



Kerux
THE JOURNAL
of
Northwest Theological Seminary

Volume 28, Number 3

December 2013



"vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo"

Colossians 3:3

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Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary is published three times per year (May, September, December) in digital format at Kerux.com. All copies are available free of charge and may be downloaded gratis. Editorial offices are located at 17711 Spruce Way, Lynnwood, Washington 98037-7431. Correspondence may be directed to the editor at this address or by e-mail at registrar@nwts.edu. *Kerux* is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database* (Chicago, IL) and abstracted in *New Testament Abstracts* (Chestnut Hill, MA).

Life Under the Sun (Son)

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Scott F. Hunter

How can another year be over? Where did the time go? This is the cry of time-bound pilgrims greeted once again by the seemingly endless, annual cycle of needing to replace our wall calendars! As we approach the end of another year, it is a common practice to reflect upon the recent months gone by and contemplate changes for the year to come. Many will resolve in the New Year to improve their health, to better manage their finances, to get their priorities in order and on and on. Life may not be what we want it to be today, but with a well-intended resolution and a dose of optimism, we can look forward to the potential of the year to come! Yet, if there's one thing that our many attempts to achieve some measure of progress has taught us, it's that there are many obstacles to success. At this time next year, we will undoubtedly be in pursuit of more tweaks and changes and course corrections. This perpetual pattern confronts us with the inescapable conclusion that life in this world is high maintenance.

If there's one book of the Bible that, at least on the surface, uniquely resonates with such an observation, it is Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is described in the very first verse as "the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." This son of David is none other than Solomon, the king of Israel, who was renowned for his wisdom, wealth, and wives.

Solomon Sought and Searching

Solomon's celebrated wisdom was sought out by the Queen of Sheba and exceeded the wisdom of any other king in his day (2 Chron. 9:1, 22). He amassed such riches as to place him among the wealthiest, if not make him the wealthiest, that ever lived. We are told that he made gold and silver as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones (2 Chron. 1:15). His power is reflected in his rule over all kings from the Euphrates river in the north to the border of Egypt in the south (2 Chron. 9:26). Solomon's power, wealth, and wisdom armed him with unparalleled potential to influence the course of his world.

Unlike his father David, Solomon was not a warrior king, but a prince of peace. Under Solomon, Israel enjoyed the height of her glory. Her borders were as safe as they were far reaching. Consequently Solomon's focus was less on extending the borders outward and more on a lavish overhaul of the inward. He presided over a Jewish renaissance of sorts. It was time of poetry and music, of artistic expression and architectural advance; it was a time of extravagance. It was an opportunity to give this world under the sun a facelift: to make its glory the envy of the nations and the source of perpetual pleasure. Solomon set out to make a lasting legacy for himself. From his magnificent building projects (recall the splendor of the Temple he built for God and that of his own, personal palace home) to his Eden-like gardens described in Ecclesiastes chapter 2, Solomon endeavored to put his indelible stamp upon this world.

In his latter years, as he entered the December of his life, Solomon took to reflection and deep contemplation. Drawing from his vast wisdom, meditating upon his grand labors and his pursuits of pleasure, he left the trivial behind and fellowshiped with the realm of the profound. His was a serious attempt to understand and evaluate life in this world under the sun. It was not a fleeting curiosity, but a prolonged and energetic pursuit.

- “I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. (Ecclesiastes 1:13)
- “I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.” (Ecclesiastes 2:3)

The conclusion of Solomon’s investigation frames the book in the beginning at 1:2 and in the final chapter at 12:8. He declares, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity”. The Hebrew word used here is *hebel*. Its meaning is not easily captured in English by a single word. It has the sense of something that is not only vain but meaningless, ineffective, pointless, unjust, empty. The world is not what it appears to be.

Parade of Vanities

“Vanity of vanities” in the Hebrew is a two-word duplication *hebel hebelim*. This replication serves the purpose of emphasis. This same duplicative pattern is used elsewhere in Scripture. It is used to emphasize the unique, sacred character of the throne room of God in the Tabernacle/Temple, i.e., the Holy of Holies. In the company of all things holy, this one thing is the most holy. It is *the* most holy place. In addition, our Lord’s unique authority is captured by the phrases “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords”. Of all the lords and all the kings, this one’s lordship is chief among all; no kingdom surpasses his kingdom; no authority exceeds his authority. So also in Ecclesiastes, this structure suggests that of all the vain things, this one thing is the most vain, the most meaningless, the most ineffective, the most pointless, the most unjust, the most empty. And what is this one thing, this chief vanity among all vanities? Everything under the sun! It is one, universal tie for first place.

The Preacher introduces his readers to the vanity of this world through a poem carefully crafted around an ABCBA pattern in verses 4-11. This pattern is depicted as follows:

- A. Human generations come and go (1:4)
- B. Creation cycles without progress (1:5-7)
- C. All wearisome – not satisfying (1:8)
- B’. Nothing new in man’s cycling labors (1:9-10)
- A’. Human generations cycle – don’t endure – not remembered (1:11)

Solomon stimulates our thinking in verse 3 by posing a question. He asks what profit or advantage there is in “all” that man does. Considering the renowned wealth and power of King Solomon, a wealth and power that attracted even the praise of the nations, this question may strike us as startling. Yet, the universal “all” of verse 3 echoes the vanity cursed “all” of verse 2. This echo reminds us that man’s labors, even King Solomon’s labors, are under the identical indictment that extends to everything under the sun; it is vanity!

This same “all” takes us to the center of our ABCBA pattern. There the frustration of this passage reaches its emotional height:

All things are wearisome;
Man is not able to tell it (1:8a)

What is it that drives Solomon to such exhausting despair? Why is he so wearied? He is grasping for meaning in a broken world. Man is caught in a realm that lacks the ability to deliver what it advertises. It’s all window dressing and veneer, but no lasting substance. So we are told at the end of verse 8, that the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing.

Sight is a critical component to Solomon’s contemplations. In every chapter of Ecclesiastes, there is some reference to sight.

“I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind ... This also I have seen ... I have seen ... Furthermore, I have seen ... I have seen ... Then I looked again ... And I have seen” (1:14; 2:24; 3:10; 3:16; 3:22; 4:1; 4:4)

The eye sees much and the ear hears many things, but there is ultimately no satisfaction with what is seen or heard. Eyes and ears have become merely tools to absorb the vain things that go on about us. The frustration with this fallen world is unspeakable. In 4:8, we are told of a man who has no dependents yet toils without end. His toil produces no pleasure, or as Solomon puts it, “his eyes were not satisfied with riches”. Never did this man question why he was so devoted to labor that produced no pleasure. Solomon’s concluding indictment reiterates the cry of chapter 1, “This too is vanity.”

Recycled Vanities

Working from the middle of our passage outward, we are challenged to consider how we are part of a meaningless, cyclic pattern. Though there is an acknowledged lack of progress in what he sees, it is not for lack of activity. Verses 4-7 contain fifteen participles! There we are presented with a constant blur of activity taken from the realm of nature. The sun rises and sets; the wind blows and turns and swirls; the rivers flow over and over and over again. Yet this incessant laboring does not silence Solomon’s inquiry. What advantage or what profit is there from all this work? What does it ultimately accomplish?

Consider the daily journey of the sun. Early in the morning, it begins its arduous trek. Up and across the sky it lumbers. By the day's end we are told the sun is "panting" or "gasping" (*shuaph*). It was a long, hard day for the sun, like every day. But what was gained from all of this labor? The next day we find the sun right back where it started, without advantage or gain from the previous day's toil.

The wind and rivers are depicted in a similar light. There is much movement to the wind but no progress. For all of its travels, it has enjoyed no advance. It blows; it turns; it swirls; but it returns and there is no progress. Likewise, rivers flow endlessly into the sea, but never does the sea overflow. The rivers appear to make no contribution despite their ceaseless stampede.

Verses 9-10 form an epexegetical pair to this endless journey to nowhere, yet the doublet draws out an additional element. In these latter two verses, the issue is not so much progress as it is "newness". Solomon has discovered what has been re-discovered by each subsequent generation. There is nothing new under the sun. The apparent "newness" of something is an artifact of an uninformed memory, not actual "newness". Cyclical patterns are repetitive patterns. Labor in this world is cyclical or circular. It lacks a consummation. Every day man, like the sun, rises to engage in labor that seemingly never ends, does not satisfy, and is not oriented toward anything other than the monotony of the same pattern relived. Such labor brings him no closer to any meaningful, lasting purpose.

The chiasmic arrangement of two key words in verses 4-6 ties the vain movements of nature to the plight of man. The Hebrew word translated "go" in verse 4 (*holek*) is the same word used for the blowing of the wind in verse 6. Likewise, the setting of the sun in verse 5 employs the same word (*ba*) for the coming of the generations in verse 4.

1:4 generations "go" (*holek*)
1:4 generations "come" (*ba*)
1:5 sun sets (*ba*)
1:6 wind blows (*holek*)

The result is that the repeated movements of the sun and meanderings of the wind not only capture the fruitlessness of labor, but also picture the repeated comings and goings of one generation after another. Not only does futility take hold of our labor, but it envelops our whole life. This latter observation forms the outer bracketing in verses 4 and 11—a frame that enfolds and casts an ominous shadow over the entire passage.

Generations come and go, but the earth remains. The persistence of the earth contrasts with the passing of the generations. The earth continues in its repeated patterns whether we're here or not; our life's contribution is, therefore, ultimately unimportant and descends into an even greater depth of vanity. Solomon has captured the root of this world's futility. It is the inescapable curse of death.

Vanities Dead-ended

It is death that brackets this passage. Man spends his days laboring in pursuit of something he cannot grasp. Ecclesiastes refers to this as a pursuit of or striving after the

wind, a phrase that Solomon uses seven times throughout the book. It's like trying to take hold of a vapor. Man's empty efforts conclude with death and in death he is remembered no more regardless of his toil and accomplishments. The earth holds neither concern nor memory of his existence.

“For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!” (Ecclesiastes 2:16)

Why is there no advantage for man? It is because we dwell in a cursed world. Because of Adam's sin, the ground is cursed and in toil we shall eat of it. All of creation is now subjected to vanity or futility (Romans 8:20) and man is sentenced to death. Though man's life ends, the earth takes no notice, but continues its seemingly endless cycles. We are left as those who are empty, insignificant, and without hope.

This world is full of frustration, confusion, injustice, cruelty; outcomes are unpredictable; adherence to wise principles does not guarantee success. Our pursuit of toil is vanity; our pursuit of pleasure is futile; our pursuit of wisdom is meaningless. If we multiply words, it is vanity; if we die in silence, it is futility. The best we can hope for, the best we can do is to enjoy those rare seasons where God presents us with the gift of enjoyment. This is a very somber evaluation of the world—a world into which we are so greatly invested.

Perhaps you have heard of the foolproof way to sculpt an elephant in just two steps. Step one requires that you obtain a very large block of marble. Step two then instructs you to remove everything that does not look like an elephant. It is sculpting by negation!

In that vein, Ecclesiastes is Solomon's sculpting of the Kingdom of God. Do you see it? He is removing everything that does not look like the Kingdom of God, so that we may be left only with the Kingdom of God.

Take careful note of what he specifically cites as the trouble with this world. From the very beginning, he is troubled by the repeated, cyclic patterns he finds:

- The going and coming of man.
- The sun rising and setting
- The wind blowing in circles
- The rivers flowing again and again into the sea.

Not even all of the treasures of wisdom can find the end of a circle. There is nothing new under the sun.

Something New Under the Sun?

Solomon longs for something new!

He is frustrated by the lifelong exertion of man that ultimately produces no advantage. There are no guarantees in our toil. There are no assurances that our labors will bring us what we had purposed. No amount of wealth can rescue us from our impotence in

securing the delight of our hearts. Enjoying the fruit of our labor is a gift of God, one that we cannot hasten. In chapter 9, Solomon will bemoan this when he reflects on what he had seen.

“I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.” (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

Solomon longs for the assurance of fruitful labor!

Not only are we unable to hasten or guarantee that our labor will provide us with a reward, but when and if such does come, we can only embrace it for a short time. Recall the well-known proverb: “All good things must come to an end”. There is no power on earth so great that it can lengthen a day by even a moment. Ultimately, death takes the stage and ends our role in life’s unfolding drama. We are then forever separated from this world and the enjoyment derived from any of our labors. This calls into question the surpassing value we have placed on the world’s treasures.

Solomon is looking for labor that bears lasting fruit. He is looking for a reward that cannot be overtaken by time—a reward that produces joy lasting not just a season but forever. Death will respect neither all of his wisdom nor all of his wealth nor all of his power. Solomon understands this and so he concedes:

“As he had come naked from his mother’s womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. And this also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So, what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?” (Ecclesiastes 5:15-16)

Solomon longs for a permanent reward!

A Kingdom Under the Sun

Solomon is describing the world “under the sun”. He is describing the cursed world about him. He has observed this world according to wisdom and finds it lacking. But his complaint is not a generic criticism as if to say merely, “life here is hard.” Rather, he finds this world lacking specifically in ways that are addressed by the coming of the Kingdom of God in the coming of Jesus Christ.

The prophets spoke of the hope of new things and the New Testament writers further advanced this hope in the light of the coming of Christ. But these “new things” were not to be found “under the sun”. The prophets spoke of a new covenant embraced by a new heart filled with a new Spirit. This was not a promise to repair this place, but to draw man into a new heavens and a new earth—a new creation! Man, by the Spirit, would then assume the character of his new, eternal abode. He would be forever exposed to new things, conformed to new things, enveloped in new things, identified with new things.

- “Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder things of the past. ‘Behold, I will do something new, Now it will spring forth.’” (Isaiah 43:18-19)
- “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- “Behold, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)

The labors of the Kingdom of God bring a sure, fruitful, and lasting reward. Recall the parable of the soils. There was seed that bore no fruit for it fell beside the road or upon rocky ground or among thorns. But there was that seed which fell upon the good soil; it grew up and increased yielding a crop that produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. Jesus spoke in John 4:36ff. of a crop so abundant that the intervals between sowing and reaping were no more. While one was planting the seed, the other was still reaping the crop from the previous season! The apostle Paul’s prayer in Colossians 1:9ff. reminds us that our life in the Spirit is a life of “bearing fruit in every good work”.

The vanity of Ecclesiastes is an issue that is further addressed in 1 Corinthians 15. Specifically, we are told that the apostolic proclamation suffers from the vanity of this world under the sun if there is no resurrection.

“And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:14)

It is vain because it bears no fruit; it is toil without lasting joy; it is “fools gold” for it professes to be of substance, but it is in fact vacuous, empty, trite, meaningless, futile, powerless, pointless. Religious ideas, no matter how inspiring they may be, will suffer the same fate of all that is under the sun unless they can address the curse of death.

Resurrection-Life Beyond the Sun

But Christ has been raised! So what does this mean for the “world under the sun”? It means death has been conquered. It does not mean a new chapter for this world. Jesus said in John 16:33, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; **I have overcome the world.**” The Lord did not overcome the world so that we could be left in it!

The resolution to Ecclesiastes is the resurrection and entrance into a land full of life and joy and peace in the Lord. We must be transferred from this “life under the sun” to “life in the Son of God”. Paul sees in his identification with the resurrection of his Savior, the end to a life of hopeless, cyclic, meandering vanity. As he lives out of the union with his Savior, he is introduced to labor that has been lifted out of this world.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that ***your toil is not in vain*** in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Solomon is crying out for the Kingdom of God in Christ!

Reflect upon the wisdom of Solomon. Contemplate the words of that great king in all of his earthly splendor. This world cannot be turned into a trophy to be hoarded; it is not now nor can it ever be.

Ecclesiastes leaves us with no treasure but Christ. You must be lifted out of the mundane life under the sun into the marvelous world of the Spirit, the Spirit of the resurrected Son of God. For then and only then will you know true life, abundant life, satisfying life, eternal life. Enter the wisdom of Solomon's Christ.

- "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world." (John 8:23)
- "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36)
- "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world" (1 John 2:15)
- "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)
- "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:2-3)
- "He is not here, for He has risen" (Matthew 28:6)

Upon Christ's Nativity, or Christmas

From three dark places Christ came forth this day;
From first His Father's bosom, where He lay,
Concealed till now; then from the typic law,
Where we His manhood but by figures saw;
And lastly from His mother's womb He came
To us, a perfect God and perfect Man.

Now in a manger lies the eternal Word:
The Word He is, yet can no speech afford;
He is the Bread of Life, yet hungry lies;
The Living Fountain, yet for drink He cries;
He cannot help or clothe Himself at need
Who did the lilies clothe and ravens feed;
He is the Light of Lights, yet now doth shroud
His glory with our nature as a cloud.
He came to us a Little One, that we
Like little children might in malice be;
Little He is, and wrapped in clouts, lest He
Might strike us dead if clothed with majesty.

Christ had four beds and those not soft nor brave:
The Virgin's womb, the manger, cross, and grave.
The angels sing this day, and so will I
That have more reason to be glad than they.

—Rowland Watkyns (ca. 1614-1664)

Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:2-3

Marc Renkema

Introduction

As we begin our examination of the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount, it is necessary that we start with a consideration of the structure of the first section of this great message. The first major section of the sermon comprises verses 1-16. Understanding the structure of this section enables us to see more clearly the overall meaning of the text.

Structure: Matthew 5:1-16

vv. 1-2—Introduction to Christ’s sermon

vv. 3-9—Seven Beatitudes

vv. 10-16—Commentary

vv. 3-6—what is done to believers

vv. 10-12—what is done to believers

as they live in the world

as they live in the world

vv. 7-9—what we do in the world

vv. 13-16—what we do in the world

in spite of persecution

in spite of persecution

The first question that we must ask is: How many beatitudes are there? If one looks at the text and simply counts up the number of times that we find the word “blessed” at the beginning of a sentence, we would say that there are nine beatitudes—nine “blesseds”. However, many commentators are inclined to combine the last two blessings found in verses 10-11 because they deal with the same subject, i.e., persecution. Thus, we are left with eight beatitudes. Furthermore, these commentators divide the passage into two parts: verses 3-12 and verses 13-16.

While there is something attractive and simple about that division, I would suggest that it is not the best way to look at this pericope. Instead, it would be more accurate to state that there are seven beatitudes and that verses 10 through 16 ought to be regarded as further commentary. Verses 10-16 throw additional light on the seven—in effect, explaining them to us as divinely inspired commentary. Therefore, the text ought to be divided into verses 3-9 and verses 10-16. Now bear with me as I explain why this makes the most sense.¹

¹ Suggested by Charles G. Dennison in a sermon on Matt. 5:1-16, dated Sept. 25, 1988.

You will notice that there is a parallel between verses 3 and 10—the repetition of the phrase “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Now admittedly, we might say that the repetition opens and closes the beatitudes, a common pattern referred to as an inclusio. However, it is more likely that the repetition of these words is indicative of the fact that Jesus is taking us back to the beginning; he is starting over again. Thus, verses 10 and following take us back to the beginning of the beatitudes in order to explain them.

I would argue that this fits the pattern of Matthew’s gospel much better—especially as we consider the apostle’s use of the number seven throughout the gospel. He notably begins his gospel this way with the genealogy of fourteen generation in each subsection, twice seven (1:1-17). The Lord’s Prayer (6:9-13) has seven petitions; in chapters 8-9, he records seven miracles; in chapter 13, he includes seven parables. Matthew makes use of this highly symbolic number many more times throughout the gospel in order to indicate fullness or completeness. Seven beatitudes leave us with the understanding that the blessings of the kingdom of heaven are full; they are perfect; they are all we need.

If we recognize this division (cf. the structure above), then we can see quite simply that the second section divides into two parts: vv. 10-12 and vv. 13-16. The first part deals with persecution. The second part deals with salt and light. The first part speaks of that which is done to God’s people in the world. The second part speaks of how God’s people are to live in the world in spite of that persecution. We also see then that this commentary applies to the beatitudes themselves, dividing them the same way. Verses 3-6 are related to verses 10-12 in that they speak of what is done to God’s people in the world; verses 7-9 correspond to verses 13-16 speaking of how we are to live in the world in spite of this persecution.

I realize that this may appear complex. Nonetheless, using the basic structure above, as a means of understanding the beatitudes correctly, we proceed to examine the first beatitude, namely, “blessed are the poor in spirit.”

First of all, who are “the poor in spirit”? How should we define this phrase? We also want to understand how Christ embodies this state most completely/fully. Finally, how are we, who are in Christ, also “poor in spirit”?

The Poor in Spirit

For many conservative Christians, to be poor in spirit has to do with the recognition of our true spiritual state before God. It is the realization that we come to when we come to grips with our own spiritual depravity. We have nothing to offer God. We can only come to him as beggars, undeserving of anything, but rather seeking his grace and mercy. It is an internal acknowledgement of complete dependence upon God—that he give us that which we desperately need. It is the state of mind present in the hearts of all believers who understand that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, not of works lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9). We are spiritually helpless, hopeless, and in a state of wretched spiritual poverty apart from the saving grace of Christ. It is this knowledge that drives us to the cross of Christ—to God from whom all

blessings flow. Without a doubt, we can say that we are spiritually destitute and we share the conviction that we are dependent fully and completely upon God's goodness in Christ Jesus alone for our salvation. Still, the question remains: is this what Christ means in this passage? Is this all that he has in mind?

Any definition has to take into consideration what the Scriptures themselves declare about the poor. Quite frequently the poor are spoken of in terms of contrast with the rich. In general, we may say that the Lord looks favorably upon the poor and in contrast frequently admonishes those who are rich. This is especially prominent in the Psalms and the prophets. Read through Psalm 35, 72, and 109. Look at the prophet Isaiah in chapters 61 and 66. There are numerous texts besides these. All of them indicate that behind the proper understanding of the phrase "poor in spirit" are the literal poor—those who have nothing. Add to this what Jesus himself teaches concerning the poor and rich. He tells us not to lay up treasures on earth. He speaks to the rich young ruler and tells him to sell all that he has and give it to the poor. He speaks of the difficulty of the rich in inheriting the kingdom of God. Generally speaking, the gospel is preached in the NT to the poor and though some who are wealthy believe, most of the believers are genuinely poor.

Now I am not suggesting that Jesus is speaking here of those who are materially or economically impoverished. He is not suggesting by any means that all those who are materially poor will inherit the kingdom. He is not idealizing poverty and making it a virtue. He is not advocating that we sell all that we have to become poor. What I am saying is that Jesus is speaking of something about the nature of being poor which informs our understanding of what it means to be poor in spirit. There is a similarity between the material poor and the spiritual poor.

The parallel may certainly be seen in the manner in which the poor are treated by the rich. Again this is a common theme in the prophets. The rich abuse and oppress the poor. They take advantage of them. Their abusiveness and bullying is represented most forcefully in the story of King Ahab and his theft of Nabboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16). The poor are treated contemptuously by the rich. They are denied justice. The poor suffer.

Furthermore, the poor are treated as if they are nothing. They are powerless in this world. They are perceived as weak. They have nothing to contribute. They are overlooked and forgotten. They are shunned and avoided by the rich who look down their noses at them. The poor are deemed inferior. The rich perceive of themselves as superior. They boast in their own prosperity and despise the poverty of the poor.

We may also look at the poor themselves. They are afflicted and their lives are filled with hardship and many struggles. As Calvin says, the poor are constantly being pressed and afflicted by adversity. They can only look up to God for their aid. Their hope is in the Lord. Apart from him, they would live in hopelessness and despair. They are down-trodden, but they look to God for deliverance. Theirs is also a detachment from the things of the earth. Their minds are set on things above. That is where their treasure is. They possess nothing on the earth of any value.

The point is not that we are materially poor, but rather that the spiritual life in the kingdom of heaven as we live in this world mirrors that of the poor. It stands in stark contrast to those whose lives are centered upon the things of the earth—whose hearts and minds are set on carnal things. Indeed, many of those who are materially poor are nonetheless preoccupied with the things of this world and are not looking to God for their sustenance. On the other hand, some of those who are rich materially are nonetheless treated as if they were poor and afflicted. Read through some of the psalms of David and you will see that though rich, he identifies himself as one of the poor who is rejected and despised by the rich, suffering the same afflictions as the poor. He is looking to God for his deliverance. The life of the poor in spirit is one of poverty in the eyes of the world. It possesses nothing worldly and therefore is regarded as nothing.

In order to comprehend this life of spiritual poverty, we need to look no further than Christ himself. Where do we find anyone who embodies the life of poverty more than the one who emptied himself of all his riches and came to earth to live a life of poverty. As Paul declares: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus, the king of heaven, was born in a stable—born into poverty. Jesus, who has no place to lay his head—not only because he had no wealth, but because he was unwelcome here. He was dismissed as worthless and meaningless. He was treated contemptuously and unjustly by the powers that were. He possesses nothing in this world other than his people. He is despised and rejected by men. He was afflicted and oppressed. He had no attachment to worldly things. His mind was set on things above. Jesus infinitely, perfectly embodies all that it means to be poor in spirit. There is none like him, nor ever will be. We, who are in Christ, are made perfect in the one who is perfectly poor in spirit. Jesus, our Lord—the eschatological One “poor in spirit”!

At the same time, the text is calling us into this life of poverty—a life that is united to Christ in his poverty. What you must see is that this is not simply a state of mind; it is rather a state of being. This is your position in the world. You are poor in spirit by virtue of your relationship with Christ. As the world hated Christ, they will hate you. As Christ endured suffering and hardship for the sake of the gospel, so will you. As Christ was offered the world in his temptation by the devil, so will we be tempted to pursue the things of the world. As Christ forsook the world, so we must forsake the world. We must set our minds on things above. Our treasure is in heaven. We may not be materially deprived of possessions here on earth, but we possess nothing that we would not readily surrender. All that we have is as rubbish compared to what we have in Christ. We are the semi-eschatological possessors, being “poor in spirit” in Christ Jesus.

You see how contrary this is to the spirit of those who preach a health and wealth gospel. They do not preach poverty in regard to the world, but a gospel of prosperity. They do not proclaim a message of identity with the sufferings of Jesus but a message of worldly success and power. They preach a gospel that is an abomination, contrary to that which Christ teaches in our text. It is not a gospel of worldly prosperity that Christ brings, but a life of poverty with regard to the world. The health and wealth folk do not advocate that believers be poor in spirit, but that they might be rich in spirit. This is the spirit of the world. This first beatitude is made into ‘blessed are the rich in spirit for they will inherit the earth.’ This is the devil’s temptation. Be rich. Possess the earth. But they who do so

will inherit the kingdom of darkness. Heed the blessing and warning Jesus gives the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. To the Laodiceans in particular, he says: “So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:16-19).

To the church at Smyrna on the other hand, he writes: “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:9-10).

Let us be poor in spirit even as Christ is poor in spirit, being forsaken by and forsaking the world, being poor in the things of the flesh that we might be rich in Christ.

People of God, this is who we are in Christ. We are poor, weak, despised and humbled in the eyes of the world. Yet even so, we are tremendously blessed by God on account of the riches of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

John Calvin on Merit from Psalm 18¹

There, however, still remains one question. If God rendered to David a just recompense, it may be said, does it not seem, when he shows himself liberal towards his people, that he is so in proportion as each of them has deserved? I answer, When the Scripture uses the word *reward* or *recompense*, it is not to show that God owes us any thing, and it is therefore a groundless and false conclusion to infer from this that there is any merit of worth in works. But God, as a just judge, rewards every man according to his works, but he does it in such a manner, as to show that all men are indebted to him, while he himself is under obligation to no one. The reason is not only that which St. Augustine has assigned, namely, that God finds no righteousness in us to recompense, except what he himself has freely given us, but also because, forgiving the blemishes and imperfections which cleave to our works, he imputes to us for righteousness that which he might justly reject. If, therefore, none of our works please God, unless the sin which mingles with them is pardoned, it follows, that the recompense which he bestows on account of them proceeds not from our merit, but from his free and undeserved grace (*Commentary on the Book of Psalms* [1949], 1:280 on Ps. 18:20).

¹ We owe this passage to Robert Van Kooten, who spotted it during research for a series of sermons on the Psalms.

THE END IN THE BEGINNING:

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CATECHISM FOR YOUNG AND OLD

James T. Dennison, Jr.

Genesis

What does “Genesis” mean?

Book of “beginnings”

What is begun in Genesis?

The beginning of creation; the beginning of the world; the beginning of man and woman; the beginning of sin; the beginning of redemption.

What other book of the Bible begins like Genesis?

The gospel of John—“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1)

Why does John begin his gospel this way?

Because the incarnation of the Word is the beginning of a “new creation”.

Who reveals himself as Creator in Gen. 1:1?

The One who is Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Rev. 22:13ff.).

How does he reveal himself?

By making all things very good (Gen. 1:31), i.e., a reflection of his glory.

Who was placed in God’s protological garden?

The first (protological) man

In what relationship was Adam to God by creation?

He was related as God’s very own image.

You are suggesting something personal and intimate between God and Adam via creation.

Yes, Adam was related to his Creator as a “son” (Luke 3:38)—the image-bearer of his Father in heaven.

So the relational aspect was dependent on something prior—the creatural?

Yes; before God personally related himself to his image (Adam), he generated his being in an act of creation.

Is there any antecedent paradigm for the Adam-God relation by creation?

Yes. There is the Adam-Christ paradigm relation.

Explain

Christ is called the second Adam, but he is prior to the first Adam.

How can Christ Jesus be prior to the protological Adam?

As ontological Son of God.

What does ontological mean?

It refers to “being”. The Son of God is the Being of God—one of the three personal Beings (without separation) in the Godhead.

Say this another way.

The Son of God is very God as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are very God.

How is the Son of God related to his Father?

Via an un-creation, i.e., a generation of a Son to a Father as a God-Son by a God-Father—an eternal Father-Son relation; an eternal Son-Father generation. Is there any priority to this relation and generation?

How does one express priority in an eternal relation via an eternal generation?

Both relation and generation are eternal as both Father and Son are eternal.

And yet, the Father stands first in order?

Yes, even as the Son stands second in order.

But does this not imply a temporal priority in either the Father or the Son?

No. There is no temporality in un-created Beings, i.e., in God in his tri-personal essence.

So there never was a time when the Father was not eternal Father and the Son was not eternal Son?

No. The un-created Father eternally generates the un-created Son: ontological relation, ontological generation, ontological un-creation.

Is the eternal Son of God the image of God his heavenly Father?

Yes; he is the very image of the essence of his Father—the very eternal image of his very eternal Father in the very eternal essence of Godhead (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:20; Phil 2:6; John 1:1).

Hence, this un-created relation of essential Godhead personally distinguished (but not separated) as Father and Son, generator and generated, begetter and begotten, eternally imprints the image of the Godhead Father Being upon the Godhead Son Being. And thus there is an antecedent precedent in the ontological God the Father, God the Son relationship for the redemptive-historical heavenly Father-Creator, earthly son-creature relationship/paradigm.

What does this imply about the image of his heavenly Father in the Adamic son?

Though a created image bearer, the protological Adam (son) mirrors the eschatological Adam (Son), the uncreated image bearer.

In what condition was the protological Adam?

He was in a probationary state of mutable righteousness

What do you mean by probationary state?

He was being tested with respect to obedience to his Creator's will.

A probationary state suggests a state which is not complete or perfect?

Yes

What state was beyond the protological man?

The eschatological state was placed before him.

How could he have attained that eschatological state?

By the merit of his works, i.e., by obeying God's command, he would have earned the eschatological reward.

Was God obligated to enter into this probationary arrangement with Adam?

No. God owed the creature—even his perfect creature, Adam—nothing (Luke 17:10).

Then what do we call this act on the part of the transcendent God in which he relates himself imminently to his creature?

It is a divine act of willing or non-obligatory stooping or humbling of himself to the creature. This act is often called God's "voluntary condescension".

And in this voluntary condescension, God bound himself by a personal relationship (or covenant) to reward Adam's obedience.

Yes; God was faithful, that had Adam "done this" (obedience), he would have

“lived” (eternally).

What do we call this covenant relationship?
The covenant of works

Did the first, protological Adam keep the covenant of works?
No; he disobeyed his Creator by eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6).

Did the second, eschatological Adam recapitulate the covenant of works?
Yes; Christ Jesus our Savior, obeyed the law of God at every point.

Did the second, eschatological Adam recapitulate the probation of the first man?
Yes; Christ endured the temptation of the serpent-Satan in the wilderness and triumphed where Adam failed (see especially Mark 1:12–13 where the image of the ‘pacified’ beasts recalls Adam’s dominion over the animal world in giving each creature its proper name, Gen. 2:19).

What has the eschatological Adam attained by his obedience?
Christ has merited/earned the right to the tree of life in the center of the Paradise of God.

Has the second Adam merely earned this right so as to restore us to the Eden-garden of the first Adam?
No; the eschatological Adam has earned the title to the heavenly/eschatological arena by his merit.

Has Christ earned the right to the glory-heaven for himself alone?
No, even as the protological Adam earned the right to damnation for himself and all whom he represented, so the eschatological Adam earned the right to salvation for himself and all whom he represented (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22).

Whom did the protological Adam represent?
The whole human race—those “in” him (*en Adam*—Greek of 1 Cor. 15:22)

Whom did the eschatological Adam represent?
The whole elect human race—those “in” him (*en Christo*—Greek of 1 Cor. 15:22)

In other words, the protological and eschatological Adams are representative figures—all represented by them are included “in” them.
Yes, the covenantal or representative principle is rooted in the “in” inclusion. The first is universal; the second is particular. But both are federally or covenantally prescribed.

Where is the first record of this distinguishing and redemptive revelation?
The so-called *protoevangelium/protoevangelion* (“first gospel”) of Gen. 3:15.

Why do you say “redemptive” revelation?
Because this is the protological promise of grace and salvation to fallen sinners.

Yet it is not the first eschatological revelation, is it?
No

If, then, the eschatological arena was held out as Adam’s destiny before the fall, what precisely is unique about Gen. 3:15 and eschatology?
Gen. 3:15 reveals God’s divine initiative to bring sinful man into the eschatological arena by way of a substitute—a Savior.

Gen. 3:15 is thus the announcement of a new covenant!
Yes, the eschatological is now to be attained by the gracious provision of a Savior.

What do we call this new, eschatological covenant?
The covenant of grace

What is grace?

A free (sovereign, i.e., at God's initiative), undeserved (sinners do not earn it; the sinless Savior earns it for them), favor (kindness, gift, cf. Eph. 2:8) of God (it does not have its source in the creature, only in the Creator-Redeemer).

How did Adam and Eve understand the protological announcement of the covenant of grace?

They heard God declare that a man (one born of the seed of the woman) would undo what Adam had just done, i.e., he would destroy the works of the Serpent by delivering a capital or fatal blow to his head, while suffering a lesser blow himself in so doing to his own heel.

How was this eschatological promise of grace a reversal of the reversal?¹

In the fall, Adam, formerly the friend of God and enemy of Satan, had become the enemy of God (NB: he hid from him, Gen. 3:8) and the friend of Satan (i.e., Adam, like Satan, soon becomes a liar, Gen. 3:11–12). Sin's reversal must itself be reversed by pledging "enmity" between the friends—man and Satan. The implication is that those who are enemies after the fall—i.e., God and (sinful) man—will become friends (enmity reversed) through the crushing of the Serpent's head and the bruising of the "seed's" heel.

Who brings this eschatological covenant to fulfillment?

The eschatological Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:45, 47)

Who is the eschatological "seed" of the woman?

Our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 3:23-38)

What is the significance of God clothing Adam and Eve with skins?

Sinful nakedness could not be covered with the works of man's hands (fig leaves). Only a covering provided by the hand of God was sufficient to robe man's unrighteousness in God's sight.

What is the eschatological significance of the skin covering?

What God provides to hide the sinner's guilt, shame and unrighteousness enables the sinner to receive the acceptance of the Lord, i.e., to be received into his glory-presence.

What about the image of God in redemptive paradigm?

Defaced by the fall, the reverse renewal of the image of God in sinful man is undertaken Christologically. God the Son (true *imago Dei*) assumes the image of man in order to restore the undefaced image of God to fallen sinners in union with him (Eph. 4:24).

Why did God place a flaming sword and cherubim at the entrance of the garden?

To guard his garden-presence, even as the cherubim guard his heavenly glory-throne.

Was man banned from the garden forever?

Only a Man with an "endless life" could pass through the flame of fire and under the sword of death; only he could open the way to the tree of life once more.

Why did God cast Adam and Eve out of the garden?

a. To indicate that sinners may not approach the tree of life without a substitute.

¹ See the author's "The Eschatological Reversal of the Protological Reversal: Narrative Analysis and Chiasmic Paradigms in Genesis 2:18-3:24." *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 23/2 (September 2008): 3-13, available at Kerux.com here: <http://www.kerux.com/doc/2302A1.asp>.

- b. To preserve them from the permanent eschatological curse of being fixed forever in a state of condemnation and damnation (Gen. 3:22–23).
 “East of Eden” is the way of wandering. Why are Adam and his wife sojourners?
 They are separated from God’s Paradise while they travel in a wilderness subject to the curse under which the whole creation groans.
- What is revealed in the history of Cain and Abel?²
 From the beginning of man’s history outside of the Garden, there are two seeds, two lines, two races: the seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent. Cain is a snake in the grass; Abel “being dead, yet speaketh”.
- What is the significance of Abel’s lamb?
 This “protological” lamb is an anticipation of the eschatological Lamb. Behind the lamb Abel offers stands the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.
- Why was Abel’s sacrifice “more excellent” or “better” than Cain’s?
 Because it was a sacrifice which had to be slain (as Abel confessed he deserved on account of his sins), a sacrifice of blood (to cover or atone for his guilt and shame), a sacrifice which had to be wholly consumed (as Abel prayed his sin and punishment would be wholly consumed by the grace of God). All this Abel believed. By “faith” (Heb. 11:4), he possessed the end from the beginning as the (new) beginning in his offering anticipated his end (the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, i.e., heaven).
- How is the division of the two races or two seeds evident in the descendants of Cain?
 They have a fortress mentality, building cities for their security—demonstrating in their works that they belong to the horizontal only, i.e., to the world.
- How is this division evident in the descendants of Seth who replaced Abel?
 They are known for calling on the name of the Lord (the vertical dimension), i.e., they show that they belong to the world to come (Gen. 4:26).
- How is this division evident in the seventh from Adam in each line (i.e., the line of Cain and the line of Seth)?
 The seventh from Adam via Cain is Lamech (Gen. 4:19–24) whose savage defiance of God and his righteousness displays the reprobate spirit of those abandoned to their lusts and brutal passions.
 The seventh from Adam via Seth is Enoch (Gen. 5:21–24) who walks with God and is raptured to the glory-presence of his Lord without tasting death.
- How is Enoch able to walk with God?
 Because God first walks with him. Enoch experiences God with him, i.e., Emmanuel
- What is the significance of the Flood (Gen. 6-8)?
 It is the initial un-creation—cosmic reversal of the created order through judgment. Mankind’s wickedness brings the eschatological judgment—the flood of death and destruction. The earth is turned back to a formless void—empty of life save what is preserved in the ark.
- What is the significance of the ark (Gen. 6:14-22)?
 The ark is God’s instrument of deliverance for those who have received his grace. Noah and his family are borne up above the waters of destruction, vindicated as righteous through divine grace alone—acquitted by preservation (1 Pet. 3:20;

² See the author’s “East of Eden” available here: <http://www.lynnwoodopc.org/home.html>, click Audio Resources, click Old Testament, click Genesis.

Heb. 11:7).

What is the eschatological significance of the Flood?

It anticipates the fearful judgment of the flood of fire which will cover the earth at the last day. The two seeds are parted by water and by fire. The warning of the flood water is an intrusion announcement and anticipation of the more dreadful flood of fire (2 Pet. 3:5-7).

Is there any righteousness in Noah which earns him the reward of the ark on the ground of his good works?

Absolutely not. Any suggestion of good works in Noah as a meritorious ground of reward diminishes the sufficiency of the grace of God and exalts human insufficiency in an inappropriate and unbiblical manner. Noah, as all sinners, is subject to the declaration of God himself to Job, as endorsed by the apostle Paul: “who has first given to him (God), that it should be paid back to him again?” (Rom. 11:35 citing Job 41:11). The obvious answer to the question is: no sinner!

God’s plan telescopes downward to Abram/Abraham in Gen. 11-12ff. What is the significance of this telescoping pattern?

The cosmic focus of God’s design at the protological level has been conspicuously narrowed to a single individual in Gen. 12. Abram alone is “effectually called” out of Ur of the Chaldees. Out of the mass of sinful mankind, God’s sovereign, electing, eschatological initiative detaches Abram from the perishing multitudes. And God does this in order to restore the cosmic focus present at the beginning.

What do you mean God restores the “cosmic focus” of the beginning?

Abram, a solitary individual, is elected to be the father of a multitude of believers in the eschatological future. Eschatology recapitulates protology—the cosmic design for mankind comes to expression eschatologically in the elect “family”; “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).

So the promise of an eschatological Adam now becomes an eschatological Abraham?

Yes, the line of election flows through the woman’s seed:

Adam→Seth→Enoch→Noah→Abraham

Hence, we have a new beginning for mankind in the call of Abram.

Yes, it is a new creation motif once more. (NB: the “new” thing God does is ever the eschatological thing; something of divine, eternal grace penetrates into time and space. The vertical line of eschatology intersects with the horizontal line of history: Y-axis [eschatology] interfaces with X-axis [history].³ This is a specifically Vosian emphasis, as a close reading of his profound inaugural address makes clear: “...revelation is organically connected with the introduction of a new order of things into this sinful world. Revelation is the light of this new world which God has called into being. The light needs the reality and the reality needs the light to produce the vision of the beautiful creation of His grace,” Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* [1980] 9–10.)

Is the Abrahamic covenant God’s initial covenant with man?

No, you will remember the covenant of works with Adam (in the Garden) and

³ See the logo of Northwest Theological Seminary (NWTS) of Lynnwood, Washington (nwts.edu). Also the cover of *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* (Volume 26/1 May [2011]) at Kerux.com. Note this author’s article “The NWTS Logo” in that issue for a full explanation (<http://www.kerux.com/pdf/kerux.26.01.pdf>).

- the covenant of grace with the Second Adam (in Paradise, reflected in Eden) at the fall.
- What then is special about God’s covenant with Abraham?
It is the covenant foundational to the Hebrews as a nation.
- Was this covenant intended to be restricted to ethnic Hebrews?
No, the promise of the Abrahamic covenant is universal—inclusive of believers from all nations.
- How are all believers ‘Hebrews’?
They are pilgrims as Abraham was (Heb. 11:13-16)⁴
- How many elements are there in the Abrahamic covenant?
Three: Emmanuel (“I will be with thee”); Heritage (“I will give thee this land”); Messiah (“In thee, all nations will be blessed”)
- Who is the eschatological Emmanuel?
Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:23)
- Who is the eschatological heir?
Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:2)
- What is the eschatological inheritance?
Heaven (Heb. 11:16)
- You mean Canaan/Palestine was not the destined inheritance?
It was the provisional inheritance of the Hebrews, but it could not be the eternal inheritance of any of God’s people.
- Why not?
Because it too will pass away. It does not partake of the eternal or everlasting (cf. Heb. 12:27).
- Who is the eschatological Messiah?
Jesus Christ (Mt. 16:16)
- What is God revealing in the covenant with Abraham?
He is particularizing and expanding the dimensions of his saving, gracious covenant. The eschatological seed of the woman is now particularly Hebrew, while directed to the nations/Gentiles, assuring them of a land of promise—an inheritance through great Abraham’s greater Son.
- What is the supreme crisis of Abraham’s life which subjects these pledges to jeopardy?
The command to sacrifice Isaac on Moriah (Gen. 22)
- What was God’s intent in commanding Abraham to offer Isaac?
To try or test Abraham’s faith in the covenant promises.
- What was Abraham’s response to God’s design?
To trust and obey
- How could Abraham do what God commanded?
Because of the eschatological character of his faith
- What do you mean by the “eschatological character of his faith”?
Abraham’s faith brought him into union with the God who is able to do all things—even call the dead to life (cf. Rom. 4:17; Gen. 17:15–17; 19; Heb. 11: 11–12).
- What transition of death to life had been the object of Abraham’s faith prior to the command to go to Moriah?

⁴ Cf. the author’s “‘To the Hebrews’: A Narrative Paradigm.” *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* (Volume 26/2 [September 2011]: 30-33) available here: <http://www.kerux.com/doc/2602A3.asp>.

The en-livening of Sarah's dead womb

So Isaac was, at conception, a token of life from the dead?

Yes—that which was dead, by the power of God, brought forth life.

What does Abraham believe as he sojourns to Moriah?

That his God is faithful; having promised that Isaac is the son of (covenant) promise (i.e., through Isaac Abraham's seed will be more numerous than sand on the shore; will inherit the promised land; will be the ancestor of the Jew-and-Gentile-blessor), if he slays him, God will bring life to the dead. For God cannot deny his promise (cf. Heb. 11:17–19). NB: the chiasm of “go” and “return” (22:5) with “returned” and “went” (22:19)—a pattern of reversal and symmetry which demonstrates Abraham's confidence in God's faithful promise.

So Abraham lays Isaac on the wood believing that God is able to raise him up from the dead?

Yes; the eschatological end of his only son is life, not death.

Is this not an intrusion of the life of God's only-begotten Son into the history of Abraham?

Yes; we see the end (of the history of redemption) from the beginning (the history of Isaac). God himself will offer up his Son in the certain assurance that he will pass from death to life. The substitute on the eschatological Moriah (Mt. Calvary) will be raised up to life so that in him the children of Abraham (= believers, Gal. 3:7) will be gathered from Jewish and Gentile nations; will be made heirs of the Kingdom of light; will be blessed in their true Messiah.

How does the remainder of Genesis reveal this pattern?

The covenant sons—Isaac, Jacob, Joseph—bear the promises of eschatological life. Jacob is saved from death (Esau) and transformed by an encounter with God (Peniel). His name change (Jacob = “schemer”; Israel = “prince with God”) indicates a transition from death to life (a regeneration). Joseph is given up for dead, but God saves him and makes him the instrument of life for his people (descent into Egypt).⁵

How does the conclusion of Genesis reveal this pattern?

Jacob and Joseph both testify to the eschatological aspect of faith. They give instructions to be buried in the land of promise. By faith, they possess the land which belongs to God and their fathers.

How does the book of Genesis end?

With Israel in Egypt

⁵ See the author's “Joseph in Potiphar's House” <http://www.lynnwoodopc.org/home.html>, click Audio Resources, click Old Testament, click Genesis.

Book Reviews

K:JNWT 28/3 (December 2013): 26-32

Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East. Part 1: The Texts. Part 2: Text, Notes and Chromograms. Part 3: Overall Historical Survey*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012. 1642pp. Cloth. ISBN: 978-3-447-06726-3. \$460.

Nearly sixty years ago, George E. Mendenhall contributed an article to the *Biblical Archaeologist* in which he drew upon Hittite treaties (and other ANE texts) in order to apply the genre to the covenants of the Bible. A year later, the article was published as a now famous booklet entitled *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (1955). Stimulated by the article, Kitchen imagined a comprehensive collection of primary documents from across the Ancient Near East (ANE) containing the three genres reflected in the title above. He labored on the project virtually single-handedly until 2003 when Lawrence joined in and split duties with him. That Godsend has sped the long awaited project to its completion with the magisterial results before us. The whole is dedicated worthily and poignantly to the late Donald J. Wiseman (1918-2010) whose friendship and evangelical scholarship has been an encouragement both to our authors and a generation of students of the OT.

What do we have in this massive set? There are 106 documents from ten languages comprising “laws that govern life in a given community”, “treaties that govern relations between such communities”, and “covenants used by or between individuals or them and groups or in dealings with deity” (Preface). Each document is introduced by a full bibliography comprising: sources (various *editiones principes*, including where they were discovered); text editions and/or full translations; major extracts, studies, etc.

The Texts in Part 1 appear in descending chronological order from 2500 B.C. (Eannatum of Lagash—Old Sumerian document) to 600 B.C. (document #102, Neo-Babylonian Laws). Two excurses complete the first volume. Excursus I contains additional documents in English translation only—including Demotic texts and Hellenistic Greek texts (i.e., document #105, Hannibal of Carthage with Philip V of Macedon, 215 B.C.; and document #106, Julius Caesar with Lycia, 46 B.C.). Excursus II lists documents not included in our author’s compilation for reasons stated on p. 1082.

Each document in Part 1 is presented in parallel: the left page is an English transliteration of the original document; the facing page is an English translation in lines parallel to the primary document. All lines are numbered correspondingly on both pages for ease of reference. We have the full text and English translation of familiar documents, i.e., the laws of Hammurabi (1800/1700 B.C.), pp. 109-85; the oft-mentioned Hittite laws (1600/1500 B.C.), pp. 251-92; the covenants and laws of the OT (Exodus to Deuteronomy, mid- to late-2nd millennium B.C.), pp. 695-898; and these interleaved with less familiar documents. The whole majestic collection places before the English reader for the first time in one volume, the texts of the three genres of the ANE as they are known to date (April 2011—completion as noted on p. XVIII).

Hence, Part 1 contains “the most essential documents required for study of the history and interrelationships of treaties, law-collections and covenants in (basically) pre-classical Ancient Near Eastern antiquity. These are the indispensable basis for any serious study of the overall subject” (XIX).

Part 2 contains the attractive color charts (chromographs, pp. 253-68) by which the authors enable us to visualize the results of their work. As with the chronological order of Part 1 (Texts), so these charts move from the 3rd millennium B.C. to the 1st millennium B.C. (cf. also the summary in Part 1, pp. XXIII-XXV). The vocabulary here will be familiar to those initiated into ANE treaty and covenant terminology. Title/Preamble is gray on the chromogram. Prologue (Historical or otherwise) is orange. Stipulations or Laws are royal blue. Deposit of the document is lemon-yellow. Periodic Reading of the document is also lemon-yellow. Witnesses is purple. Blessings is green. Curses is crimson. Oaths is golden yellow. Solemn Ceremony is golden yellow as well. And Epilogue is brown. White is used for additional items (cf. the overall color key, Part 2, pp. 253-54). The concept of the chromogram is to compare and contrast the constitutive elements in the documents through history. For example, the treaty-law-covenant elements which are unique to the 2nd millennium B.C. may be contrasted with those same elements in 1st millennium B.C. treaty-law-covenant texts. This is a keystone of Kitchen’s apologetic for the Biblical covenants of the Mosaic era being compatible with the mode of 2nd millennium B.C. covenant and treaty documents.

This point has been a distinctive of his published works since it first appeared in 1966 (*Ancient Orient and Old Testament*) and most recently (and definitively, I might add) in *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (2003¹). Kitchen is not attempting to *prove* that Moses existed (though he does believe the Biblical Moses is historical—cf. his remarks in Part 3 of our current title, p. 136)—he is merely observing that the documents associated with the figure of the 2nd millennium B.C. Moses are authentic to the style of covenant-law-treaty genre from that era².

At the same time, Kitchen is equally clear in his anti-apologetic vis-à-vis the fabrications and deceit of the Wellhausen school, the advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis and the radical minimalists of the OT clique who maintain that covenant, law and treaty are late evolutions in Israelite religion, peculiar to 1st millennium B.C. treaties and covenants and hence impossible to a 2nd millennium B.C. milieu. Our present title is a massive endorsement of the 2nd millennium B.C. provenance of the Mosaic covenant and law on the basis of the analysis of primary documents—oodles of primary documents. And in the process, the numerous ANE treaty-law-covenant documents for the 1st millennium B.C. *do not* show the elements of the 2nd millennium B.C. documents—as the chronograms visually illustrate so clearly. Wellhausenism and its bastard children should be judged on the scientific study of primary documents. That **theory** found wanting (even base fallacy) should be interred in the graveyard of other so-called ‘scientific studies’ which are more

¹ Cf. this author’s review of the book here: <http://www.kerux.com/kerux/doc/2002A6.asp>.

² Lawrence takes the same approach in his *The Books of Moses Revisited* (2011)—“The evidence that we have considered clearly points to the Late Second Millennium BC as the period when the first five books of the Bible were written. So I contend that it is also time to reinstate Moses as the ‘author,’ or, in the case of Genesis, as the ‘compiler’” (p. 128).

propaganda grounded in reigning contextual and extra-Biblical philosophical views than objective data from authentic texts of the 2nd and 1st millennium B.C. One glance at the chromograms of the 2nd millennium B.C. Mosaic covenant (p. 263) as compared with 2nd millennium B.C. Assyrian and Hittite treaties (p. 262) indicates similarity of era. In turning the page (264) to 1st millennium documents, that 2nd millennium similarity evaporates as the elements and order of the 2nd millennium documents disappear in the uniformity of the 1st millennium B.C. custom. Specifically, Title/Preamble—Historical Prologue—Stipulations in 2nd millennium B.C. covenants has been replaced by Title/Preamble—Witnesses—Curses in 1st millennium B.C. documents. This is NOT apples and apples! There is no way the Mosaic covenant and law could be 1st millennium B.C. in origin except to those with hidden agendas who ignore the evidence of the primary documents. Such devotees of Wellhausen and the Documentary Hypothesis are not scholars; they are propagandists, either willfully or by default (i.e., out of ignorance, knowing no better because uncritical of the reigning presuppositions which dispose them against Mosaic origin).

Given the mass of information in these documents, what have our authors provided in order to access the data? Thankfully, there are several useful indexes—all within the pages of the second volume. There is a topical index (pp. 111-38) from “Abduction” to “Women”. Each entry provides reference to the particular document, the section of that document and a brief statement of the topic. There is also an exhaustive index of gods, goddesses and places where deities gather (pp. 193-208). Familiar names of the Mesopotamian pantheon appear: Ishtar, Sin (moon god), Enlil, Marduk, Ashur, etc., as well as those of Canaan—Baal and Astarte. There is also an alphabetical index of blessings and cursings (pp. 209-24) followed by explanatory notes. Here, the authors observe that the curse of exile is a generic and universal malediction in “almost all periods of ancient Near-Eastern history” (225). Thus, the higher critical argument that exile (either 8th century B.C. Israel or 6th century B.C. Judah) is inserted into OT documents *ex eventu* (“after the event”) is demonstrably false—an invention of those unaware or willfully ignorant of the pervasive curse of exile common to all law-treaty-covenant documents from 2000 B.C on (226).

In Part 3 (“Overall Historical Survey”), our authors weave together the documents with a narrative history of the three millennia from which the primary texts arise. The goal is the *longue durée* or “long-lasting” story of the ANE as it unfolds in our texts from 2500 B.C. to Julius Caesar. In their own words, a “true metanarrative” which accurately (in contrast with pejoratively, i.e., historical-critical) portrays law, treaty and covenant inside and outside the Biblical world.

We begin in 10,000 B.C. with increasingly complex pre-literate cultures (especially in Mesopotamia and beyond). These societies of families, farmers, villages and even cities required rulers and deities. That, in turn, required rules and agreements between groups. About 6500 B.C., stamp-seals began to appear for recording transactions and ownership. Then, about 3200 B.C., pictures were drawn to represent information on clay tablets. By 2900 B.C., phonetic values had been assigned to the pictures and wedge-like marks to these via early cuneiform. Hence, an emerging literate culture had existed for nearly 500 years prior to the first document in our collection—Eannutum of Lagash (2500 B.C.). Kitchen and Lawrence stress the significance of this paradigm: “we are not dealing with a

bunch of simple and obscure primitives, but with people embedded in each case within long-developed, mature cultures” (Part 3, p. 3). So much for the popular 19th century canard that Biblical religion emerges in evolutionary style—from the primitive to the complex (with the further gratuitous presumption that the complex era matter is read back on to the primitive era so as to deceive the uninitiated via deliberate myths invented by the priest-caste, by and large).

Then, with the collapse of the IIIrd Dynasty of Ur, the influx of the Amorites and the emergence of the city-state of Assur ca. 2050 B.C., old Akkadian law texts appear as part of the governance of trade routes from Iran to Anatolia (Turkey) via Mesopotamia. The 19th to 17th centuries B.C. show competing dynasts in Babylon (especially Hammurabi) and Syria, with Mari in between. With Hammurabi’s destruction of Mari, Babylon becomes the hub of the historical wheel for nearly a thousand years. His famous code of laws extends legal stipulations to disparate petty mini-dynasties on the periphery of the Fertile Crescent (dynasties reflected in the clash detailed in Gen. 14). It is important to note the focus of the famous code: the family unit basic to human society. It is not the state nor the political hierarchy/bureaucracy which is featured. Truly a reminder that when the omni-incompetent state assumes the role of the family, society decays and civilization collapses—only barbarians flourish.

Comes now the mid-2nd millennium B.C. and the rise of the Bronze Age powers—Egypt, Mitanni (between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, east of Carchemish and west of Assur), Hittite (Anatolia)—together with the union of Assyria and Babylon. To regulate these interrelationships, treaties appear with the standard format of the era: title, prologue, stipulations, oaths and ceremonial ratification. Our authors take space to recount the accuracy of the Biblical account of the patriarchal era prior to 1550 B.C. (Part 3, pp. 69-71). There is nothing in the Scriptures which is not also reflected in the extra-Biblical documents contemporary with the patriarchal age. Again, “there was no later model from which our ‘patriarchal’ narratives could have been derived” (p. 70)—they are authentic records of their historical and cultural milieu. The Hittite laws and treaties follow, bringing us down to 1180 B.C. when the Hittite Empire collapsed under pressure from rising Assyria (east) and the invasion of the Sea Peoples (west).

We are next treated to an extensive discussion of the Mosaic law and covenant, illustrated with tables which outline the 2nd millennium B.C. genre of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy (pp. 133-34). Together with the notes on this material in Part 2 (pp. 71-84), our authors provide significant insights on the Biblical material (Part 3, pp. 117-213). Here we encounter their attempt to schematize the entire book of Deuteronomy as a covenant document, breaking the book chapter by chapter into the ANE covenantal paradigm. This is common to evangelical scholars (M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*; J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, etc.), but it is a gratuitous exercise of imposing an ANE formula on an entire book of the Bible. Specifically, it makes the usual brief Historical Prologue (e.g., “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage,” Ex. 20:2) into a lengthy discourse (Dt. 1:6-3:29). In fact, Dt. 1:6-3:29 is a travel narrative; it is not a covenantal or treaty prologue. Enthusiasm for ANE parallels should halt at forcing the inspired text into a comparative-cultures straight-jacket! The structure of Deuteronomy is narrative-theological, in retrospect primarily, not treaty-covenantal (though the review of the Sinai covenant is present in the retrospective

historical narrative review—i.e., covenant as retrospective narrative story even as the whole story unfolds from Egypt to the edge of the Jordan and the vista of journey’s end—the Promised Land).

This brings us to the 1st millennium B.C. and the dominance of the Levant by Assyria (900-612 B.C.) and the Neo-Babylonian (612-539 B.C.) Empires. The distinctive style of these post-1000 B.C. treaties, laws and covenants is detailed on pages 218-42 (cf. the chromographs in Part 2, pp. 264-66). The dissimilarity of these documents from 2nd millennium B.C. texts is readily apparent to the eye. Once more, the texts of the Mosaic era do not match this 1st millennium milieu; they belong to the 2nd millennium B.C. world.

Chapter 7 of this volume ties up the whole work with a fitting “Concluding Overall Perspectives: Contexts and Concepts” (243-66). This is followed by an excursus on apodictic and casuistic law (267-76): “not a usage restricted to the Hebrew Bible . . . Thus, the use of apodictic ‘basic laws’ (our modern ‘ten commandments’ section) . . . followed by a run of casuistic laws in more detail . . . is a commonplace of the 14th-13th centuries—not some oddity unique to the biblical texts” (256).

This final chapter also contains a superb 2-page précis of higher critical asininity (pp. 260-61). Beginning in the 18th and 19th centuries, gurus of the nascent Documentary Hypothesis (i.e., the reconstruction/reinvention of the Pentateuch from “eurocentric” ideology and that, read back on to and in to the Biblical text! So much for the lie of the “Bible without presuppositions”), our authors review the alleged scientific source-criticism (JEDP) noting its rise alongside the rise of Darwinian evolution. K. H. Graf (1815-1869) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) applied cultural Darwinianism to Israelite religion as “king-pins” to a J (YHWH = Jehovah) strata, merged with an E (Elohim = God) strata, integrated with a D (Deuteronomist) book fabricated by 7th century B.C. Josianic priests (621 B.C.) to include the hoary mythical ‘Moses’; this whole conglomeration is completed with the addition of a P (Priestly) document native to the Persian and Hellenistic exilic interface. And yet, this theory (which is *true* myth) continues to dominate the so-called scientific and historical-critical study of Genesis through Deuteronomy. But our authors observe: “On behalf of scientific accuracy . . . these matters . . . and elaborate theories so baldly summarized in the preceding three paragraphs enjoy no tangible or visible means of support. Not in any library, archive, or ancient text-field (like, e.g., the Dead Sea Scrolls) has any copy or MS ever been found, of any separated form of documents J, E, or P, (or D, other than the canonical Deuteronomy). They are all without exception (and remarkable to have to relate), ‘dream-children’, born exclusively out of the versatile minds and imaginations of the . . . ‘critics’ in whose learned volumes they are . . . elaborated. These ‘documents’ and their variants have no other physical existence, outside of the pages of their creators . . .” (260). These myth-makers are erstwhile scholarly wizards materializing the “phantoms” of their imagination by which to bewitch and seduce gullible students, pastors, church folk and publishing houses. “[I]t is with embarrassment and some distaste, that we have in effect to declare that ‘the emperor has no clothes’ . . .” (261). Indeed, as this magisterial compilation evidences, three millennia of concrete and objective documents—*real* scientific facts!—demolish late 1st millennium B.C. dates for the documents of the Pentateuch. The whole façade should collapse in view of the facts—not theories!—save

for the willful ignorance, crass dishonesty and philosophical hidden agendas which prop up a whole industry devoted to intellectual blinders (“Nothing to see here! Kitchen and Lawrence? Move on! Move on with J. Van Seters, T. L. Thompson, J.-L. Ska, R. Whybray, J. Blenkinsopp and a host of others.”).

In view of such a superb compilation, insightful notes, excellent indexes and a helpful historical overview and synthesis, it would seem to be nit-picking to register a caveat. But as I have expressed my disagreement before with Kitchen³ on the date of the Exodus (cf. my review in footnote 1 above), I repeat myself here. 1 Kings 6:1 places the date of the Exodus from Egypt under the historical (not mythical) Moses at 1447/46 B.C. (971/970 B.C.—date of Solomon’s accession. His 4th year is 967/966 B.C. Add 480 years = 1446/47 B.C.). This so-called early date of the Exodus is rejected by Kitchen and a host of others. Kitchen’s capable and learned defense of the late date of the Exodus is anchored in the name Raamses (i.e., Ramesside/19th Dynasty, 1295-1190 B.C.). Hence, Kitchen and other late daters prefer an Exodus date after 1290 B.C. In the title under review, our authors suggest that those favoring the early date of the mid-15th century belong to “‘fundamentalist’ schools . . . of a rigidly literal interpretation of 1 Kings 6:1” (p. 264). In a marvelous 3-volume compilation of primary documents, with repeated appeal to the “texts”, this remark is less than gentlemanly with regard to numerous scholars and friends of Kitchen and Lawrence who anchor their early date commitment not in some Neanderthal exegesis, but in the inspired text. It is therefore surprising to learn that responsible conservative scholars including John Bimson, William Shea, Leon Wood, Douglas Petrovich, Bryant Wood, Eugene Merrill, Gleason Archer, E. J. Young and many others, the undersigned included, are regarded by our learned authors as shackled by a ‘fundamentalist’ mentality and not by the testimony of the Biblical text.

Our authors’s statement neglects to mention the passage from the inspired Word of God in Judges 11:26 where Jephthah notes that in his day the age of the Judges and the occupation of the Transjordan had reached “three hundred years” duration.⁴ Do the math! If the Exodus is 1290 B.C., then 40 years wandering brings us to 1250 B.C. for crossing over Jordan. Allow ca. 15 years for the conquest under Joshua and we are at 1235 B.C. King Saul dates from 1050 to 1010 B.C. (Acts 13:21 puts his reign at 40 years). Samuel precedes him having been designated by divine call from the time he was a child, likely ca. 1090 B.C. 1250 to 1050 B.C. is NOT 300 years; it does not comport with the statement in Judges 11:26 that the era of the Judges and the occupation of the Transjordan is at least 300 years in duration. The only date of the Exodus which allows the 300 years as cited is the date confirmed by 1 Kings 6:1. 1447/46 B.C. less 40 years wandering = 1407/06 B.C. 15 years for the conquest brings us to 1392/91 B.C. Now take the 300 years in question and we are at 1092/91 B.C.—precisely the suggested date for the call of Samuel. In other words, the whole testimony of the OT to the date of the Exodus, the wandering in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the era of the Judges,

³ In the beautiful 2006 Atlas Lawrence compiled for IVP, he provided a balanced explanation of both the early and late dates (pp. 36-37); cf. the review here: <http://www.kerux.com/kerux/doc/2202R1.asp>. Does this set (and these comments) suggest a departure from that more even-handed approach?

⁴ Kitchen dismisses this comment as “bluster”, *On the Reliability of the OT*, 308. Alas, Jephthah is as fundamentalistically literal as the rigid conservatives whom Kitchen and Lawrence dismiss. Is this not a repetition of becoming what the higher critics are: blinder-wearers unmoved by any facts inconvenient to their pet theories—the very thing which 1642 pages has been attempting to disprove?

the age of Samuel and the rise of the monarchy requires the 480 years noted in 1 Kings 6:1. This is not “rigidly literal” interpretation. It is the plain meaning of two texts which cannot be dismissed with pejoratives (“fundamentalist”, “rigidly literal”, “bluster”). Kitchen and Lawrence have the right to their opinion, but have they not slipped (perhaps unwittingly) into ridicule with unfair comments about those who disagree with them and yet have made a whole and consistent Biblical case (from the texts, Kitchen and Lawrence!—from the texts! Remember your very own clarion cry throughout this massive 3-volume set) for the early date of the Exodus and the three-century period of the Judges and beyond?

My caveat does not qualify my praise and thanks for this wonderful contribution. Neglect of these documents by liberal and conservative scholars alike will be a litmus test—real scholarship or propaganda?

—James T. Dennison, Jr.

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Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*. New York: Image, 2012. 144pp. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0385346405. \$15.41.

Joseph Ratzinger (otherwise known among Roman Catholics as Pope Benedict XVI) presents his third book in a series on Jesus, though it is the first chronologically, about the birth of Christ. The book contains a number of interesting references to biblical scholars and their interpretations of the infancy narratives. We are told about various views of Isaiah 7:14, “the virgin shall be with child”. Ratzinger rejects all attempts to find the fulfillment of this prophecy in the historical period of Ahaz. Its only fulfillment is in Jesus of Nazareth. The biblical scholars he sights also open up possible echoes of the Old Testament in the New. Some of these are intriguing. And he speaks of the kingdom of God. Yet Ratzinger misses the semi-eschatological nature of the kingdom, especially its vertical transcendent character. This is no surprise, as the Roman Catholic “priesthood” and its sacerdotal form of worship repristinates the Old Testament economy. In fact, it makes it an end in itself, producing the idolatry of the mass. Ratzinger himself does not shy from suggesting continuity between the present priestly caste and the Old Testament priesthood.

Other elements of Roman Catholic piety are evident in the book such as his Mariolotry and his overemphasis on the internal moral disposition of the Biblical characters. Drawing on this focus, he also states that Jesus did not come to critique the piety of the Jewish people. Here he may be following the post-Vatican II embrace of various religions. Even if this is not the case, this claim is too simplistic. The Son of God did accept the worship of the faithful among Israel such as Simeon and Anna. Still, he brought that piety to its fullness with the sending forth of his Spirit at Pentecost. And Christ clearly criticized the false piety of many in Israel, such as the scribes and Pharisees, based as it was in human merits.

His Roman Catholic view of grace is also evident. When it comes to interpreting Luke 2:14, he rightfully notes the moralizing perspective of the translation of the Latin version, “men of good will”. However, with his appeal to free will, he then rejects the Augustinian approach to grace, leaving us with a form of Semi-Pelagianism. In fact, he even quotes Bernard to the effect that God was waiting on the response of Mary in faith to solidify the virgin birth through her womb. This is preposterous! And Augustine would have said so. It may at least seem that Ratzinger defends the historical reliability of the gospels narratives for he reaffirms this several times. However, he then quotes Karl Barth to support the historical nature of the virgin birth and resurrection as unique miraculous acts. But Barth himself did not believe that these events look place in history, but only in the Kantian noumenal realm, here understood as a transcendent *Geschichte*.

Thus, while this book contains some interesting reflections on the infancy accounts from noted Biblical scholars, those insights can be found in standard commentaries. And because of our other reservations above, we do not suggest it for a lay audience. The king who came lowly in a manger did so because he was turning the cosmos upside down, bringing a kingdom in which the proud of this age would be humbled—and those humbled before Christ’s throne in heaven would be exalted. This king possessed in himself a transcendent kingdom—not of this age. From there he offers grace—both justifying and sanctifying— to lead those trusting it to heaven. And thus, he brings low all establishmentarian religions which boast in human merits. Glory be to thee alone, Lord Christ.

—Scott F. Sanborn