this end, it is helpful to go to the writings of Aristotle (c. 384–322 BC), Theophrastus (c. 371–287 BC), and Athenaeus (c. AD late 2nd–early 3rd c.) to understand the verbiage that the Synoptics are using here.⁶

Classes of plants

By the time of Christ, a vocabulary had developed around a three-part division of plants. Edmund Ware Sinnott (1888–1968), a botanist with expertise in phytomorphology, said of these ancient Greek plant classes:

The most ancient system of botanical classification which we know, first proposed by Aristotle and Theophrastus and even continued after the dawn of modern botany with the herbalists of the sixteenth century,

^a Luke 13:18 δέ \mathfrak{M} A; ουν \mathfrak{P}^{45} \mathfrak{G} (h.C), WH Treg NIV SBL

^b Luke 13:19 εἰς δένδρον μέγα \mathfrak{M} \mathfrak{P}^{45} A, Treg; εἰς δένδρον \mathfrak{G} (h.C) A, WH NIV SBL

⁶ To be clear, this appeal to Greek pagans is only for linguistics’ sake and not an attempt to attach pagan ideology to Jesus as is unfortunately common today.

divided all plants into three great and easily distinguishable groups, the trees, the shrubs and the herbs.⁷

Aristotle and Theophrastus go into greater detail of the divisions within these three classes, but the relevant matter for the task at hand is that there is a distinction between trees and herbs. An herb was planted in the parable, but a tree grew as a weed.

The Greek word for *tree* is δένδρον. The Greek word for *shrub* is θάμνος. The Greek word for *herb* is λάχανον. The words for tree and herb occur in the parable of the mustard seed, but shrubs do not occur anywhere in the New Testament. Aristotle describes these terms in his work, *On Plants* (the translation uses “garden herbs” for λάχανον):

Some plants, again, are trees, while others are intermediate between trees and herbs; these are called shrubs. Some, again, are wild and some are garden herbs. Nearly all plants may be classified under one of these terms. Trees are those which have their stems growing from their own root, and many branches grow from them, like fig and olive trees; but some do not... Garden herbs are those which have many stems arising from one root, and many branches, such as rue, cabbage and the like.⁸

As seen in Aristotle, the Greek herb (λάχανον) is identified not by function,⁹ but by its form of having “many stems arising from one root” as

⁷ Edmund Sinnott, “The Evolution of Herbs,” *Science* 44 (September, 1916), 291.

⁸ Και παλιν των φυτων τινα μεν εισι δενδρα, τινα δε μεσον δενδρων και βοτανων και ταυτα ονομαζονται θαμνοι. και τινα μεν εισι βοταναι, τινα δε λαχανα. σχεδον μεν ουν παντα τα φυτα τοις τοιουτοις υποπιπτουσιν ονομασι. παλιν εισι δενδρα απερ εχουσιν εκ της οικειας ριζης φιτρον, και γεννωνται εν αυτοις κλαδοι πολλοι, ως συκαι και ελαιαι· τινα δ' ου... λαχανα δε εισι τα εχοντα πολλους φιτρον εκ μιας ριζης και πολλους κλαδους, ως το πηγανον, αι κραμβαι και τα τοιαυτα. Aristotle, *On Plants*, I. iv. Translation by W.S. Hett in *Aristotle Minor Works*, T. E. Page, E. Capps, W. H. D. Rouse, A. Post, E. H. Warmington, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), 169.

⁹ The word *herbs* can be confusing to modern English readers. William Tyndale translates this word as *yerbes* and “herbs” has echoed through the corpus of English Bible translations ever since. A problem is that to the modern English speaker, an herb is typically used in small quantities for a culinary, medicinal, or recreational purpose. The restricted “herbs” translation has not always been. Vulgate translated *holeribus*, Anglo-Saxon *wyrt*, and Wycliffe followed with *worts*, all of which include plants that would not today be commonly thought of as herbal, but excluded trees.

opposed to the Greek tree (δένδρον), which has a trunk, or as Aristotle says, “their stems growing from their own root.” This word, λάχανον, is inclusive of more than the modern “herb,” but exclusive to the tree class; in fact, there is an entire middle category, the shrub, which separates them.

Another word for mustard besides σίναπι is νᾶπυ.¹⁰ Athenaeus quotes Theophrastus as classifying νᾶπυ as a λάχανον.¹¹ The herb mustard was planted, but a different plant of a different sort grew instead. The mustard plant is a λάχανον, an herb, not a δένδρον, a tree. Again, there is an entire class of plants, the shrub, between these two so that the mustard plant and the tree are on two opposite sides of the Greek taxonomy of plants. The text says of the plant which grew that “it is greater than the herbs” (μειζον τῶν λαχάνων ἐστίν). The Greek comparative, μειζον, is used here. It is not the superlative as if to say “it is the tallest λάχανον,” but rather it is a plant that is taller than any λάχανον because this plant is not a λάχανον, but a δένδρον. In other words, mustard is a herb, so the tree that grew was not a mustard plant.¹²

The use of γίνομαι for growing weeds

The second relevant point in Greek botanical verbiage is the unique application of γίνομαι to growing plants. English translations have that the mustard seed “becomes a tree,” which sounds like a tree seed was planted and simply matured. However, the mustard plant is not a tree, so how does a mustard seed “become” anything other than a mustard plant? It turns out that while Greek usually uses γίνομαι to describe something that comes into being, there is a unique horticulture idiom that uses γίνομαι to describe weeds growing where they should not. This botanical idiomatic γίνομαι aligns well with the notion that the tree grew as a weed in a mustard garden.

¹⁰ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 9.2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.81.

¹² The mixture of plants in the field could further indicate a violation of Mosaic Law as a field should not be sown with mixed seed (Lev. 19:19 cf. *m. Kilayim* 3:2).

In *Historia plantarum*, Theophrastus describes fields of wheat, barley, and flax being overrun with weeds, specifically darnel.

Now, of the other seeds, none is naturally disposed to change into another while being corrupted, but wheat and barley turn into darnel, they say, and especially wheat; and it happens with heavy rains and especially in the well-watered and rainy districts... This is peculiar of these seeds, and also of flax; for that also, as they say, becomes darnel.¹³

Theophrastus lived *circa* 371–287 BC, so his Greek would have coincided with the shift from Attic to Koine. He records a saying among Greek-speaking horticulturists (καὶ γὰρ ἐκ τούτου φασὶ) that “flax becomes darnel” (reconstructed as τό λίνον γίνεσθαι τὴν αἶραν). This does not mean that flax is darnel, or even that it “becomes” darnel in the sense that darnel grows from the flax seed. Rather, this is an idiom in the horticulture community to say that after planting flax, darnel grew as a weed.¹⁴

The use of γίνομαι to describe a weed growing in place of an intended plant is an idiom that Theophrastus uses to describe darnel growing in place of wheat, barley, and flax, so it is certainly appropriate to use this wording about a tree growing as a weed in the middle of a mustard field.

A nuance in Mark

It is worth noting that while Mark’s account does not use the word δένδρον, it does describe something that is undeniably in the δένδρον

¹³ Τῶν μὲν οὖν ἄλλων σπερμάτων οὐδὲν εἰς ἄλλο πέφυκε μεταβάλλειν φθειρόμενον, πυρὸν δὲ καὶ κριθὴν εἰς αἶραν φασὶ καὶ μᾶλλον τὸν πυρὸν, γίνεσθαι δὲ τοῦτ’ ἐν ταῖς ἐπομβρίαις καὶ μάλιστα ἐν τοῖς εὐύδροις καὶ ὀμβρώδεσι χωρίοις... τοῦτο μὲν οὖν ἴδιον τούτων, καὶ ἔτι τοῦ λίνου· καὶ γὰρ ἐκ τούτου φασὶ γίνεσθαι τὴν αἶραν. Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum*, VIII.7.1.

¹⁴ On a similar point, in the Hebrew text of Ezekiel 17:23, the cedar “will bring forth boughs,” and it will “be a majestic cedar” (וְהָיָה לְעֵץ מְהֻלָּל וְהָיָה לְעֵץ מְהֻלָּל ...וְהָיָה לְעֵץ מְהֻלָּל). In the Septuagint, the text has εἰμί rather than γίνομαι for “be a majestic cedar” instead of “become a majestic cedar.” The cedar in Ezekiel 17:23 begins as a cedar and ends as a cedar, so the use of εἰμί in the phrase ἔσται εἰς κέδρον μεγάλην denotes a change to the qualities of the cedar rather than the category of the plant. Perhaps the translator preferred εἰμί over γίνομαι to avoid the idiom of the weeds.

class instead of the *λάχανον* class. Mark writes that the plant is larger than those from the *λάχανον* class and uses terminology that is akin to Aristotle's description of the tree. Mark says "it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches" and Aristotle's definition of a tree is "Trees are those which have their stems growing from their own root, and many branches grow from them."¹⁵ If the reader only had access to Mark's Gospel, it would still be apparent that this was a tree that grew instead of a mustard herb.

Birds Nest in its Branches

Three Old Testament prophecies describe kingdoms as great trees with birds in the branches: Ezekiel 17:1–24; 31:1–18; and Daniel 4:4–27. The wording in the Synoptics is reminiscent enough to draw a connection to these references, but the applications of the wording are distinct and show that these are separate occasions. There are similarities and dissimilarities between the birds in the parable of the mustard seed and the birds in both Ezekiel and Daniel, so it is likely that Jesus did not intend the parable to advance the revelation of either of the earlier tree references, but rather was alluding to the precedents set by earlier birds in earlier branches to describe the behavior of the birds in these branches.¹⁶

Psalm 104:12 (LXX 103:12) is occasionally brought into the discussion: "By them [the springs, vs. 10] the birds of the heavens have their home; They sing among the branches."¹⁷ Psalm 104 is a doxologically centered description of creation that has much to contribute to the fields of epistemology and metaphysics, but the birds are working differently in Psalm 104:12 when compared to the aforementioned passages in Ezekiel and Daniel. The psalmist is speaking of the wonder of

¹⁵ *παλιν* εἰσι δένδρα ἀπερ εχουσιν ἐκ τῆς οἰκειας ριζης φιτρον, και γεννωνται ἐν αυτοις κλαδοι πολλοι Aristotle, *On Plants*, I. iv. See above.

¹⁶ For a helpful discussion on the definition and taxonomy of allusions, see Jillian L. Ross, *A People Heeds Not Scripture: Allusion in Judges* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023), 3–51.

¹⁷ :לִקְרוֹתַי אֲנִי־מְבָרֵךְ יְיָ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם / ἐπ' αὐτὰ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνώσει, ἐκ μέσου τῶν πετρῶν δώσουσιν φωνήν.

creation, while the Ezekiel and Daniel texts are using tree imagery to describe kingdoms.¹⁸ As such, only Ezekiel and Daniel will be considered intertextual to the parable of the mustard seed.

The texts

The following tables include the parable of the mustard seed in Greek and English and the Old Testament texts in Hebrew and Aramaic with their Greek translations on the left and English translations on the right.¹⁹ References to birds in branches and shade are in **red** and references to the tree's growth are in **blue**. References to entities other than birds coming to the branches and shade are in **green**:

Nesting Birds in the Parable of the Mustard Seed

Greek	English
<p>ὁ μικρότερον μὲν ἐστὶν πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων· ὅταν δὲ ἀύξηθῆ, μείζον τῶν λαχάνων ἐστίν, καὶ γίνεται δένδρον, ὥστε ἐλθεῖν τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατασκηνοῦν ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ. (Matt. 13:32 Ὠ)</p>	<p>which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. (Matt. 13:32 NKJV)</p>

¹⁸ Oddly enough, some Gospel commentators remove Ezekiel 31 from the discussion entirely while still including Psalm 104:12 as a potential cross reference. For example, Bock writes, “The bird imagery is significant. Three Old Testament texts have this image (Ps. 104:12 and Dan 4:10–12, along with Ezekiel [17:22–24] mentioned above).” Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 243.

¹⁹ The Septuagint text comes from Henry Barclay Swete, *The Old Testament in Greek: According to the Septuagint* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1909) and the English translation of Swete’s text comes from Rick Brannan, et al., eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012). The Theodotion text of Daniel comes from Robert Holmes and Jacob Parsons, eds., *Vetus Testamentum Græcum cum Variis Lectionibus* (Oxford: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1827) and the English translation of Theodotion is from Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

Greek	English
<p>καὶ ὅταν σπαρῆ, ἀναβαίνει, καὶ γίνεται πάντων τῶν λαχάνων μείζων, καὶ ποιεῖ κλάδους μεγάλους, ὥστε δύνασθαι ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνοῦν. (Mark 4:23 M)</p>	<p>but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade. (Mark 4:32 NKJV)</p>
<p>Ὅμοία ἐστὶν κόκκῳ σινάπεως, ὃν λαβὼν ἄνθρωπος ἔβαλεν εἰς κῆπον ἑαυτοῦ· καὶ ἤϋξησεν, καὶ ἐγένετο εἰς δένδρον μέγα, καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκήνωσεν ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ. (Luke 13:19 M)</p>	<p>It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches. (Luke 13:19 NKJV)</p>

Allusion to Nesting Birds in Ezekiel 17:23

Hebrew and Greek	English
<p>²³ בְּהַר מְרוֹם יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁתַּלֵּם וְנִשְׂא עֲנַף וְעֵשֶׂה פְרִי וְהָיָה לְאֵרֶז אֲדָר אֲדָר וְשָׁנִי תַחְתָּיו לֵל צְפוּר כָּל־כֵּץ בְּעַל דְּלִיּוֹתָיו תִּשְׁכֵּן: (Ezek. 17:23 MT)</p>	<p>²³ On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. (Ezek. 17:23 NKJV)</p>
<p>²³ καὶ κρεμάσω αὐτὸν ἐν ὄρει μετεώρῳ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ καταφυτεύσω, καὶ ἐξοίσει βλαστὸν καὶ ποιήσει καρπὸν καὶ ἔσται εἰς κέδρον μεγάλην· καὶ ἀναπαύσεται ὑποκάτω αὐτοῦ πᾶν ὄρνεον, καὶ πᾶν πετεινὸν ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ ἀναπαύσεται· τὰ κλήματα αὐτοῦ ἀποκατασταθήσεται. (Ezek. 17:23 LXX)</p>	<p>²³ and hang him on a high mountain of Israel, and I will plant him, and he will bring a sprout forth, and it will make fruit and become a great cedar, and every bird will stop under it, and every winged creature will stop under its shade; its branches will be restored. (Ezek. 17:23 LES)</p>

Allusion to Nesting Birds in Ezekiel 31:5, 6, 13

Hebrew and Greek	English
<p>עַל־כֵּן גִבְהָא קָמְתוּ מִכָּל עֲצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה וַתִּרְבֶּינָה קַרְעֵפְתָיו וַתִּאָרְכְּנָה פִּאֲתוֹ [פִּאֲרָתָיו, פִּאֲרָתוֹ] מִמַּיִם רַבִּים בְּשִׁלְהוֹ: בְּסֻעֲפֹתָיו קָנְנוּ כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַתַּחַת פִּאֲרָתוֹ יִלְדוּ כָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וּבְצִלּוֹ יִשְׁבּוּ כָּל גּוֹיִם רַבִּים... 13 עַל־מִפְלֹתָיו יִשְׁכְּנוּ כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶל־פִּאֲרָתוֹ הָיוּ כָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה: (Ezek. 31:5–6, 13 MT)</p> <p>5 ἕνεκεν τούτου ὑψώθη τὸ μέγεθος αὐτοῦ παρὰ πάντα τὰ ξύλα τοῦ πεδίου, καὶ ἐπλατύνθησαν οἱ κλάδοι αὐτοῦ ἄφ' ὕδατος πολλοῦ. 6 ἐν ταῖς παραφυάσιν αὐτοῦ ἐνόσσευσαν πάντα τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ὑποκάτω τῶν κλάδων αὐτοῦ ἐγεννώσαν πάντα τὰ θηρία τοῦ πεδίου, ἐν τῇ σκιᾷ αὐτοῦ κατώκησεν πᾶν πλῆθος ἐθνῶν... 13 ἐπὶ τὴν πτώσιν αὐτοῦ ἀνεπαύσαντο πάντα τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ στελέχη αὐτοῦ ἐγένοντο πάντα τὰ θηρία τοῦ ἀγροῦ, (Ezek. 31:5–6, 31 LXX)</p>	<p>5 ‘Therefore its height was exalted above all the trees of the field; Its boughs were multiplied, And its branches became long because of the abundance of water, As it sent them out. 6 All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; Under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young; And in its shadow all great nations made their home ... 13 ‘On its ruin will remain all the birds of the heavens, And all the beasts of the field will come to its branches— (Ezek. 31:5–6, 13 NKJV)</p> <p>5 On account of this, his stature was exalted above all the woods of the plain, and his branches were spread because of abundant water. 6 All the birds of the sky nested in his shoots, and all the wild beasts of the plain gave birth under his branches; every multitude of nations dwelt in his shade ... 13 All the birds of the sky rested on its ruin, and all the wild beasts of the field came beside its boughs, (Ezek. 31:5–6. 31 LES)</p>

Allusion to Nesting Birds in Daniel 4:10–12, 20–21

Aramaic and Greek	English
<p> ⁽⁷⁾ ¹⁰ וְחֻזְנֵי רְאִישֵׁי עַל־מִשְׁכְּבֵי תַנְהָה הָיִית נֶאֱלָמוּ אֵילָנוּ בְּנוֹא אֲרַעָא וְרוּמָה שְׂגִיָא: ⁽⁸⁾ ¹¹ רְבָה אֵילָנָא וְתַקַּף וְרוּמָה יִמְטָא לְשָׁמַיָא נְחֻזְתָּה לְסוּף כְּלִי־אֲרַעָא: ⁽⁹⁾ ¹² עֲפְתָהּ שְׁפִירָא וְאַנְבָּה שְׂגִיָא וּמְזוּן לְכָל־אֲבָה תְּחַלְתָּהּ מִטְּלָלוּ חֵינֹת בְּרָא וּבַעֲנָפוּהִי יִדְרוּן [וְדוּרָן, יִדְרִין] צִפְרֵי שְׁמַיָא וּמְנָה יִתְגִּין כְּלִי־בִשְׂרָא... ⁽¹⁷⁾ ²⁰ אֵילָנָא דִּי חֻזְתָּה דִּי רְבָה וְתַקַּף וְרוּמָה יִמְטָא לְשָׁמַיָא נְחֻזְתָּה לְכָל־אֲרַעָא: ⁽¹⁸⁾ ²¹ וְעֲפְתָהּ שְׁפִירָא וְאַנְבָּה שְׂגִיָא וּמְזוּן לְכָל־אֲבָה תְּחַלְתָּהּ תְּוִיהִי תְּדוּר חֵינֹת בְּרָא וּבַעֲנָפוּהִי יִשְׁכְּנוּן צִפְרֵי שְׁמַיָא: (Dan. 4:10–12, 20–21 MT) </p>	<p> ¹⁰ “These <i>were</i> the visions of my head <i>while</i> on my bed: I was looking, and behold, A tree in the midst of the earth, And its height was great. ¹¹ The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. ¹² Its leaves <i>were</i> lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it ... ²⁰ “The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which could be seen by all the earth, ²¹ whose leaves were lovely and its fruit abundant, in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home— (Dan. 4:10–12, 20–21 NKJV) </p>

Aramaic and Greek	English
<p>^{10 (7)} ἐπὶ τῆς κοίτης μου ἐκάθευδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ δένδρον ὑψηλὸν φυόμενον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἡ ὄρασις αὐτοῦ μεγάλη, καὶ οὐκ ἦν ἄλλο ὅμοιον αὐτῷ. ^{12 (9)} οἱ κλάδοι αὐτοῦ τῷ μήκει ὡς σταδίων τριάκοντα, καὶ ὑποκάτω αὐτοῦ ἐσκίαζον πάντα τὰ θηρία τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐνόσσευον· ὁ καρπὸς αὐτοῦ πολὺς καὶ ἀγαθός, καὶ ἐχορήγει πᾶσι τοῖς ζώοις. ^{11 (8)} καὶ ἡ ὄρασις αὐτοῦ μεγάλη, ἡ κορυφή αὐτοῦ ἤγγιζεν ἕως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τὸ κύτος αὐτοῦ ἕως τῶν νεφελῶν, πληροῦν τὰ ὑποκάτω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ· ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη ἦν, ἐν αὐτῷ ᾧκουσιν καὶ ἐφώτιζον πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν... ¹⁷ τὸ δένδρον τὸ ἐν τῇ γῆ πεφυτευμένον, οὗ ἡ ὄρασις μεγάλη, σὺ εἶ, βασιλεῦ. ¹⁸ καὶ πάντα τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τὰ νοσσεύοντα ἐν αὐτῷ· ἡ ἰσχὺς τῆς γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ τῶν γλωσσῶν πασῶν ἕως τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ χῶραι σοὶ δουλεύουσι. (Dan. 4:10–12 [7–9], 20–21 [17–18] O')</p>	<p>^{10 (7)} I was sleeping upon my bed, and behold, a very high tree was growing upon the earth, and its appearance was huge, and there was not another tree like it. ^{12 (9)} The branches of it were long, about thirty stadia, and under it all the beasts of the earth found shade, and in it the winged creatures of heaven nested; its fruit was abundant and healthy, and it provided for all living things. ^{11 (8)} And the vision of it was great. Its crown draws near to heaven, and the top of it up to the clouds, filling the things under the heaven. The sun and the moon were dwelling in it, and they shined on all the earth ... ^{20 (17)} The tree planted in the earth, whose appearance was great, you are <i>the tree</i>, O king. ^{21 (18)} And all the winged creatures of heaven that were nesting in it; the might of the earth and of the nations and the tongues of all unto the ends of the earth and all the countries now serve you. (Dan. 4:10–12 [7–9], 20–21 [17–18] LES)</p>

Aramaic and Greek	English
<p>^{10 (7)} Ἐπὶ τῆς κοίτης μου ἐθεώρουν, καὶ ἰδοὺ δένδρον ἐν μέσῳ τῆς γῆς, καὶ τὸ ὕψος αὐτοῦ πολὺ. ^{11 (8)} Ἐμεγαλύνθη τὸ δένδρον, καὶ ἰσχυσε, καὶ τὸ ὕψος αὐτοῦ ἔφθασεν ἕως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ τὸ κύτος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ πέρασ ἀπάσης τῆς γῆς. ^{12 (9)} Τὰ φύλλα αὐτοῦ ὠραῖα, καὶ ὁ καρπὸς αὐτοῦ πολὺς καὶ τροφὴ πάντων ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ ὑποκάτω αὐτοῦ κατεσκῆνουν τὰ θηρία τὰ ἄγρια, καὶ ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ κατῶκουν τὰ ὄρνεα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐτρέφετο πᾶσα σὰρξ... ^{20 (17)} Τὸ δένδρον ὃ εἶδες, τὸ μεγαλυνθὲν καὶ τὸ ἰσχυρὸς, οὗ τὸ ὕψος ἔφθασεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν, καὶ τὸ κύτος αὐτοῦ εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν, ^{21 (18)} Καὶ τὰ φύλλα αὐτοῦ εὐθαλῆ, καὶ ὁ καρπὸς αὐτοῦ πολὺς, καὶ τροφὴ πᾶσιν ἐν αὐτῷ· ὑποκάτω αὐτοῦ κατῶκουν τὰ θηρία τὰ ἄγρια, καὶ ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ κατεσκῆνουν τὰ ὄρνεα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, (Dan. 4:10–12 [7–9], 20–21 [17–18] Θ)</p>	<p>^{10 (7)} Upon my bed I was looking, and lo, a tree was at the center of the earth, and its height was great. ^{11 (8)} The tree grew great and strong, and its top reached as far as heaven, and its span to the ends of the whole earth. ^{12 (9)} Its foliage was beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and food for all was on it. And the wild animals dwelled under it, and the birds of the air lived in its branches, and from it all flesh was fed ... ^{20 (17)} The tree that you saw, which grew great and strong, whose top reached to heaven, and its span into the whole earth, ^{21 (18)} and its foliage was flourishing, and its fruit abundant, and there was food for all on it, under which the wild animals would live, and in its branches the birds of the air would dwell— (Dan. 4:10–12 [7–9], 20–21 [17–18] Θ NETS)</p>

The synoptics use πετεινὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ while the Septuagint of Ezekiel 17:23 has πᾶν πετεινόν, Daniel 4:12, 21 has ὄρνεον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ and Ezekiel 31:23 has πάντα τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. These phrases are close enough to suggest allusion, while distant enough to show that none of the three in particular are being invoked. The Septuagint translations of Ezekiel 17:23 and Daniel 4:12, 21 are the furthest from πετεινὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ of the Greek New Testament, so it is worth noting a few nuances here before moving forward. The textual criticism of the Septuagint at Ezekiel 17:23 is difficult,²⁰ but there is evidence for an

²⁰ Zimmerli probably goes overboard in reconstructing the Hebrew text to fit some Greek manuscripts, but his work with the Greek manuscripts is worth noting nonetheless. He translates Ezekiel 23:17b: “And under it ‘all kinds of animals’ will make

ὄρνεον variant there, so πᾶν ὄρνεον instead of πᾶν θηρίον for כָּל־כְּנָף.²¹ Perhaps part of the reason for the difference can be traced in the Talmud, which includes a perspective (and counter-perspectives) that the Hebrew and Aramaic words for bird (צָפֹר/צִפּוֹר)²² imply cleanliness if alone, but uncleanness if modified. The Gemara says “ ‘The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches’ (Dan. 4:9): [unclean birds] are called ‘The birds of the heavens,’ they are not vaguely called ‘birds’ ”²³ and “ ‘bird’ is clean; ‘winged [bird]’ is unclean and locusts.”²⁴ It is also worth considering that in the New Testament, the word ὄρνεον only occurs in John’s writings (Rev. 18:2, 19:17, 21), while πετεινόν occurs 12 times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke–Acts, yet never in Johannine literature. Which Septuagint variant is preferable? Is there an implication from Daniel’s birds being from the sky? Did the Synoptics simply have a preferred Greek word? Too many variables are at play to extrapolate much information from the synoptic word choices, so perhaps the accent is on something else.

Analyses of kingdom tree imagery in Ezekiel and Daniel

The parable of the mustard seed references birds with verbiage that cannot be traced back to any single prophecy, so Jesus did not likely

their abodes, and [birds of every sort], all feathered creatures will nest in the shade of its branches.” He notes: מְּ וּשְׁכֵנו תַּחְתּוֹ כֹּל צְפוֹר כֹּל כְּנָף בְּצֵל דְּלִיּוּתוֹ תִּשְׁכְּנָה מְּ וְכַיִן וְדִלְיּוּתוֹ תִּשְׁכְּנָה. Ⲭ και ἀναπαύσεται ὑποκάτω αὐτοῦ πᾶν θηρίον (already assimilated to מְּ in Ⲭ^{B OL}; Ⲭ^C Ⲭ: ὄρνεον) και πᾶν πετεινὸν ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ ἀναπαύσεται και τὰ κλήματα αὐτοῦ ἀποκατασταθήσεται. In the first half Ⲭ appears to have preserved the original text here, with its clear parallelism: animals-birds, confirmed by 31:6. Behind תַּחְתּוֹ we must add וְ חַיָּה כֹּל. In what follows כֹּל כְּנָף (Gen 7:14), or better still כֹּל צְפוֹר since כְּנָף appears to be supported by πετεινόν of Ⲭ, is to be deleted as a gloss. The concluding clause of Ⲭ, however, must be a double reading of the last words of מְּ in the form תַּחְתּוֹ תִּשְׁכְּנָה.” Walter Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, Ronald E. Clements, Trans., Frank Moore Cross, Klaus Baltzer, and Leonard Jay Greenspoon, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 359.

²¹ In Field’s work on Origen’s *Hexapla*, an entry for Ezekiel 17:23 has: “צָפֹר. Aves. O’. ὄρνεον. Alia exempl. θηρίον. [Sic Ald., Codd. III, 26, 36, alii, et Syro-hex. in marg. char. med.] Πάντες: ὄρνεον. [Cod. 86, teste De Reg.]” Fridericus Field, ed., *Origenis Hexaplorum* (London: Oxford University Press, 1875), II.813.

²² But not necessarily as עוֹף as in Genesis 7: 3 “also seven each of birds of the air” (מִכָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם שִׁבְעָה).

²³ (מעוף השמים שבעה) וּבַעֲנַפּוּהִי יְדוּרֵן צְפָרִי שְׁמַיָא צְפָרִי שְׁמַיָא אִיקְרוּ צְפָרִי סַתְמָא לֹא אִיקְרוּ (b. *Chullin* 140a.1).

²⁴ צְפוֹר טְהוֹר כְּנָף טְמֵא וְחִגְבִּים (b. *Chullin* 139b.18b).

intend for His disciples to see the birds as a development specifically of one of the aforementioned prophecies in Ezekiel or Daniel. Rather it seems more likely that Jesus was alluding to birds in a way that reminisces all three passages so that the birds in the parable would function in commonality with the other birds. All three of these passages compare a kingdom to a tree and feature birds that illustrate vassals to the kingdom in comparison—and each passage has a different kingdom that it references—so this is most likely the intention of the birds in the parable of the mustard seed.

Ezekiel 17 opens with some parables of eagles, trees, and a vine (vv. 1–10), which God uses to describe rebellious Israel’s position amidst Babylon and Egypt (vv. 11–21). Then God reaffirms His promise of a future Messianic kingdom by saying that He will plant a new tree:

²² Thus says the LORD God: “I will take also *one* of the highest branches of the high cedar and set *it* out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant *it* on a high and prominent mountain. ²³ On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. ²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done *it*.” (Ezekiel 17:22–24)

Verse 17 features “birds of every sort” (lit. “every bird of every wing” כָּל צִפּוֹר כָּל־כַּנְף / LXX “every bird” πᾶν πτερινόν). This is most likely a reference to the international nature of the Messianic kingdom.²⁵ Gentiles will submit to the Messiah (Isa. 10:11; 56:6, 7; 66:23), celebrate Jewish festivals (Zech. 14:16), have a new attitude toward Jews (Zech. 8:23), and even rule in the Messianic kingdom (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–24). As such, the Gentiles can be viewed as vassals in the eventual Messianic kingdom. This vassalship is depicted by birds in a kingdom tree. This

²⁵ The Gentile aspect is particularly interesting in light of the observations above from *b. Chullin* 139b–140a.

is the only case of the three alluded-to texts in which the tree is the Messianic kingdom and there is nothing within the texts to urge the reader to see the parable of the mustard seed as a development of this messianic prophecy.

In Ezekiel 31, God is again using cedar tree imagery to describe to the Pharaoh the greatness of the Assyrian kingdom (vv. 1–9), but just as Babylon defeated the mighty kingdom of Assyria (vv. 10–17), so also will Babylon defeat Egypt (vs. 18). This passage refers to “all the birds of the heavens” (כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם / πάντα τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ LXX) twice (vv. 6, 13):

⁶ All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs;
Under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young;
And in its shadow all great nations made their home ...
¹³ ‘On its ruin will remain all the birds of the heavens,
And all the beasts of the field will come to its branches— (Ezekiel 31:6, 13)

The text indicates that the birds and beasts are “all great nations,” but even after the tree is cut down, “On its ruin will remain all the birds of the heavens.” As in the previous parable, the birds in the shade are the international vassals to a kingdom as the tree stands. This time the tree falls. The birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field (which are also mentioned in Ezekiel 29:5; 32:4, both times with a similar connection to the verb נָטַח) remain with the fallen tree, but are exposed without shelter as vassals.

In Daniel 4:4–18, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of another tree and then the prophet Daniel gives the interpretation:

²⁰ “The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which *could be* seen by all the earth, ²¹ whose leaves *were* lovely and its fruit abundant, in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home— ²² it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth. (Dan. 4:20–22)

The original Aramaic does not explain the birds in verse 21, but the text of Origen's version (O'), which is less literal than the Masoretic or Theodotion (Θ) here, brings in an interpretation that is consistent with the previous birds, specifying that they are "the might of the earth and of the nations and the tongues of all unto the ends of the earth" (see chart above). The birds are showing the extent of the tree to include vassal nations. Origen's version continues "and all the countries now serve you," emphasizing the function of subjecting to the king. Again, there is an image of a tree as a kingdom and birds that represent vassals to the kingdom.

Intertextual contributions to the parable of the mustard seed

A common method for making the tree in the parable of the mustard seed to represent the messianic kingdom is to read the specific content of Ezekiel 17:23 into the parable, but this is unlikely to be Jesus' intention. First of all, even if the mustard seed grew into a mustard tree (which is an herb, not a tree), the tree in Ezekiel 17 is a cedar, not a mustard tree (vs. 22). The Greek text of the parable in all three accounts has "the birds of the air" (τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), while the Greek of Ezekiel has a phrase that would have easily been quoted word-for-word: "and every bird under its shadow shall rest" (καὶ πᾶν πετεινὸν ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ ἀναπαύσεται). There is an interesting emphasis here on the variety of the birds. Ezekiel's tree is representative of the Jewish Messianic kingdom, but the birds show how many nations benefit from the tree. Also interesting is that Ezekiel 17 begins with two birds—eagles that represent kings—and then the final tree has birds that represent kingdoms. The nature of the birds does not change throughout the chapter.

Through the postponement parables, the nature of the birds does not change either. All three accounts either begin with or are preceded by the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–9; Mark 4:1–9; Luke 8:4–8). Mark records Jesus beginning His explanation of the parable of the sower with "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" (Mark 4:13), thus indicating that information from that parable should carry over in understanding the others. In the parable of the sower, the birds represent the evil one, Satan, the devil

(Matt. 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12). Satan is often spoken of in the singular as representative of his kingdom (cf. Matt. 12:22–32; Mark 3:22–30; Luke 11:14–23) and this is possibly the intention in the parable of the sower. Carrying the identification of the birds over to the parable of the mustard seed, the birds are to be identified with the demonic realm.

Summary

The parable of the mustard seed distinguishes the seed from the tree and the birds eventually nest in the tree when its branches are ready.²⁶ Contrary to the common interpretation of the Messianic kingdom growing on earth as a spirit realm, the parable of the mustard seed depicts Satan's kingdom growing in place of the Messiah's kingdom.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

The parable of the leaven also describes the interim period that resulted from the withdrawal of the kingdom offer but with a different emphasis. While the parable of the mustard seed emphasizes the temporary displacement of the promised kingdom with a demonic kingdom, the parable of the leaven illustrates the activity of the demonic kingdom, indicating that the world will undergo complete corruption before the Messianic kingdom arrives. There is a finite amount of meal (which represents the world), but it will be fully corrupted before Jesus establishes the Messianic kingdom.

Following a similar structure as the preceding section, this portion of the article will present the text and consider some oft-overlooked aspects of the parable of the leaven. There is a significant question over the nature of what the kingdom is compared to: is it the leaven itself or the situation of the meal being leavened? The latter is preferable as shall be explained below. There is also reason to interpret the leaven and the woman's hiding

²⁶ Mark's phrase, ὥστε δύνασθαι, may indicate that the purpose of the branch production is for the birds.

action as being negative (which fits best with the corruption interpretation) rather than positive (as implied in the spiritual kingdom view).

The Texts

The two texts where the parable of the leaven occurs are Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20–21. Mark does not record the parable of the leaven.

Matthew 13:33

³³ Ἄλλην παραβολὴν ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς, Ὅμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ζύμη, ἣν λαβοῦσα γυνὴ ἐνέκρυψεν^a εἰς ἀλεύρου σάτα τρία, ἕως οὗ ἐζυμώθη ὅλον.

³³ Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

Luke 13:20–21

²⁰ Πάλιν^a εἶπεν, Τίτι ὁμοιώσω τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ; ²¹ Ὅμοία ἐστὶν ζύμη, ἣν λαβοῦσα γυνὴ ἐνέκρυψεν^b εἰς ἀλεύρου σάτα τρία, ἕως οὗ ἐζυμώθη ὅλον.

²⁰ And again He said, “To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? ²¹ It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

The Kingdom Is Like What?

An objection to interpretations that see the leaven representing corruption might be that if the leaven is evil, then the kingdom of heaven is also evil; after all, the parable begins “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven ...” (Matt. 13:33a). But is the leaven itself the end of the thought? Herbert Lockyer takes a slightly different perspective than the one presented here, but he does well to write:

^a Matthew 13:33 ἐνέκρυψεν M¹ G, TR, Cr, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL; ἔκρυψεν M

^a Luke 13:20 Πάλιν M¹ A; Καὶ πάλιν P⁴⁵ G (h.C), TR Cr

^b Luke 13:21 ἐνέκρυψεν M^{PT} P⁷⁵ N A, TR [Cr] NIV RP; ἔκρυψεν M^{PT} B, WH Treg SBL

Jesus did not stop at, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven,” but is “like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened.” It was not the *leaven* alone that illustrated the kingdom of heaven, but the *whole* of the parable... The leaven was hidden in the meal, and as a type of evil, represents the way in which Satan’s subtle forces militate against the truth.²⁷

Just as the parable of the sower begins, “The kingdom of heaven is like a man ...” (Matt. 13:24), but does not claim the kingdom to be like the man and the man alone apart from the whole situation, the parable of the leaven likewise is not comparing the kingdom to the leaven alone. The entire picture is vital to understanding the parable. The parable features leaven, which is used to represent evil in the Bible, a woman who is hiding the leaven, and the large sum of *σάτα τρία* “three measures”²⁸ of meal into which she is hiding the leaven and which the leaven ferments. Toussaint comments:

This parable reveals the fact that evil will run its course and dominate the new age. But it also indicates that when the program of evil has been fulfilled, the kingdom will come. This is indicated by the use of the preposition “until” (ἕως). The definite limit and program of this age is also indicated by the fact that *three measures* of meal are used. The parable stops when this amount is leavened. So the kingdom will come when the evil of this age has run its course.²⁹

The parable of the leaven is not only about the increase of leaven, but about the complete leavening “till it was all leavened” (Matt. 13:33b; Luke 13:21b). The kingdom of heaven is not being compared just to the leaven per se, but rather to the entire situation of a large sum of dough arriving to a state of being completely leavened.

²⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Parables of the Bible: A Study and Analysis of the More Than 250 Parables in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1963), 190.

²⁸ The Greek *σάτον* comes from the Hebrew *סֵאֵוֹ*. Following Rashi, “three measures” would equal the volume of 432 eggs. Cf. Rashi, *Rashi on Exodus*, 16:36.

²⁹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1980), 182.

This notion that the kingdom is being compared to more than the leaven is not at all a dispensational grid being pushed onto the text. Two examples from outside the dispensationalist school of thought should suffice: the Gospel of Thomas and George Eldon Ladd.

The first example comes from the Gospel of Thomas, which contains a form of the parable of the leaven in Coptic. This is not an inspired text, but it does contain a version of the parable rephrased through translation. As such, it can be viewed as an early commentary on this particular aspect of the parable. The Gospel of Thomas' version of the parable is:

“96.1 Jesus s[aid], ‘The kingdom of the Father is lik[e a] woman. 96.2 She took a little leaven, [h]id it in some dough, and made it into lar[ge] loaves. 96.3 He who has ears, le[t] him hear.’”³⁰

Notice that after “The kingdom ... is like” (τῆντερο ... ἐστῆτων) comes “a woman” (ἀγρῆμε)³¹ whose actions are then explained, rather than the leaven, which certainly is an irreducible part of the activity.³² The switch from the yeast as a subject to the woman would not affect the meaning of the parable because although the author of the Gospel of Thomas evaded the true meaning of the parable, he likely understood that it was not the yeast specifically that Jesus was comparing the kingdom to, but rather the entire process.

The second example is from George Eldon Ladd, who was a staunch proponent of inaugurated eschatology, but when he came to the parable of the leaven, he realized that this was not depicting a permeating kingdom:

³⁰ 96.1 π[ε]χ[ε] ἰς χε τῆντερο ἡπειωτ' ἐστῆτω[ν] ἡ ἀγρῆμε 96.2 ἀσχι ἡογκογῆ ἡσῆειρ [ἀσρ]οπη' εἰ οὐρωτε ἀσαα ἡρῆνο[σ] ἡ]νοεκ' 96.3 πετεγῆ ἡαδε ἡνοχ ἡ[ρε]ψωτῆ' *The Gospel of Thomas*, Logion 96. From Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 545.

³¹ Logia 96–98 have the same phrase “The kingdom of the Father is like a woman/man” (τῆντερο ἡπειωτ' ἐστῆτων ἀγρῆμε/εὔρωμε).

³² “In contrast to the canonical texts, it is the Thomasine woman who ‘is the predominant actor, not the yeast,’ if one notes the subject of the three verbs: ἀσχι ἡογκογῆ ἡσῆειρ ‘she took a little yeast,’ ἀσροπη, ‘she concealed it,’ and ἀσαα, ‘she made it.’” David W. Kim, *The Words of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas: The Genesis of a Wisdom Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2021), 197. He cites Robert Doran, “A Complex of Parables: GTh 96–98,” *Novum Testamentum* 29 (1987): 347–352.

Jesus' reply is that when a bit of leaven is put in a mass of meal, nothing seems to happen. In fact, the leaven seems quite engulfed by the meal. Eventually something does happen, and the result is the complete transformation of the dough. No emphasis is to be placed upon the way the transformation is accomplished. The idea of the Kingdom of God conquering the world by a gradual permeation and inner transformation was utterly foreign to Jewish thought. If this was Jesus' meaning, he certainly must have reiterated the truth again and again, even as he did the unheard-of truth that the Son of Man must die. The idea of gradualness is contradicted by the parables of the tares and the dragnet where the Kingdom comes by apocalyptic judgment and separation of evil rather than by its gradual transformation of the world.³³

Ladd sees the emphasis as the final result rather than the process, though he disagrees with dispensationalists over the process and result. It would be preferable to say that the result is a fully corrupted world that only Jesus may set right. Ladd firmly disagrees on what the leaven itself is, but agrees that the emphasis is on the final form of the dough:

The emphasis of the parable lies in the contrast between the final, complete victory of the Kingdom when the new order comes, and the present, hidden form of that Kingdom as it has now come into the world. One would never guess Jesus and his small band of disciples had anything to do with the future, glorious Kingdom of God. However, that which is now present in the world is indeed the Kingdom itself. This is the mystery, the new truth about the Kingdom. How or when the future Kingdom will come is no part of the parable.³⁴

The key difference between Ladd's interpretation and the one offered here is in the identity of the kingdom. If instead of depicting the kingdom of God, the text is depicting the kingdom of Satan, then the parable

³³ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 97–98.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

of the leaven fits nicely on a kingdom postponement framework and would conflict with inaugurated eschatology

The parable of the leaven does not compare the kingdom itself to mere leaven but rather describes the leavening process and this aspect is evident across the ecumenical spectrum. Going one step further, since the Messianic kingdom is not leaven, it could follow that the leaven may maintain its typically negative connotation here.

The Rotting Leaven

Leaven occurs through Scripture as symbolic of sin. Perhaps a reason for this imagery is that leaven is a substance that causes rot. This is evident in the etymology of the word for “leaven” in Greek as contrasted to English:

“Leaven (ζύμη). Wyc., *sour dough*, as German *Sauerteig*. From ζέω, to boil or seethe as in fermentation. The English *leaven* is from the Latin *levare*, to raise, and appears in the French *levain*.”³⁵

Another related verb, ζυμόω, can refer to the pungent work of acid or vinegar.³⁶ One lexicon has “*cause to effervesce*.”³⁷ Leavening is a fermenting and rotting process, as Plutarch writes:

For the whole leavening process is one of rotting, and if the measures are disregarded, it causes a decay that is bubbly and light and brings forth spoiling.³⁸

The Bible uses leaven as a symbol of sin. The Mosaic Law contained a prohibition: “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven”

³⁵ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), I.80.

³⁶ Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, 9.30; Plato, *Timaeus*, 66.

³⁷ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), s.v. ζυμόω.

³⁸ ἡ γὰρ ζύμωσις ὀλίγον ἀποδεῖ σῆψις εἶναι· κἂν ἀποβάλῃ τὸ μέτρον, ἐπὶ τὴν αὐτὴν φθορὰν ἀραιοῦσα καὶ λεπτύνουσα τὸ φύραμα προήγαγεν. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 659b.

(Exod. 34:25a), which Lockyer explains, “The reason why leaven was excluded from any sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord, was because these were typical of the offering up of the *sinless* sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself.”³⁹ In the Gospels, Jesus uses leaven to describe the corruption of His contemporaries (Matt. 16:5–12; Mark 8:13–21). Before this discourse, He calls the hypocrisy of the Pharisees “leaven” (Luke 12:1–3). After Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, Paul continued alluding to leaven when speaking of evil (1 Cor. 5:6–8).

Allowing the symbolism of leaven to carry over to the parable of the leaven, the text easily speaks of the current experience. Darby does well to write, “that leaven everywhere else is the symbol of that which is bad. Has not the history of Christendom supplied that which fully corresponds to such a symbol?”⁴⁰ Francis Wright Beare proposes similarly that Matthew 13:33 “was originally a warning against the dangerous contagion of evil. It would be understood as an illustration of the warning against ‘the leaven of the Pharisees.’”⁴¹

Leaven is corruption. The kingdom itself is not corruption, but rather it is coming after the fullness of the corruption. This realization opens the door to an examination of how the leaven came into the meal without necessitating a positive connotation to the woman’s activity.

The Sneaky Woman

Both Matthew and Luke have, as the NKJV translates, “leaven, which a woman took and hid in ...” (ζύμη, ἣν λαβοῦσα γυνὴ ἐνέκρυψεν εἰς ...). The syntactic arrangement of the participle λαβοῦσα followed by the subject γυνὴ could be intentional to segregate the relative clause ἣν λαβοῦσα γυνὴ from the indicative action γυνὴ ἐνέκρυψεν. In other words, when the NKJV puts the verbs in the English past simple “took and hid,” the Greek

³⁹ Lockyer, *All the Parables of the Bible*, 191.

⁴⁰ John Nelson Darby, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, ch. 13. John Nelson Darby, *The Gospel of Matthew in The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 24, ed. William Kelly (London: G. Morrish, 1867), § Matthew 13.

⁴¹ The precise citation is not given, but presumably this is intended to be Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 309 cited by W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury Academic, 1988), II.422.

nuances in arrangement and grammatical forms turn up missing. Perhaps a preferred translation could be “leaven, which a woman, having taken [it], sneaked into ...” The term ἐνέκρυψενα εἰς,⁴² which the NKJV translates as “hid in,” carries a devious connotation that is easily overlooked in the English translation. Commentaries often avoid the negative undertone of the hiding by treating it as a secret inauguration of the kingdom,⁴³ but the Bible says that when the kingdom is established, it will not be a secret. Among other phenomena, the Mount of Olives will split in two and waters will gush forth from an elevated Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4–10)! The inauguration of the kingdom will be impossible to miss.

The basic verb ἔκρυψεν is often translated as “hid,” but perhaps the sinister setting could justify “sneak” as a base, and with the εἰς- prefix, ἐνέκρυψεν could have a slightly richer “sneaked in” meaning, which would become “sneaked into” as the verb is followed by the prepositional phrase εἰς ἀλεύρου σάτα τρία (literally, “into three seahs of meal”). The English verb “to hide” typically uses the locative preposition “in” rather than the directional “into,” which is another strength of the translation “sneak” as the directional nature of “into” is significant here. There are enough textual variants in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:21 to indicate that κρύπτω εἰς is normal verbiage, but assuming the original autograph had the ἐν- prefix (ἐνέκρυψενα εἰς), there would probably be a reason for this

⁴² The Hodges-Farstad text chooses ἔκρυψεν in Matthew 13:33 (M as opposed to ἐνέκρυψεν M¹ C, TR, Cr, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL) but the parallel text of Luke 13:21 has a similar variant, whereby the Hodges-Farstad text chooses ἐνέκρυψεν (M^{pt} P⁷⁵ N A TR [Cr], NIV as opposed to ἔκρυψεν M^{pt} B WH, Treg, SBL). It seems that most Greek New Testaments choose ἐνέκρυψεν in Matt. 13:33, even those that were compiled before the recovery of the codices Sinaiticus (N), Vaticanus (B), and Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), which also confirm the variant. Clement of Alexandria uses ἐνέκρυψεν in Matthew 13:33 (cf. Carl Cosaert, *Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 90). Theodore Beza confirms ἐνέκρυψεν in Matthew 13:33 and notes the sinister connotation: *Vetusta omnia exemplaria scriptum habebant ἔκρυψεν, eodem sensu. Vulg. Abscondit. Erasmus, Abscondidit. Ego verò quum το κρύπτειν interpretari soleam Occultare, hìc malui Condendi vocabulo uti. Id enim occultare vel abscondere dicimur quod eo consilio seponimus ut ubi sit, ab aliis ignoretur, quod huic loco non quadrat: sed quod cond tur, aufertur spectantium oculis.* Theodore Beza, *Testamentum Novum* (Geneva: Henri Estienne, 1588), 65.

⁴³ For example, see David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Greenwood, S.C: Attic Press, 1972), 233–234.

word choice⁴⁴ over ἔκρυψεν εἰς. It is proposed here that the ἐν- prefix serves to intensify the verb of motion to emphasize a hiding aspect in ἐνέκρυψεν εἰς that would be less accentuated in ἔκρυψεν εἰς.

In the development of the Greek language, the preposition ἐν was older than εἰς and originally took both the locative and accusative.⁴⁵ As a prefix, ἐν- (which morphs into ἐγ- in ἐγκρύπτω and ἐμ- in other circumstances) occurs in verbs of motion where one might otherwise anticipate εἰς. A.T. Robertson gives examples:

Besides in Homer we have ἐν-ὦπα, not to mention the common compound verbs like ἐμ-βάλλω, ἐμ-βαίνω, where one might look for εἰς. Cf. ἐμβάντι εἰς πλοῖον (Mt. 8:23), ὁ ἐμβάψας ἐν τῷ τρυβλίῳ (Mt. 26:23). This so-called pregnant use of ἐν seems very natural after all... Other examples of ἐν in composition in the N.T. with verbs of motion are ἐμβατεύω (Col. 2:18), ἐμβιβάζω (Ac. 27:6), ἐπίπτω (Lu. 10:36 followed by εἰς). The word therefore evidently expresses the idea of ‘within,’ whether of rest or of motion depending on the context.⁴⁶

The ἐν- prefix coupled with the preposition εἰς appears to intensify the motion of hiding the leaven. Contextually, the hiding emphasis likely provides a sinister connotation to the phrase ἐνέκρυψενα εἰς as the woman sneaks the leaven (which represents evil) into the measures of meal. Perhaps a better translation would be that the woman “sneaked [the leaven] into” the meal. The leaven itself has a negative connotation of spoiling corruption, so this parable does not seem to be speaking of a good spiritual

⁴⁴ Some may say that Matthew provides the ἐν- prefix here to differentiate from occurrences of the κρύπτω family in the context (Matt. 13:35, 44). Luke also uses the ἐν- prefix but does not have a parallel to those two verses, so it is more likely that there is a connotation to ἐγκρύπτω εἰς that is not evident in κρύπτω/κρύπτω ἐν.

⁴⁵ A.T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1934), 584–586.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 585. It is worth noting that several examples that Robinson provides in the above quote have intensified connotations—in negative senses, even—of Judas’ betrayal (Matt. 26:23), false worship (Col. 2:18), Paul’s arrest (Acts 27:6), and a robbery (Luke 10:36). In fact, every biblical occurrence of ἐπίπτω has a negative connotation (Matt. 12:11; Luke 10:36; 14:5; 1 Tim. 3:6; Heb. 10:31) as opposed to several neutral and even positive examples of πίπτω (for example, in Matt. 2:11; 13:4, 5, 7, 8; 17:6; 18:26, 29; 26:39).

kingdom growing and permeating an evil world. Instead, the leaven was intentionally and mischievously planted to ruin something big.

Summary

The parable of the leaven essentially repeats the parable of the mustard seed in that it proclaims a wicked system that grows in the interim period. The woman worked the leaven into the meal with menacing intention. Leaven represents corruption and by the end of the parable, an entire inventory of meal—three seahs worth—is ruined. So it is with the world before Messiah returns to put His kingdom on earth. Christ the King is coming and no amount of evil in this current age can stop Him. Since the parable of the leaven depicts an increase of evil on the earth, the disciples can know what to expect of the interim period.

CONCLUSION

The disciples were right in their anticipation of a literal Messianic kingdom. Christians today should also look forward to this kingdom. Dispensationalists are often characterized as holding to a pessimistic view of eschatology, but as bleak as the interim period may seem, it offers comfort that is particular to literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Philosophers have tried to make the most of the current situation, but the fact of the matter is that the world is broken and evil. If this age is the kingdom, then the kingdom also is broken and evil. The biblical description, if taken for its plain sense, offers the Christian hope that is far greater than the current experience. Yes, the world is an evil place, but the Messiah is coming and He will set things right. The parables of the mustard seed and leaven describe a fallen world that awaits the Messianic kingdom. These words of Christ encourage Christians in the interim period to spread the good news that the kingdom is coming and that entrance into the kingdom is available simply through faith alone in Christ alone.

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15-MINUTE CITIES, QUIXOTIC OR CHAOTIC? A LOOK AT THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS PROTOTYPE ECO-COMMUNITIES THROUGH A BIBLICAL LENS

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Keywords: *15-minute cities, 15mCs, urban engineering, urban planning, sustainable proximities, eco-communities, eco-villages*

Abstract: *COVID-19 caused the world to rethink how to conduct society. The pandemic served as the perfect petri dish for social engineers who desired more equitable cultural diversity between people and more biodiversity between humans and the environment. Subsequently, green-minded government officials and political activists stopped asking “What if?” and started asking “What’s stopping us?” Urbanist Carlos Moreno coined the term 15-minute cities to describe his plan to reset existing urban areas and build new communities so that the daily necessities of life, such as work, shopping, education, healthcare, and leisure, can easily be accessed by all of its citizens within a short walk or bike ride. Less car dependency, in their minds, promotes healthy and sustainable living and improves city dwellers’ well-being and quality of life. Though major cities worldwide have taken measures to move in this direction, unfortunately, these community leaders and societal architects have not sufficiently addressed or answered major questions from functional, ethical, and biblical standpoints.*

However, wise counsel is available to them from God's Word. The Bible contains two narratives of past attempts by man (Gen. 6 and 9) to build idyllic societies devoid of God and shows the catastrophic ramifications of such efforts. The Bible gives instructions for all present Christians to be at peace with all men, if possible (Rom. 12:18), and to be model citizens in a community (Rom. 13). The Bible also prophetically warns of two future occasions (Rev. 19:21; 20:9) when men will once again attempt to usurp God and rule the world, only to discover their foolish desires will lead to their fatal destruction.

While the projected societal "ends" are lauded by proponents as worthy, the proposed and actual means are not justifiable. They will lead to increased government regulations and the sacrifice of civil liberties. Without acknowledging God or revering what is contained in His Word, these self-contained communities cannot function well over time on a practical, sociological, or ethical level and will ultimately become Orwellian.

INTRODUCTION

For many urban engineers, COVID-19 was the perfect shot in the arm to inject their climate-change-driven ideological resets into the world. People were forced to work (and worship) from home for months. Virtual meetings supplanted in-person meetings. Telehealth replaced regular visits to the doctor's office. Online classrooms substituted for school facilities. Home delivery services boomed because state and local regulations stonewalled brick-and-mortar shopping for groceries and necessities. The pandemic served as an ideal test case for social engineers who desired to see more equitable cultural diversity between people and more biodiversity between humans and the environment.

After observing the remarkable behavioral conformity to unprecedented mandates and restrictions, further clarion calls have trumpeted moves towards additional urban reorganization and reformation. For

these urban engineers and community activists, the time is now to build and govern population centers through a vast network of *15-minute cities*.

As its moniker denotes, the 15-minute city (15mC), as defined by the term's originator, urbanist Carlos Moreno, "represents an urban model in which the essential needs of residents are accessible on foot or by bicycle within a short perimeter in high-density areas. The *30-minute territory* extends this concept to less densely populated areas where commutes can take a little longer."⁴⁷ Most daily necessities and services, such as work, shopping, education, healthcare, and leisure, can easily be accessed by all of its citizens within a concise amount of time. This approach aims to reduce car dependency, promote healthy and sustainable living, and improve the well-being and quality of life of its city dwellers. Social infrastructure prioritizes schools and parks. Green spaces are developed to promote the mental and physical health of residents.

While less congestion and more convenience sound Edenic, would such man-made utopias bring heaven to our sin-fallen world? Can such cities function practically and ethically well, or will they ultimately become Orwellian? This paper explores and answers these questions by briefly looking at the history of socially engineered communities, glancing at present projects and prototypes, and then examining the future of 15-minute cities through a biblical lens.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 15-MINUTE CITY CONCEPT

The inspiration for 15-minute cities is sourced back to Clarence Perry's neighborhood unit idea in the early 1900s. Perry's motivation was noble: to create more playgrounds across New York City. A catastrophic increase in traffic fatalities was tied to the rapidly growing number of vehicles on the streets. At least one child was killed per day during this

⁴⁷ Carlos Moreno, *The 15-Minute City: A Solution to Saving Our Time and Our Planet* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2024), 14.

time.⁴⁸ Perry's idea, however, evolved into a much more elaborate plan that involved segmenting larger cities into self-contained units away from the "noise of the trains, and out of sight of the smoke and ugliness of industrial plants."⁴⁹ Schools were to be at the neighborhood's center. Arterial streets and shopping centers were located around the perimeter. Ten percent of the land would be dedicated to open spaces and parks. However, as community builders began to develop these neighborhoods, greed and racism reared their ugly heads. The attempt to improve large cities fell victim to shady political maneuvering and segregationist scheming. For example, Robert Moses, the prolific urban planner in New York during the 1920s, bulldozed Black and Latino homes to make way for parks and built highways through the middle of minority neighborhoods. He reputedly ensured that bridges on the parkways connecting NYC to Long Island beaches were low enough to keep city buses, which primarily carried minorities, from passing underneath.⁵⁰

Over the past 50 years, the mantle of metropolitan urban planning has been picked up by humanistic social progressives who see self-sustained neighborhoods as a cure for most societal ills. In the 1980s, an urban design movement called New Urbanism began to take shape to promote environmentally friendly community habits. An organizing body called the Congress for the New Urbanism was founded in 1993. Its Charter of the New Urbanism states, "Urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology, and building practice."⁵¹ Since the early 2000s, this body has become radically more active in promoting sustainability within a community's architecture and energy sources due to global climate change and habitat destruction.⁵²

⁴⁸ Clarence Perry, *The Neighbourhood Unit* (London: Reprinted Routledge/Thoemmes, 1998), 25–44.

⁴⁹ Perry, *The Neighbourhood Unit*, 25–44.

⁵⁰ Ashish Valentine, "The Wrong Complexion for Protection. How Race Shaped America's Roadways and Cities," *NPR*, July 5, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/05/887386869/how-transportation-racism-shaped-america>.

⁵¹ Emily Talen, ed., *Charter of the New Urbanism*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill Education, 2013), vi.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 267ff.

RECENT IMPLEMENTATIONS OF THE 15-MINUTE CITY CONCEPT

As mentioned, a considerable uptick in the interest of 15mCs was seen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. What was once only imagined on a drawing board is now being implemented by municipal boards in major cities worldwide. Below are a few examples.

Paris, France

In 2020, under the leadership of Socialist Mayor Anne Hidalgo, Paris devoted 10% of the city's budget toward making it a 15-minute city. A concerted effort to curb car usage included increasing the price of parking meters, eliminating free parking on certain days, enacting a ban on diesel engines, and removing sections of a highway along the Seine to convert it into a riverside park.⁵³ Goals were established to remove over half of the parking spaces in Paris, exponentially expanding the number of bike lanes and turning roads into green zones by planting tunnels of trees. Hidalgo announced in 2021, "We must forget about crossing Paris from east to west by car."⁵⁴ There are now 746 miles of protected bike lanes—more Parisians bike than drive.⁵⁵

Oxford, England

In 2022, the Oxfordshire County Council's Local Plan 2040 advocated dividing the old, venerable city of Oxford into six 15-minute cities. Since all household essentials would be only a short walk or bike ride away, it implied that citizens no longer needed to own a car. Moreover, traffic filters (cameras) would be installed to read car license plates.

⁵³ Eillie Anzilotti, "Starting May 8, Sundays on the Champs Elysées Will Be a Car-Free Experience," *Blomberg*, April 29, 2016, <https://bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-04-29/paris-will-ban-cars-from-the-road-on-the-first-sunday-of-each-month-to-curb-air-pollution>.

⁵⁴ "Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris and her goal of a green Paris," *The Mayor*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.themayor.eu/en/a/view/anne-hidalgo-the-mayor-of-paris-and-her-goal-for-a-green-city-439>.

⁵⁵ Adele Peters, "How Paris Became a 15-Minute City," *Fast Company*, May 9, 2024, <https://www.fastcompany.com/91119919/how-paris-became-a-15-minute-city>.

Residents still wanting to drive could apply for a permit. However, someone caught driving through a filter without a permit or over 100 days per year would be fined.⁵⁶ The plan attracted worldwide attention and ignited vociferous opposition and protests. As a result, in March 2024, the Oxford City Council removed the controversial phrase *15-minute cities* from the plan, claiming it had become “too toxic and incendiary.” However, Cabinet Member for Planning Louise Upton said the decision to drop the phrase would “make no noticeable difference to our planning decisions.”⁵⁷

Portland, Oregon

Portland was one of the world’s first cities to pursue the idea of walkability, accessibility, and inclusivity. In 2008, its Local Action Plan on Global Warming was launched to cut the city’s greenhouse gas emissions. Strategies included light-rail transit, increasing bicycle commuting, and adding more housing and retail within walkable *20-minute neighborhoods*. \$30 per month in Bike & Walk Bucks was given to city employees who commuted by nonmotorized means.⁵⁸

Another emphasis of The Portland Plan is to ensure that each neighborhood has access to healthy food options. Government measures tackle *food insecurity*, the inability to obtain nutritious food conveniently and affordably for all citizens. The city admits that local authorities do not have much power to choose where supermarkets or grocery stores decide to build. However, it can restrict where stores are built through their zoning code. Suppose a grocery store chain wants to build a new store in a vibrant part of the city. In that case, the city government can

⁵⁶ “Joint Statement from Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council on Oxford’s Traffic Filters,” *Oxford City Council*, Dec. 7, 2022, <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/joint-statement-from-oxfordshire-county-council-and-oxford-city-council-on-oxford-traffic-filters/>.

⁵⁷ Ellie Ames, “‘Toxic’ 15-Minute City Phrase Cut from Oxford Local Plan,” *LocalGov*, March 8, 2024, <https://www.localgov.co.uk/Toxic-15-minute-city-phrase-cut-from-Oxford-local-plan/59019>.

⁵⁸ Philip Langdon, “Portland pursues the 20-Minute Neighborhood,” *Congress of New Urbanism*, Sept. 1, 2008, <https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/portland-pursues-20-minute-neighborhood>’9.

nix their plans unless they also agree to build a store in a lower-income area, even though they would have to absorb a higher percentage of loss from retail shrinkage.

Portland's Plan also discourages residential land ownership. New housing projects are expected to develop four housing units per lot instead of one. Thus, higher population densities per square mile effectively cram people into housing so public green spaces are not violated.⁵⁹

PROTOTYPE ECO-CITIES EMPLOYING THE 15-MINUTE CITY CONCEPT

As depicted in the previous section, the transition of an existing metropolitan area into a 15-minute city forces private individuals and businesses to give up a certain level of previously enjoyed personal liberty in exchange for civically achieving stated environmental and egalitarian objectives. But what about the ever-growing number of brand-new eco-communities being built? To what degree are these planners, builders, and officials implementing societal safeguards to enforce and maintain livability standards? Below are examples.

Quayside Toronto

Quayside, a 12-acre waterfront community, was initially developed in 2017 by Sidewalk Labs, whose parent company is Alphabet (Google). *Sidewalk Toronto* featured roads for driverless cars, an environmentally friendly design, and an innovative infrastructure. The community was a real-life laboratory for the latest and most remarkable technologies. Massive data was collected from the citizenry's thoughts and actions for ongoing improvements. But something happened that community designers failed to anticipate.⁶⁰ Citizens were unhappy with the

⁵⁹ Langdon, "Portland pursues the 20-Minute Neighborhood."

⁶⁰ Michael Olivera, "Sidewalk Labs 'hadn't foreseen' data concerns by Canadians in designing Toronto neighbourhood," *The Canadian Press*, March 20, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4095904/sidewalk-labs-toronto-data>.

surveillance level (thousands of cameras) by which they were being monitored and with the unabashed sharing of personal data at their expense. Thus, they expressed a sizable pushback due to privacy concerns. Conversely, Sidewalk Labs was concerned with how it would recuperate its sizable investment of funds and technology without data harvesting.⁶¹

In March 2021, after several years of negotiations, Sidewalk Labs decided to cut its losses and pull out from the urban experiment. In 2023, Quayside Toronto is giving it another go with a new development team that wants to recapture the community's original intent.⁶² However, since many of the latest buildings and skyscrapers are being built out of timber, hopes are that the city doesn't go up in smoke again (literally).

The Line, Neom, Saudi Arabia

The Line is a linear smart city that will span 106 miles yet measures only 220 yards wide. The concept is the brainchild of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who admittedly wants to leave his mark upon the desert landscape in the same vein as the pharaohs of Egypt. According to plans, the tallest buildings will soar higher than the Empire State Building. It is expected to house 9 million people upon completion and 1.5 million by 2030. There will be no cars or roads. Residents will run errands with a 5-minute walk. High-speed rail will carry people from end to end in 20 minutes.⁶³ Lest people think that the motivation for such a herculean effort is for the good of the planet, architects have estimated that Saudi Arabia's glass and

⁶¹ Blayne Haggart and Natasha Tusikov, "Quayside Toronto project proves that smart city talks must be transparent," *The Conversation*, May 15, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/quayside-toronto-project-proves-that-smart-city-talks-must-be-transparent-96323>.

⁶² DCN-JOC News Services, "Developers unveil latest plan for Toronto Quayside," *DCN-JOC News Services*, Feb. 8, 2023, <https://canada.constructconnect.com/dcn/news/projects/2023/02/developers-unveil-latest-plan-for-toronto-quayside>. Note: a cursory search by the author found no churches listed within this 12-acre community.

⁶³ Ronald E. Yates, "15-Minute Cities: Utopias? Or a Brave New World of Domination?," *Ronald E. Yates*, May 9, 2023, <https://ronaldyatesbooks.com/2023/05/15-minute-cities-a-brave-new-world-of-domination>.

steel-filled plan for The Line would generate 1.8 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, the equivalent of almost three years of Saudi Arabia's total annual emissions.⁶⁴

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS OVER THE 15-MINUTE CITY CONCEPT

Despite the best intentions, any man-made eco-utopia can quickly descend into a maddening dystopia. As 15mCs gain momentum worldwide, functional and ethical questions must be asked. The movement should be meticulously scrutinized using biblical lenses.

Functional Questions and Concerns

How can people be convinced to move to a city that does not have an established economy?

A major problem with several new eco-cities is their ability to attract residents to move from their current living conditions into an experimental city. The Saudis launched the *King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC)* in 2005 as a manufacturing hub housing 2 million people by 2035. Planners envisioned a canal system and lush greenery to draw in prospective residents. Almost two decades and billions of dollars later, the city's population hovers only around 10,000.⁶⁵ In 2016, *Forest City* in Malaysia was built to house 700,000 foreigners from Singapore and China. In 2022, the \$100 billion development was called a ghost town, possessing less than 5% of the expected residents.⁶⁶ A sustainable city of the future inaugurated in Senegal by R&B singer Akon in 2020 is

⁶⁴ Ciara Nugent, "So-Called 'Green' Cities Promise a Climate-Friendly Utopia. The Reality Is a Lot Messier," *TIME*, May 10, 2023, <https://time.com/6278511/green-new-cities-climate>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Marielle Descalsota, "Malaysia's \$100 billion luxury estate was supposed to be a 'living paradise.' Six years into development, it's a ghost town full of empty skyscrapers and deserted roads," *Insider*, May 2022, <https://www.insider.com/ghost-town-malaysia-forest-city-china-developer-estate-photos-2022-6>.

attempting to launch through a massive funding effort by selling cryptocurrency. At the end of 2022, it was reported that only goats inhabited the land.⁶⁷

Without a dense population of inhabitants, 15-minute city start-ups struggle to have the human capital and the economy necessary to be the dream cities they advertised. This phenomenon shows that most people are willing to move their families to a new location based on perceived opportunities to increase wealth or obtain professional advancement. However, the attempt to lure many inhabitants to an unproven city for strictly environmental motivations does not appear to be a strong draw.

How are civic leaders, managers, and supervisors selected for the start-up city?

Building a brand-new sustainable city requires many workers, supervisors, and administrators. Like-minded leaders must be selected to maintain the founders' vision for their community. The city's leaders and law enforcement will also push the predominant ideology propagated by the city's founders. There may be a diversity of ethnicities, backgrounds, and social classes among the leaders and police officers. However, due to the financial investments of founders and shareholders into the community, any diverse ideology or opinion that strays too far away from the community's original intent and threatens its peace and unity cannot be tolerated. Thus, one's belief system must align with the community's values to advance positionally, professionally, profit-wise, or politically. Like-minded leaders can garner more responsibility and authority. Like-minded merchants and professionals can become wealthier and more successful. In time, if not remedied, the city whose original vision included aspirations for *equality* will wake up one day to find that *some are more equal than others*.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Jonathan Griffin, "Akon's Wakanda, grazing goats and a crumbling crypto dream," *BBC*, Dec. 24, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63988368>.

⁶⁸ George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1945), 134.

Who determines what is affordable? What about the poor? How is inflation mitigated?

Georgia Pozoukidou and Zoi Chatziyiannaki write in the journal *Sustainability* that the creation of dense, walkable urban cores often leads to gentrification (the attraction of higher-income individuals into an area) or displacement of lower-income residents to outlying neighborhoods due to rising property values. They stress the importance of having affordable housing provisions in each neighborhood.⁶⁹ Rent controls, however, circumvent the free market system. In the competition for a limited supply of living quarters, increased demand will arise from people willing to pay higher prices to secure the most desirable places to live (or to live away from “less desirable” people). Housing property owners and landlords have a natural craving to make the best return on their investment. Thus, the wealthy will eventually live where they want to live, and all others will have to compete for lesser desirable housing options. If not remedied, the green mindset that helped fuel the building of such eco-communities will eventually be supplanted with the green of envy.

What will happen when people lose mobility due to health or injury and cannot travel 15 minutes to receive the required products or services?

As people age or become injured, the possibility of them walking or riding a bicycle for 15 minutes becomes less likely. If these people live by themselves or with others who are non-mobile, an extensive system of delivery services, either public or private, will need to be established and implemented to ensure their well-being. Medical services that supersede mere telehealth consultations must also be considered. This would require ambulances or emergency vehicles that can transport someone to a hospital or clinic, not just a bicycle or scooter. Similarly, police and firefighters need motorized vehicles to keep this car-free society safe.

⁶⁹ Georgia Pozoukidou and Zoi Chatziyiannaki, “15-Minute City: Decomposing the New Urban Planning Eutopia,” *Sustainability* 13, no. 2 (2021): 928, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020928>.

Also, delivery trucks of food and goods from outside farms and manufacturing plants will be required to navigate through the city's streets to supply stores, markets, and restaurants.

What if a sizable number of workers within a contained community choose not to work or organize a labor strike?

An able-bodied labor force that contributes positively is necessary to the well-being of any society. But what if a 15mC's economic life flow is hampered due to disinterested or disgruntled workers? When the U.S. tried to return to normal after the COVID-19 crisis, a unique situation now referred to as The Great Resignation occurred. In September 2021, one-quarter of workers aged 20–34, “some 14 million Americans, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics ... were neither working nor looking for work.”⁷⁰ Several factors contributed to the exodus, including pandemic burnout and dissatisfaction with wages and working conditions. Such a scenario could be catastrophic for the welfare of a self-contained eco-community.

Ethical Questions and Concerns

How will systems of justice treat citizens and businesses who break the community's rules?

Individuals who repeatedly transgress municipal laws, rules, or policies must be dealt with. Someone who is behaving contrary to community dictates may be forced to leave. Or, like what is currently being implemented in China, they may be penalized with a low social credit score that can physically or digitally limit one's freedoms, access, and opportunities within the community. Hixson mentions an example of such punitive action: “In China, all charge stations are state-owned, and you must use your digital wallet app and scan the QR code on the screen to charge your car. So, the Chinese government can shut you down at

⁷⁰ Raisa Bruner, “Young People Are Leaving Their Jobs in Record Numbers—And Not Going Back,” *TIME*, October 29, 2021, accessed May 19, 2024, <https://time.com/6111245/young-workers-quitting>.

any time.”⁷¹ Such a deterrent would be highly effective, especially for those who wish to periodically leave the confines of the city to attend a sporting event, enjoy a museum, explore a national park, or visit extended family in another city.

How are drugs, alcohol, and sex trades to be controlled?

Decisions will need to be made within 15mCs concerning whether to tolerate, moderate, or outright ban societal influences such as drugs, alcohol, and prostitution. If the current practices and beliefs of most green advocates are any indication, these startup green societies could be open to almost any vice that brings sensual pleasure to its practitioners. Sadly, in the research for this paper, none of the planned 15-minute cities designate any real estate for churches or houses of worship. Even the seminal book on the subject, *The 15-Minute City* by Carlos Moreno, fails to mention the word “church” a single time within its 276 pages.⁷² A city devoid of the light from Bible-believing churches will eventually disintegrate into darkness.

Will population growth and a tighter population density lead to more crime and violence?

Without de-growth measures instituted by a startup green community, population growth is bound to occur. Suppose more and more 15mCs are not created to handle the resultant growth so that people can be transferred out of one community and into another. In that case, individuals will feel like one of many sardines being cooped up inside a can. As has occurred in New York, Chicago, and other metropolitan cities during the heavy immigration years of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a rapid population influx can tax civic resources and turn prosperous communities of opportunity into hellish slums dominated by competition and corruption. Harvard professor Edward Glaeser sees this same scenario playing out in 15mCs.

⁷¹ J.B. Hixson, *Spirit of the Antichrist: The Gathering Cloud of Deception Vol.2* (Falcon, CO: Not By Works, Inc., 2022), 142.

⁷² Moreno, *The 15-Minute City*.

But the basic concept of a 15-minute city is not really a city at all. It's an enclave—a ghetto—a subdivision. All cities should be archipelagos of neighborhoods, but these neighborhoods must be connected. Cities should be machines for connecting humans—rich and poor, black and white, young and old. Otherwise, they fail in their most basic mission and they fail to be places of opportunity.⁷³

Popular Canadian psychology professor Jordan Peterson tweeted his thoughts concerning 15-minute cities: “The idea that neighborhoods should be walkable is lovely. The idea that idiot tyrannical bureaucrats can decide by fiat where you're ‘allowed’ to drive is perhaps the worst imaginable perversion of that idea—and, make no mistake, it's part of a well-documented plan.”⁷⁴ Without viable answers to such questions, promising eco-communities can quickly degrade into putrefying green slums.

Biblical Questions and Concerns

Is the inherent sinfulness of man taken into consideration?

Leading proponents of 15-minute cities view their concept as solving many societal ills that have plagued communities throughout history. Embedded within their societal ideals is the belief in the inherent goodness of man. Thus, these 15mC evangelists mistakenly have the wrong savior:

Inclusive and socially affluent neighborhoods in a just city. FMC neighborhoods are, by definition, socially mixed and rich urban environments.

⁷³ Edward Glaeser, “The 15-minute city is a dead end cities must be places of opportunity for everyone,” *London School of Economics and Political Science*, May 28, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/covid19/2021/05/28/the-15-minute-city-is-a-dead-end-cities-must-be-places-of-opportunity-for-everyone>.

⁷⁴ Jordan B. Peterson, “The idea that neighborhoods should be walkable is lovely. The idea that idiot tyrannical bureaucrats can decide by fiat where you're ‘allowed’ to drive is perhaps the worst imaginable perversion of that idea—and, make no mistake, it's part of a well-documented plan,” Twitter Post, December 31, 2022, <https://twitter.com/jordanbpeterson/status/1609255646993457153>.

Inclusive or ubiquitous societies provide employment and housing opportunities for everyone to ensure economic prosperity that will, in turn, contribute to reductions in crime, violence, and poverty. In economic terms, inclusion concerns the issue of providing equal opportunities for employment, education, lifelong learning, financial resources, and so on, and to ensure a fair share in rising prosperity. The spatial dimension concerns accessibility to a wide array of affordable housing options, transportation options, and urban services and amenities; it also involves the regulation and control of available land and housing stock. The FMC concept aspires to create neighborhoods that are available and affordable to everyone and counterbalance the risk of creating a socially polarized city.⁷⁵

In many of their writings, they boil the assured success of these communities down to three Ds: Density, Diversity, and Digitalization.⁷⁶ However, in their humanist zeal, they forget an essential D that more than counterbalances the others: *depravity*. The 15mC concept is built upon a sandy foundation that deifies the creation and dismisses the Creator. In their minds, what is needed to diminish the moral ills of society is to create the right kind of city with the right type of leadership promoting the right kind of values within the right kind of educational system. Conversely, the Bible has a different perspective on the matter:

The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. (Ps. 14:1)⁷⁷

Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins. (Ecc. 7:20)

⁷⁵ Georgia Pozoukidou and Margarita Angelidou, “Urban Planning in the 15-Minute City: Revisited under Sustainable and Smart City Developments until 2030,” *Smart Cities* 5, no. 4 (2022): 1356–1375, <https://doi.org/10.3390/smartcities5040069>.

⁷⁶ Zaheer Allam, et al., “The ‘15-Minute City’ concept can shape a net-zero urban future,” *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 9, no. 126 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01145-0>.

⁷⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural citations are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 update.

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9)

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Cor. 2:14)

The U.S. Supreme Court decisions to remove school-sponsored prayer in 1962 (*Engel v. Vitale*) and school-sponsored Bible reading in 1963 (*Abington School District v. Schempp*) from public schools have allowed various forms of humanism and hedonism to fill the void. Francis Schaeffer pointed out:

To whatever degree a society allows the teaching of the Bible to bring forth its natural conclusions, it is able to have form and freedom in society and government ... So, to the extent to which biblical teaching is practiced, one can control the despotism of the majority vote or the despotism of one person or group.⁷⁸

The intentional elimination of the Bible from these planned cities will leave its citizens dead in their sins and trespasses. Their decision to worship the creation instead of the Creator will have serious consequences. The Apostle Paul aptly describes such people:

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Rom. 1:28–32)

⁷⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976), 110.

The absence of objective moral standards as taught in the Bible ultimately results in the gravitation toward everyone doing “what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25b). Thus, the indoctrination of Darwinian thought can lead to a survival-of-the-fittest mindset amid societal stresses and upheavals. When the quixotic becomes chaotic, more authoritarianism is unleashed upon the populace to bring order.

***Since man has been created to worship,
what will he worship in these green cities?***

Ecclesiastes 3:11 explains that God has set eternity in the hearts of men. Even without a church or a Bible, mankind will be drawn toward some form of worship. Since biblical Christianity is seen as divisive, eco-community founders and leaders may propagate some ecumenism that will unify all their citizens; as Karl Marx wrote, religion is the opium of the masses.⁷⁹ The Bible speaks of a one-world religion in the Tribulation period, but definite shadows of such a dynamic are gaining momentum in the present world. Like-minded, community-unifying worship may initially be nature-centered (Rom. 1:25), but there will come a day in which a world leader will arise upon the scene, take the global reins of control, and demand to be worshipped as a god: “And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying ‘Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?’ ” (Rev.13:3b–4). Anyone who fails to worship the coming world leader will be killed. The Bible continues:

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. (Rev. 13:16–17)

⁷⁹ Karl Marx, “Introduction,” *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1843), ed. J. O’Malley, trans. A. Jolin and J. O’Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

Such a future system would be much easier for the Antichrist to implement if most of the world was already organized and controlled within 15-minute communities and 30-minute territories.

Will evangelism be accepted in these startup green communities, or will all missionary activity be halted?

With a predominance of socialists and atheists leading the charge for these green prototype communities, there is no reason to believe they would look favorably upon an omnipotent Competitor who promises to create *His own* new earth one day. Anything they might deem as potentially causing discord and disunity in their cities must be suppressed. Since the opponents of God commonly view biblical Christianity to be *a cancer*, it would be administratively prudent to require its surgical removal in the municipality before metastasis.

Such antagonism would bring internal conflict upon believers who have a mandate from God to spread the Good News of Christ (Matt. 28:19–20). Living in subjection to the governing authorities is biblical (Rom. 13:1–7). However, any community mandate or regulation that outlaws evangelism, Bible teaching, or church assembly must be resisted (Acts 4:19–20).

Persecution would also have dire consequences for the community. Paul illustrates this in a timeless truth: “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:14, 17). God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). The suppression of the truth of God in unrighteousness facilitates the incursion of the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18).

The Bible is bookended by man-made attempts to create one-world societies on earth in defiance of God. In Genesis 6, this resulted in a worldwide deluge *over* the populous, and in Genesis 11, it led to a global dispersion of the populous. Then, in Revelation 13, a future time is prophesied when evil men will try to unite the world and usher in a global godless society. But this time, God’s own Son will return to the earth to usurp the usurpers and establish *His own* kingdom on the earth (Rev. 20:2–7). There will be a significant difference between this “1MillK”

(1 Millennium Kingdom) and the 15mCs: “Behold, a King will reign righteously, and princes will rule justly” (Isa. 32:1). Then, in the eternal state, every city will be *sustainable*, sustained forever by the One who “sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:3 NET).

CONCLUSION

The 15-minute city concept had noble origins. To solve the increasingly tragic traffic problem that plagued poorly planned NYC neighborhoods in the 1920s, Clarence Perry devised a “neighborhood nuclei” plan so that schools, places of worship, retail, and services could be near housing units. He considered *family*, *faith*, and *free-market capitalism* to be the three foundational pillars of American society, and he strived to integrate them into each of his communities.⁸⁰

However, as urban planning progressed through the years, it slowly digressed into leftist progressivism and secular humanism. Many urban activists now view Perry’s three foundational pillars as *enemies of the state*. The nuclear family has had a meltdown, Mother Nature has replaced Father God, and capitalism has become a dirty word.

This is the unfortunate backdrop behind the move toward 15-minute cities and prototype eco-communities. Those investing the time, effort, and finances to create these communities are politically active, ensuring the rules and the rule-makers are of their choosing. As more significant levels of power and control are exerted, greater degrees of compliance are expected. As public laws increase, personal liberties decrease. There may come a day in the not-so-distant future when the First Amendment’s five rights (freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition) are lost. That would be the darkest day in our nation’s history.

We are to be lights wherever God providentially places us, even in a 15-minute city or a 30-minute territory. As His ambassadors, we must remember that this world is not our home. We do not seek security from man-made schemes or man-built utopias. We, like Abraham, are

⁸⁰ Perry, *The Neighbourhood Unit*, 25–44.

to be looking “for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10).

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REVIEWS

The Essential Archaeological Guide to Bible Lands. By Titus Kennedy. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2024. Hardcover. 480 pp. \$34.99. ISBN: 978-0-7369-8470-6.

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Introduction

Dr. Titus Kennedy's latest book, *The Essential Archaeological Guide to Bible Lands*, is an attractive volume full of well-researched information. It is neatly bound in a full-color hardcover and has 480 pages. Helpful illustrations, including maps, site plans, and full-color photographs of artifacts and locations, are generously scattered throughout the text. The volume's contents comprise five chapters, each representing a geographical region. Each chapter is sub-divided into a series of entries, each addressing a specific location within that region.

Dr. Kennedy (Ph.D., University of South Africa) is an experienced field archaeologist, researcher, and professor. He is well-traveled, and most of the illustrations in the book are his own photographs taken on location during his travels.

This volume comprises descriptions of 57 biblically and archaeologically significant locations situated within five different regions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean. The contents cover a wide span of time, space, and culture, from some of the world's earliest cities in Mesopotamia to Rome in the height of the Roman Empire and beyond. Most of the locations represent specific biblical cities, with the exceptions being Sinai (a region), Ararat (a mountain range), and Malta (an island). Most of the entries deal with known archaeological sites which archaeologists have identified with some

certainty. A few exceptions exist, such as Sodom and Ai, biblical cities for which multiple candidate sites exist. In these cases, the author lists all the candidate sites, describes the nature of the controversy and advocates for his preferred site. Each location described in the volume is a standalone entry with a selected bibliography.

The introductory section discusses the purpose of the book, which is "... to provide a broader picture of the history and archaeology behind the biblical texts and to fill a niche with regard to information available" (p. 14). This section also addresses the known difficulties in identifying biblical sites and the problem of differences in dating schemes among scholars. It explains that this book follows widely accepted chronological systems. Additionally, the introductory section tackles the question of the historical accuracy of the biblical text. This volume is written from the viewpoint that the Bible contains reliable historical information.

Overview of the Positives of the Book

The Essential Archaeological Guide to Bible Lands delves into the historical, archaeological, and biblical data associated with each of its included biblical locations. While it is far from a comprehensive catalog of either biblical or archaeological sites, the book focuses on 57 carefully selected locations with both biblical and archaeological significance. Each entry touches on a wide range of topics relating to each location, including themes such as the site's geographical location, historical context, biblical connections, name meaning, archaeological findings, inscriptions, mythology, culture, religion, and significant historical characters. The author summarizes and simplifies the information relating to each location, weaving together biblical, archaeological, and textual data into an understandable unified narrative. Each entry includes a selected bibliography of excellent sources.

Although each section stands alone, the book's overall flow is logical, moving from regions with Old Testament connections to those associated with the New Testament. The central chapter of the volume deals with the Levant, the heart of the Bible lands, effectively bridging the transition between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Overview of the Negatives of the Book

This volume is well-written and an excellent resource. However, a few additions might have improved the book. A table of archaeological periods,

matching the chronological designations in various regions with absolute dates, would have been a valuable addition since the different names for periods in different regions can be very confusing, even for those familiar with biblical chronology. Additionally, an index of key terms would have been helpful for those who wish to use this volume as a research tool. Finally, a short introduction to each chapter providing an overview of the region as a whole would have been a welcome addition to the text.

Conclusion

The Essential Archaeological Guide to Bible Lands provides an excellent overview of the cities and regions that form the backdrop for the events of the Bible. Its format is easy to read since it is broken into standalone segments. This volume will be a helpful sourcebook for anyone interested in biblical archaeology and the historical context of biblical events. While almost anyone can enjoy and profit from the volume, it is best suited to someone with at least a basic knowledge of the history, chronology, and geography of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean.

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Hermeneutics for Everyone: A Practical Guide for Reading and Studying Your Bible. By Daniel Goepfrich. Forward by Paul Miles. Paperback. Kyiv: ISBH Press, 2024. 206 pp. \$14.95. ISBN: 978-1-947022-13-3.

Reviewed by:

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Hermeneutics for Everyone is a practical, down-to-earth resource. It serves as a tool to help everyone who reads it understand what their Bible is and how to study it. Dr. Daniel Goepfrich has three goals in mind for this book:

1. To be a solid teaching and reference resource that you can use for years to come.
2. To be useful for people at all levels of Christian maturity, from middle school through adulthood.
3. To be very practical and hands-on, not just theoretical.

Whether you have been reading the Bible for years or never at all, this book will equip you with the tools to understand for yourself what God says in His Word. In his introduction, the author points out that there are numerous books, courses, and study guides about the Bible that are available for people everywhere, but he also points out that the Bible itself is the only tool we need for growth in our Christian walk. As he states: “Every Christian should be taught and well-versed in the process of carefully interpreting the Scriptures, so they can fulfill their ministry in their families, local churches, and anywhere they can in this physical and internet-connected world.” This book stands apart as an outstanding resource because rather than simply giving you an interpretation of Scripture, it equips you to form your own interpretation of Scripture, test that interpretation, and submit to God’s Word in your life. There are abundant hermeneutics textbooks available, but this work stands apart because it is written with the distinct purpose of being practical for everyone!

This book has 11 chapters and is formatted so that you will have ample room to take notes. As the author introduces the information, he has designed “do it yourself” sections to help you test what is being taught. Additionally, the author has added a helpful glossary. This glossary is an exceptional addition to the book, particularly if you come across something with which you are unfamiliar. As theological words and terms are introduced, he provides definitions for many of these.

Chapter one is an introduction to what the Bible is. This is an essential place to begin because it establishes a correct foundation on which to build. The author explains how the Bible is divided and why, as well as when and where it was written. He provides an introduction to the languages and forms of literature in which the Bible was written and the implications of this on the study of God’s Word. Chapter two deals with the inspiration of Scripture, understanding what that means, and why it is crucial for everyone to understand clearly.

Chapter three deals with Bible translations, explaining why there are different translations, their differences, and how to choose which ones to use. In chapter four, the author begins introducing Bible study. He explains the difference between deductive and inductive study, defines what hermeneutics are, and evaluates the different hermeneutics people choose to use, explaining what they are.

In chapter five, the author introduces the “ACTS” method of studying the Bible and explains how it can benefit you as you study God’s Word. Chapter six deals with step one: “Ask questions.” Chapter seven deals with step two: “Compose your thoughts.” Chapter eight deals with step three: “Test your conclusions.” Chapter nine deals with step four: “Submit to God’s Word.” When you take the time to work through each of these steps in order carefully, you will be amazed at how much better an understanding you will have of any given passage that you put the work into!

In chapter ten, the author explains that if you follow the information presented in this book, some conclusions will be naturally reached. There are four conclusions that the author emphasizes: God’s purpose, God’s method, God’s people, and God’s gift. Each of these is dealt with in Scripture, yet there is so much misunderstanding as to the correct conclusions about these four things.

Chapter eleven presents two additional ways to study the Bible in addition to the ACTS method explained earlier. These two different types of study are “Bible Surveys” and “Topical Studies.” The author presents valuable information that will help you understand how to do these types of studies on your own.

After the conclusion, the author includes an excellent appendix that addresses the question, “What are dispensations?” This is a great overview that will help you understand what a dispensation is and why understanding dispensations is important. It also provides an overview of dispensations that can be observed in Scripture.

The importance of hermeneutics cannot be stated strongly enough. Hermeneutics plays a significant role in the life and walk of a believer. Only a consistently biblical hermeneutic will result in a consistent understanding of God’s design for the believer, and this work is an exciting tool that serves as a tremendous aid in learning how to handle the Word of God in a biblical manner! This material is vital for everyone and is presented in a way that anyone can understand and interact with. Dr. Goepfrich has composed a practical guide to studying the Bible. It is hoped that many individuals will utilize this material as they engage in personal study of God’s Word!

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A People Heeds Not Scripture: Allusion in Judges. By Jillian L. Ross. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023. Paperback. 340 pp. \$45.00. ISBN: 978-1-6667-9594-3.

Reviewed by:
Paul Miles

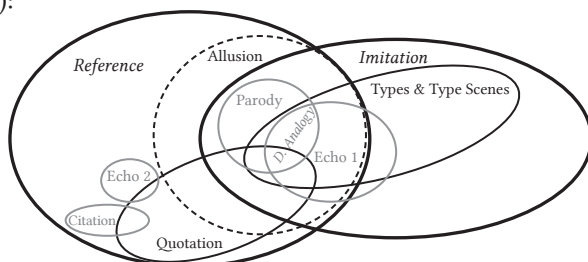
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Jillian Ross is an adjunct professor of biblical studies and director over the Biblical Languages Program at Liberty University. This book is an adaptation of her 2015 Ph.D. dissertation at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 has three chapters to develop three things: a methodology to define literary allusion, a taxonomy of literary terms pertaining to allusion, and a poetics for inner-biblical allusion. Part 2 divides the narrative of Judges into six sections, each of which is handled in a chapter that catalogues allusions in Judges to the Pentateuch, with an emphasis on Deuteronomy over the so-called Tetrateuch. Part 3 is on poetics and develops a poetics of allusion in Judges and a compositional strategy of Judges. Three appendices follow to discuss reduction-critical matters, a comparison of Judges to the Pentateuch, and the Pentateuch to Judges.

Part 1 uses some rather technical language, which is appropriate, considering it came from a dissertation literature review. Ross's concluding definition for *literary allusion* is as follows:

A *literary allusion* is a literary device with an *indirect reference* utilized by an author in such a way that textual markers are placed into the alluding text in order to activate meaning in a precursor so that the rhetorical relationship between the two contexts can be determined and the meaning resulting from the graft into the alluding text can be comprehended. (p. 18)

The resulting taxonomy of literary devices is illustrated in the following Venn diagram (p. 35):



It can be a puzzling endeavor to classify allusions among other references and imitations, but Ross does well to explain the issues amidst the academic discussion.

Part 2 makes up the bulk of the book (pp. 55–227) and discusses the allusions in Judges. A key section of this part is chapter 4, which handles the prologue (Judg. 1–2). Deuteronomy 7 and its instructions on *ḥērem* practices receive special attention here (pp. 56–65), as this chapter “is the most important Pentateuchal text in this project” (p. 56), but still, several other allusions are pulled from the rest of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch as a whole. The rest of part 2 divides the Book of Judges into sections based on lead characters (the “in” judges of Judges 3–5, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Micah, and Gibeah), then goes through certain pericopes in those chapters and relevant parallels in the Pentateuch with relevant analyses and conclusions. Ross provides several charts throughout the book to compare the allusive text in Judges with the Pentateuchal text(s) to which allusion refers, often providing Hebrew text for insight. These charts are certain to be of aid to the student of Judges who may otherwise miss key parallels in the Hebrew Bible.

Regarding the “in” judges, Ross states “For the first three judges, literary allusion is not used to draw out the theme of Israel’s disobedience to the Law” (p. 105). Another key aspect of this chapter is the commentary on Judges 3:1–6, a passage which “served as the objective measure from which to deduce Israel’s fidelity during each cycle of the major judges” (p. 189). Chapter 6 on Gideon is the longest chapter (pp. 106–147)—and appropriately so—as his story is the first to use allusion to expose Israel’s disobedience to Scripture, with laws of idolatry and warfare taking center stage. Chapter 7 on Jephthah has an interesting feature as it deals with some liberal theories that put the authorship of Judges before Deuteronomy or during the Hellenistic period; following David Jansen, Ross develops a case for allusions to Deuteronomy 12 and Numbers 21 that supports a single-hand exilic Deuteronomy (pp. 159–174). In chapter 8 on Samson, Ross goes beyond the standard Nazarite allusion to Numbers 6 and develops a case for type-scene elements that trace back to Genesis. Chapter 9 delves into the Micah narrative and explores further Israel’s failure to heed Deuteronomy 12 with an emphasis on “place theology” and the extent to which every sort of person was in violation. Chapter 10 on Gibeah demonstrates that Judges alludes

to Deuteronomy 13:13–19 to show how all the tribes of Israel neglected Scripture. Throughout part 2, Ross provides sufficient examples to support her claim that the frequent references to the Law in Judges reveal the extent to which Israel neglected the Scriptures.

Part 3 on poetics wraps up the book. Ross concludes that while the book of Judges does not use frequent quotations of the Law, it does trigger allusions often with stock phrases, structural markers, and lexical markers. The allusions connect Judges to the Law and support the theme of the book, that the people did not heed Scripture. Ross's conclusions on allusions in Judges are supported well in part 2.

Appendix A on redaction-critical matters “discusses reasons for the priority of the Pentateuchal texts alluded to in the book of Judges” (p. 251). Several critical scholars put the compilation of Judges before the completion of the Pentateuch, which is a problematic claim considering the evidence for intentional allusions in Judges to the previously written Torah. Such accusations are typically “highly speculative” (p. 254), “speculative reconstruction” (p. 258), “untenable” (p. 262), and often result from reading the text “without literary sensitivities” (p. 266). Ross's defense of the priority of the Pentateuchal texts is consistently scholarly, logical, and conservative.

The book presupposes an understanding of Hebrew and uses rather technical language surrounding literary theory, textual criticism, and compositional theory. The academic tone is appropriate considering the context of the book; however, the resulting content will likely be inaccessible to many lay readers.

Pneumatikos readers will find *A People Heeds Not Scripture* to be edifying as an apologetic for Pentateuchal priority, as an instructive on intertextuality, and as a commentary on Judges. Progressive revelation is a cornerstone to the hermeneutics that results in dispensationalism and this book demonstrates a fine study of Judges through the lens of progressive revelation. The methodology laid out for allusive intertextuality is beneficial to all students of internal hermeneutics and opens the door for more study in other portions of biblical literature. As a commentary, this book is unique in that it does not go verse-by-verse, but rather brings out intertextual insight from every section of Judges.

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Interpretive Insights from the Genitive Absolute in the Greek New Testament. By Mark Perkins. Fort Dodge, IA: Grace Acres Press, 2023. Paperback. 299 pp. \$21.00. ISBN: 978-1-60265-095-4.

Reviewed by:

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When someone who has spent decades studying the original language of Scripture sets out to explain every occurrence of a particular grammatical construction in the New Testament, there certainly will be benefits for himself and others. Mark Perkins has undertaken this task with the genitive absolute in the Greek New Testament.

In his brief introduction, Perkins gives his understanding of the function and semantics of the genitive absolute (GA). He provides its common syntax definition, that is, a participle and noun or pronoun, both in the genitive case, which refers to another clause even though it is not grammatically connected (p. 3). Unlike the traditional Greek grammars, Perkins sees a function inherent in the GA construction that “makes nonverbal communication *about* another clause, ... as facial expressions, body language, or verbal intonation all do” (p. 2). He observes that these constructions always express contrast with the referenced clause, meaning that the mood expressed by the GA (tranquility, goodness, etc.) signals to the reader that an alternate mood is coming (chaos, evil, etc.; p. 4).

Perkins explains his analysis clearly and approaches his task methodically. As a result, the book is accessible to anyone with a first-year understanding of biblical Greek. Following his introduction are eight chapters that analyze every GA he has identified in the New Testament, one chapter for each Gospel author, the book of Acts, Paul’s epistles, the book of Hebrews, and Peter’s epistles. Each chapter concludes with observations about that author’s use of the GA. The final chapter summarizes Perkins’ observations about the use of the GA in the New Testament. Finally, he adds two appendices: one laying out a step-by-step guide for the exegete to interpret this construction, and one that provides some extra-biblical examples.

Several features of the analysis chapters can be quite useful to the reader. For each GA, the Greek text where it occurs is displayed first, with enough

context to include the clause to which it refers in almost every case. At times more than one GA will be included in the same passage being analyzed when they appear in close proximity to each other. Second, Perkins adds his analysis of the tense and semantic category of each GA's participle, along with the genre of the text where it occurs. Third, he provides his own translation of the given Greek text. These three features of the analysis keep the reader attuned to the underlying data for the commentary that follows.

Finally, the analysis of the passage containing the GA concludes with Perkins' commentary on the text and its context. Often, the summary of the context is extensive, providing a good overview of the book or section where the GA occurs. Occasionally, his exegetical observations are particularly insightful. For example, the parallels between John 8:30 and 12:37 that Perkins observes (pp. 127–30) suggest John's structural organization of his Gospel, which an exegete might easily miss.

Throughout this book, Perkins engages the reader with careful attention to details the author includes in his text. Often an author's comments about an event include "scene-setter" participles (p. 5) that give pertinent context for what follows. Careful exegesis considers how grammatical features such as these function in the text, with the goal of discerning their contribution to a proper grasp of the author's intended meaning. Perkins is right to draw attention to what a reader might otherwise overlook in an effort to find the main action, statement, or command in the text.

Unfortunately, Perkins bases his exegetical approach to the GA in the New Testament on several unwarranted claims. These are best identified in his introductory chapter, and illustrated in the analysis chapters that follow. Two of his most significant claims deserve specific attention.

First, Perkins asserts that the GA "alerts the reader to nonverbal communication" (p. 2). He sees this as its semantic function, that is, the author's intended meaning when he uses a GA. He boldly claims, "Although we can never know what kind of nonverbal communication is there, (facial, body, or vocal), we do know that is exactly what the writer or speaker communicates" (p. 5). Perkins is certain that an author chose the expression of a GA to inform the reader that he or a speaker in his narrative is making an unspecified gesture, voice inflection, etc. For example, in his commentary on Luke 21:28, where Jesus is foretelling the extraordinary circumstances around His second coming, he writes, "This is

another good example of Luke's depiction of Jesus' nonverbal communication with the absolute construction. What was Jesus' intonation and/or His body language? We do not know. But we do know that He gave a clue to the unexpected commands" (p. 113). It would be one thing if Perkins were simply saying that he believes the context of a GA suggests nonverbal communication was present; it is quite another thing to say that this Greek construction *means* it was there.

If Greek writers intentionally directed the reader to take note of nonverbal communication as Perkins claims, the exegete must focus as much on what they did not explicitly write as what they did. He suggests, "Reflection on the event referenced allows us to return in our imaginations to the genitive absolute, where we can hear the speaker lower his voice, see him raise his eyebrows, or any other of a multitude of human expressions. It is not the function of a genitive absolute to define these nonverbal signals, but simply to alert us to their presence" (pp. 5–6). In his commentary on Matthew 25:5, for example, he states that in Matthew's citation of Jesus' words he is recording by the use of a GA that "in some way Jesus tipped off His disciples" to a contrast in his story (pp. 45–46). In his comments on the next GA in Matthew 25:10 he writes that Matthew's use of the GA in recording Jesus' words "gives some insight on the story-telling style of the Lord. He hardly communicates in a flat monotone. In some way, unknown to us, Jesus conveys more information with nonverbal communication" (p. 46). This view of the GA poses a significant problem for exegesis, for the exegete's task is to discern the author's intended meaning in a text. If the author intended to draw attention to nonverbal communication, but he did not indicate what form or meaning was in that communication, then exegetes must use their "imaginations" to supply what was unstated by going beyond the words of the text (p. 287). However, New Testament authors had the means to clearly communicate gestures, facial expressions, and voice inflections when it was a detail the reader should know. For example, Mark expresses with words Jesus' angry look when he healed a man in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Mark 3:5). He did not rely on a grammatical feature to suggest that some unstated communication was there.

Second, Perkins claims that the GA has "its own rules" for determining the clause to which it refers: (1) most commonly, it refers to the following clause; (2) sometimes it refers to the preceding clause, such as when the participle is causal; (3) it can refer to an entire discourse; and (4) it can refer to another GA

in a coordinate relationship (p. 4). Thus, he distinguishes the GA from other participle clauses, while the grammars he cites (Robertson and Wallace) classify the GA as a circumstantial (adverbial) participle. In those grammars, the GA only differs from other circumstantial participles by having an expressed subject that differs (with few exceptions) from that of the main clause. Rather than “breaking the normal conventions of syntax” (p. 2), the GA allows an author to express a less prominent action that is related to the main clause but has a different subject than that of the main clause. Perkins fails to cite any grammarian who supports his view of GA semantics. Sometimes this departure leads him to miss the significance of the GA. For example, because Perkins is looking for contrast to explain the author’s use of the GA, he concludes that the GA in Ephesians 2:20 “sets [Christ] apart from everything around in the teaching,” and its reference is “omnidirectional” as it “seems to shout in every direction concerning the primacy of the Lord in the church as an organization and as an inward pattern for our spiritual growth” (pp. 254–55). While he may argue for his conclusions from the context, deriving this meaning from Paul’s use of a GA loads the grammar with a weight of meaning that it cannot bear.

In summary, Perkins’ work is thorough in its scope, containing useful data about the GA in the NT. His clear and lively commentary often draws helpful conclusions from the context of the texts he addresses. However, he assumes the truth of his claims about the meaning and function of the GA without supporting evidence. Further research would be required to back up these claims with linguistic or grammatical evidence that Koine Greek writers actually used the GA with the asserted intentions, but grammarians currently agree that the GA is an instance of an adverbial participle rather than a unique grammatical construction with separate rules of interpretation. Many of Perkins’ insights result from his careful evaluation of the context, the author’s tone, modes of expression, changes in the direction of a narrative, the content of a doctrinal discussion, and the like. These should all be included in proper exegesis, but authors present these things in many ways other than the GA. Most importantly, Perkins’ approach can hinder exegesis by encouraging the interpreter to elevate the prominence of the subordinate GA clause and to imagine what the author’s unstated, nonverbal communication meant, rather than focusing on the words he chose to write.

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Where Was God? Theological Perspectives on the Holocaust. By Barry R. Leventhal. San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2023. Hardcover. 296 pp. \$25.00. ISBN: 978-1958552094.

Reviewed by:

Olivier Melnick

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The *Shoah* or Catastrophe has left a permanent scar on the collective Jewish psyche. There is no shortage of volumes on the Holocaust, and most of them—though very scholarly—usually fall short of providing an adequate explanation for the Jewish Catastrophe. There might not be any acceptable answer for the Holocaust, and yet, Barry Leventhal chose that very difficult topic for his 1982 doctoral dissertation. Forty years later, this unique scholarly contribution has been published into a book. In the era of Holocaust denial, historical revisionism, and toxic antisemitism, Leventhal’s work couldn’t come at a better time.

Purpose

Leventhal gives a threefold purpose for his work. He looked within the whole spectrum of contemporary Judaism, from atheism to ultra-orthodoxy, exploring views from philosophers, rabbis, and theologians. He posits that the only viable approach to the problem posed by the Holocaust, is through a dispensational biblical theology. Regarding the evil performed during the Holocaust, Leventhal claims that only biblical theism can solve the challenge of theodicy and reconcile the possibility for evil coexisting with a just, powerful, and loving God.

Critical Evaluation

Leventhal spends almost a third of his book evaluating various modern Jewish views on the Holocaust. The result is a collection of thoughts divided into three perspectives: Traditional, radical, and moderate. His survey takes the reader across the wide spectrum of Jewish religious thought, referring to the Talmud and other rabbinic sources. While they all shed a certain amount of light on the topic, according to the author, none of them is satisfactory. Leventhal believes that the trauma of the Holocaust has “obliterated all religious boundaries” (p. 23).

At times, and with the help of other scholars, Leventhal makes some progress towards the final theological perspective that he addresses in his conclusion.

One of these times is when he quotes Dennis Prager, who asserts that “God didn’t build Auschwitz, men did . . . people have freedom of choice” (p. 84). Leventhal also includes the controversial view of a direct correlation between the death of six-million Jews and the re-birth of Israel as a modern state (pp. 91–95).

He concludes that first section, after a review of eighteen different views, by stating, “all of them exhibit the same scars. The Holocaust has permanently changed the nature and character of contemporary Judaism. It will never be the same” (p. 99). While many views are explained, there doesn’t seem to be a way out from the evil of the Holocaust.

Yet, having explored all these views, the author makes a shift and starts building a case for a solid biblical approach by reviewing the five covenants made between God and Israel. He asserts that Israel’s relationship with God is based on these covenants which he explains can be conditional (Mosaic) or unconditional (Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, New). Leventhal places a lot of emphasis on the covenants (about a quarter of his book), as he understands that they are foundational to understanding not just Israel and God, but the entire Bible. Building on the concept of a correlation between the Holocaust and the rebirth of Israel in 1948, Leventhal states that without being a direct cause and effect, “it is highly unlikely that this regathering could now be taking place without the Holocaust.” (p. 138).

Having established that the covenants are a key component of God dealing with Israel, he also asserts that they are secure and sensitive, remembering the blessings and curses promised by God in Deuteronomy 28. Blessings and curses that are linked to obedience or disobedience to His covenants, but that never cancel the promises made in His unconditional and eternal covenants.

Leventhal continues to build his case by addressing the issue of the nation of Israel which he describes as a historical enigma from a secular standpoint (p. 183). He places a lot of importance on Israel’s election from Abraham forward, as he presents seven biblical reasons for the purpose of the election and how they play a part in the events connected to the Holocaust. As a result, Israel’s level of obedience to God’s word would warrant a proportional response from Him. Leventhal claims that “in the Scriptures, great privilege always brings great responsibility as well as accountability” (p. 195).

Adding to the mystery of Israel’s existence and survival, the author explains that there is a remnant within the nation. He studies that remnant

chronologically, systematically (eight functions), and then in direct relation to the Holocaust. Leventhal also exposes the adversary of Israel. He helps the reader understand that Satan is the main protagonist against the chosen people of God. The satanic influence in the Holocaust, while explained, is covered in only seven pages. Leventhal could have developed that part a bit further, seeing that Satan has a past, present, and future role in the various attempts at destroying the Jews.

The stage has been set, and in the last 34 pages of his work, Leventhal establishes the need for a theodicy as “an attempt to reconcile the unlimited goodness of an all-powerful God with the reality of evil” (p. 225).

First, he briefly reviews six unacceptable philosophical positions (illusionism, dualism, finitism, sadism, impossibilism, and atheism), which leads him to conclude that the only viable theological approach to the Holocaust is theism, describing a Creator who is infinite and personal. Yet theism is connected to another position called “depravity” as it relates to man, and Leventhal posits that, “only an understanding of both positions can bring a satisfactory explanation of evil and suffering (i.e., theodicy), especially the evil and suffering of the Holocaust” (p. 237).

In a very strong conclusion, Leventhal proposes that God, while being eclipsed by the events of the Holocaust, was very much at work during that period. By preserving our freedom of choice, God has allowed for evil to exist, but Leventhal reminds us that, “the Holocaust is one of many violent eruptions that the Jewish people have faced and will face again in the future. Those responsible for such atrocities will ultimately pay for their evil choices and actions (Gen. 12:3), but in the meantime, it is hoped that Israel will learn the painful lessons that God is trying to teach her” (p. 253).

Conclusion

I would have liked for Leventhal to spend a bit more time on the satanic influence behind the Jewish catastrophe. That would have helped bridge the gap between the Holocaust of yesteryear and the new antisemitism, that cannot truly be understood apart from its irrationality, which itself is coming from Israel’s adversary.

Nevertheless, *Where was God? Theological Perspectives on the Holocaust* is an outstanding work in the field of Holocaust studies. It reviews many contemporary Jewish positions on the question of “Why the Holocaust,”

builds a biblical foundation on the Jewish covenants, the Land of Israel, and the Remnant of Israel, and finishes by establishing a solid biblical case for a theodicy. It is unique book in a sea of scholarly works, and while we might never fully understand why the Holocaust happened, Leventhal gets us a little bit closer without minimizing the event or diminishing who God is.

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The Ark and the Darkness. Produced by Sevenfold Films and Genesis Apologetics, 2024.

Reviewed by:
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Introduction

I personally viewed *The Ark and the Darkness* on March 21st in Montgomery, Alabama and currently hold to a biblical creationism perspective. *The Ark and the Darkness* is a documentary published by Sevenfold Films and Genesis Apologetics, which was released for special showing in 2024. The film was produced by Dan Biddle and Ralph Streaan, with the apparent purpose of contending that the Flood of Noah’s day was a historical and global event. Biddle and Streaan fulfill the film’s purpose through interviews with scientific experts and theologians while using computer-generated imagery (CGI) to illustrate various talking points of their explanation. The film progresses through various points of history: Creation, Fall, Post-Edenic/Antediluvian Period, Noah’s Flood, Postdiluvian Period, Tower of Babel, Present Day, and the Return of Christ.

There are a couple of key statements made throughout the film which reveal the direction it is heading. First, the theme of the film is emphasized by the key word, “biblical.” This seemed to focus on the aspect that the Flood and age of the earth is not left to speculation, but rather is seen within the pages of the Bible. It is clear from the onset that this film holds a young earth and dispensational perspective. Another key statement in the movie is that people today are “willingly ignorant,” referring to 2 Peter 3:5. In other words, although

scientific and biblical evidence is clear of a recent, global Flood, many people choose to disbelieve the evidence which lies before them. Instead, many willingly hold to the faulty evolutionary “theory” thus rejecting the scientific evidence while ignoring the many contradictions within evolutionary thought and research. With this in mind, the film correlates the days of Noah to the days immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ.

Overview of Positives

There are many positives in this film. First, *The Ark and the Darkness* has a star-studded cast of scientists and professors from various creation-based ministries and organizations, such as: Answers in Genesis, Logos Research Association, Points of Origin, Grand Experiment, Liberty University, and Truett McConnell University. Each of these individuals speaks to their area of expertise and their passion on the topic is evident.

Secondly, the CGI in the film was top-notch, vividly detailing the various biblical events, as well as illustrating key points of evidence. Through CGI, the film depicted many parts of the antediluvian period such as man setting up idolatrous statues, people making sacrifices to a Molech-type god, mankind living among and hunting dinosaurs, and more. It was fascinating to see early pages of Genesis visualized in such captivating detail. With this animation, the film detailed different phases of the Flood, showing how it would have appeared in those days. I thought that was fascinating because while I have spent a considerable amount time personally studying the Flood, I never took the time to see how it happened sequentially.

Another benefit of the CGI was that the animation made it very easy to follow the speaker’s technical explanations, which brings me to another positive. Each speaker had a way of taking technical information and explaining it in layman’s terms. This is extremely important because it appears the main intended audience of the production is the layperson. So, being able to understand complex ideas in basic vernacular is crucial for accepting a position. This was a huge success of the film.

Regarding the evidence made throughout the film, I believe it was a big win for Creationism. It was clearly revealed how polystrate fossils extend through various layers of sediment, laid down during the Flood, thus refuting evolutionary theories on the ages of these sediments. It was also explained how the sedimentary layers require a rapid laying as opposed to being laid

over millions of years. Furthermore, the existence of bending, curved rock formations require that the sedimentary layers be pliable in order to form and hold that shape without cracking. Which proved to be another excellent example of the rapid laying of the layers during the phases of the Flood.

But the many pieces of evidence in the film were not only provided for the Flood, but also for other dispensations as well. The explanation and illustration of linguistic research revealed that if evolution was true, we should be able to trace all languages back to one root language. However, through research it is seen that there are around 70 root languages, not merely one. This makes sense seeing that God had confounded the world's language at the Tower of Babel. Finally, the film did not stray away from the biblical account of the age of mankind in the antediluvian period. They explained how people could live over 900 years during that dispensation, but then also illustrated the exponential decay curve found within the genealogy of Genesis, explaining that if this was fictional mythology, we would not expect to see the curve as we do in the recordings of Genesis.

In correlating the days of Noah to the days prior to the return of Jesus, we see that the film holds to a premillennial view. This is important because it is a biblical understanding that the world will not get better before Jesus returns but will instead get worse until Christ comes back. And with His return, Jesus will ultimately set up His Messianic Kingdom. This is refreshing amidst the growing adherence to a faulty amillennial viewpoint.

As I had hoped, the film closed with a gospel presentation which was made separately by two different people. And I am pleased that it was a faith-alone in Christ-alone message, with no mention of salvific requirements found within lordship salvation or Calvinism. Nor was there a mention that one needs to “repent” of their sins.

Overview of Negatives

While the gospel presentation is a positive, it is also a negative. With a focus on the coming judgment of the Second Coming of Christ, more emphasis could have been spent on the gospel. While grateful they included a clear message on how to be saved, I believe it was only about two minutes out of the two-hour film.

Another negative was that while the narrator did a decent job, it was lackluster for a couple of reasons. First, I wanted to speed up the narration by 1.5×

as it seemed too slow compared to the energy of the film. Second, while Lewis did well in his articulation and enunciation, there was a lack of liveliness in his dialogue.

Conclusion

To say this film was excellent would be an understatement. From the outstanding use of CGI, the ability to understand technical and complex information, holding to a biblical account of the events recorded in the book of Genesis, an unadulterated gospel message, and more, this film nearly met all expectations. The evidence presented was convincing, the speakers were easy to listen to and understand, and the sequential order that the film took was easily followed. The narration could have had more vigor and the gospel presentation could have had more emphasis in the end. But all in all, for what the film set out to do, to contend for a recent, global Flood, it fulfilled that mission extremely well. This documentary will definitely be making it in my video library once it becomes available. And it should be in yours as well.

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