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## EDITORIAL

### A Notable Giant

I recently reached back forty years through life's rearview mirror and revisited the experiences of a 25-year-old, fresh out of the Navy, neophyte seminary student. One of my strongest memories from those earlier years remains reading *Moody Monthly*, especially Warren Wiersbe's "Insight for Pastors" column where he often wrote brief biographical sketches of great preachers from bygone eras. Several years later, my family gave me a treasured volume of Wiersbe's articles for Christmas entitled *Walking with the Giants*.<sup>1</sup>

These miniature literary portraits of men greatly used by God thrilled me. I felt especially drawn to the men who labored a lifetime preaching sequentially through the Bible, like Alexander Maclaren and Joseph Parker. These were inspirational moments for me at the time, but little more as I focused primarily on surviving the rigors of seminary study.

Of late, however, the opportunity to reconsider some of those same men has resurfaced. With a better and clearer perspective on how infrequent precious men like these have surfaced in church history, it dawned on me that I now walk in ministry with one such giant—John MacArthur, president of The Master's Seminary.

I have lived beyond 65 as TMS celebrates her 25th year. During times like these, older gentlemen usually engage in serious reflection on their lives and ministry. In so doing, I asked several people to name for me the pastors who in the course of their ministries preached though the entire Bible or either Testament and then put their preaching into print to extend their fruitfulness even further in time and space.

Limited to those who ministered after Johannes Guttenberg invented the printing press in 1440, the list remains unbelievably short because only a rare handful of men over the last 500-600 years have actually done so. While my brief research certainly cannot be considered exhaustive, it does capture a representative group of the notable giants. By century, it looks like this:

16th century—John Calvin (1509-1564)<sup>2</sup>

17th century—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Walking with the Giants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

18th century— John Gill (1697-1771)<sup>4</sup>; Charles Simeon (1759-1836)<sup>5</sup>  
 19th century—Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910)<sup>6</sup>; Joseph Parker  
 (1830-1902)<sup>7</sup>; B. H. Carroll (1843-1914)<sup>8</sup>  
 20th and 21st centuries—J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988)<sup>9</sup>;  
 Warren Wiersbe (1929-present)<sup>10</sup>; John MacArthur (1939-present)<sup>11</sup>

John MacArthur began preaching through the New Testament at Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA in 1969. He plans to finish the New Testament with the Gospel of Mark in 2011—43 years of preaching that spans all or part of six decades.

His preaching unfolded in the following fashion:

Matthew	1978–1985	2 Thessalonians	1992
Mark (in process)	2009–2011	1 Timothy	1985–1987
Luke	1998–2008	2 Timothy	1987–1988
John	1970–1972	Titus	1992–1993
Acts	1972–1975	Philemon	1991
Romans	1969–1970, 1981–1986	Hebrews	1972–1973
1 Corinthians	1975–1977	James	1986–1987
2 Corinthians	1993–1998	1 Peter	1969, 1988–1990
Galatians	1973–1974	2 Peter	1969, 1990–1991
Ephesians	1971–1972, 1978–1979	1 John	1975, 2002–2003
Philippians	1988–1989	2 John	1975, 2003
Colossians	1976	3 John	1975, 2003

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1845; repr., Marshallton, DE: Sovereign Grace, n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> John Gill, *Gill's Commentary*, 6 vols. (1746–1763; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Charles Simeon, 21 vols. (1847; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956). The reprint title is *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, 17 vols. (1904–1910; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Parker, *The Peoples' Bible*, 25 vols (1886ff. repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). The reprint title is *Preaching Through the Bible*.

<sup>8</sup> B.H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, 6 vols. (1948; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973).

<sup>9</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible: Genesis through Revelation*, 5 vols. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 6 vols. (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, estimated 33 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1983–2014).

1 Thessalonians	1990–1991	Jude	1975, 2004
		Revelation	1970, 1991–1995

Then in 1981, Jerry Jenkins, at that time Director of Moody Press in Chicago originated the idea for a *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* series. This monumental work should be completed with 33 volumes (estimated) in 2014 (estimated). Without question, it stands as one of the most thorough word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, and book-by-book New Testament commentary series ever undertaken by a preacher. The publication schedule to date has worked out in this sequence:

Hebrews	1983	Titus	1996
First Corinthians	1984	Acts 13–28	1996
Matthew 1–7	1985	James	1998
Ephesians	1986	Revelation 1–11	1999
Matthew 8–15	1987	Revelation 12–22	2000
Galatians	1987	Philippians	2001
Matthew 16–23	1988	First Thessalonians	2002
Matthew 24–28	1989	Second Thessalonians	2002
Romans 1–8	1991	Second Corinthians	2003
Colossians	1992	First Peter	2005
Philemon	1992	Second Peter and Jude	2005
Romans 9–16	1994	John 1–11	2006
Acts 1–12	1994	First, Second, Third John	2007
First Timothy	1995	John 12–21	2008
Second Timothy	1995	Luke 1–5	2009
		Luke 6–10	2011

While John MacArthur has majored on the New Testament in his pulpit preaching, his extended labors have also included study notes on the entire Bible in *The MacArthur Study Bible*. To date, it has been published in three English versions (ESV, NASU, and NKJV) which have been translated into eight additional languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish).

Of the other nine notable giants mentioned above, John MacArthur most resembles three of them. First comes John Gill (pastored the Carter Lane, Southwark church in London for 51 years) in the overall scope of his ministry. In addition to his commentary work, John Gill wrote a theology<sup>12</sup> and a volume on pastoral ministry.<sup>13</sup> John MacArthur has published a “systematic

<sup>12</sup> John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (1769; repr., Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (1770; repr., Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, n.d.).

shepherdology” of sorts in five volumes.<sup>14</sup> Currently, he is working on *Christian Doctrine: The Persons, Purposes, and Plans of God* with two colleagues.<sup>15</sup>

Second, in his approach to preaching, John MacArthur very much thinks like Charles Simeon (pastored Trinity Church in Cambridge, England for 54 years). His three great aims of (1) humbling the sinner, (2) exalting the Savior, and (3) promoting holiness (conviction, conversion, and consecration) parallel John MacArthur’s prayerful outcome of his own preaching.<sup>16</sup>

Third, in his exposition, John MacArthur embraces the expositional essentials of John Calvin (pastored St. Peter’s Church in Geneva, Switzerland for 25 years) —to accurately explicate and applicate God’s Word.<sup>17</sup> John MacArthur could just as easily comment as did John Calvin, “Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning, and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions, which lead us away from the natural meaning.”<sup>18</sup>

Surely enough has been said by now to identify John MacArthur as a man ordained by God to be numbered among the notable preaching and writing giants in church history. With a rare combination of exceptional depth of study, determination, devotion, diligence, and discipline, John MacArthur has pastored, preached to, and published for Grace Community Church during the last 43 years (with many more anticipated).

Having this perspective in mind and on the occasion of completing 25 years as President of The Master’s Seminary (1986-2011), this 22nd volume, 1st issue of *The Master’s Seminary Journal* (Spring 2011) has been prepared for presentation to Dr. John MacArthur at the 25th graduation celebration of The Master’s Seminary as a festschrift (a volume of writings by colleagues and friends collected in honor of one’s significant accomplishments and contributions) recognizing a most worthy slave and notable giant of Christ to the glory of God.

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<sup>14</sup> *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005); *Pastoral Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005); *Biblical Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005); *Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011); and *The Master’s Plan for the Church*, updated ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Projected for publishing by Crossway in 2013.

<sup>16</sup> H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (1892; repr., London: Inter-Varsity, 1948), 52.

<sup>17</sup> John H. Leith, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today in Light of Recent Research,” *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989): 32, 34.

<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians in Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols (1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 21:136.

## A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF JOHN MACARTHUR'S PUBLIC MINISTRY

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This volume celebrates John MacArthur's 25th anniversary as founding president of The Master's Seminary—a remarkable landmark. For those of us who have been here since the beginning, as we look back on that quarter-century, it seems a very short time. But it's almost exactly half the number of years John has spent in public ministry. Fifty years of preaching, virtually all of it recorded for posterity, reminds us that John is first of all an outstanding preacher of God's Word. All the other hats he wears—as an educator, author, media figure, encourager, discipler of men, and role model for pastors worldwide—are secondary and subordinate to his weekly ministry from the pulpit of Grace Community Church.

The first sermon John ever preached was during his college years, and the message *wasn't* recorded. It wasn't delivered in a church, either, but in the open air. John was part of a student gospel team doing music and evangelism. The team leader dropped him off at a bus depot in Spartanburg, South Carolina, telling him his assignment was to gather a crowd and preach. It was an awkward assignment for which John was completely unprepared.

"The sermon was terrible," he says. "I didn't know how to do it right. I went in there—had my Bible in my hand—and I walked into this mostly-empty bus depot. And I'm looking around this motley bunch and so I just started preaching a gospel message. You could just see people looking at me saying, 'The poor kid! He looks intelligent. It's so sad; he must have some kind of disability.'"

"And I thought, *You know, this doesn't make any sense at all.* So I did it for about ten minutes and then I walked out the door and I went down the street where there was a high school dance beginning—and I just sat outside and gave the gospel to kids as they went in and out. That's how I got my start preaching. It wasn't memorable at all. But after that I was eager to *learn* to preach, because I was determined to be ready whenever I was called on to preach. I would go to rescue missions and military bases to preach when I could. Over time, I learned how to connect with an audience."

In his early college career, John's central passion was athletics. A superb multi-sport competitor, he was considering opportunities for a

professional sports career. (At one point, he was recruited by the Washington Redskins, who were impressed with his skills as a halfback.)

But all that changed in an instant on a remote Alabama highway during a cross-country road trip between semesters. Six students were traveling together in a two-door Ford Fairlane when the driver lost control. The car apparently drifted off the edge of the shoulder, and the driver reacted too forcefully, over-correcting. The car went airborne, the passenger's side door opened, and John MacArthur was ejected. Seat belts were virtually unheard of in those days, but John was the only student thrown from the car. Fortunately, no one else was seriously injured. The open door kept the car from rolling over completely. It landed upside down and just spun to a stop.

John, however, was propelled on his back onto the asphalt at nearly seventy miles per hour. When his body stopped skidding, he was more than a hundred yards from the point where he left the car; he had sustained serious abrasions and third-degree friction burns on his back—but no broken bones. And he was still fully conscious when the long skid finally ended. He stood up, walked to the edge of the road, and stood there bleeding by the highway. He says that before the dust from the accident even settled, he had surrendered his life to the Lord for full-time ministry.

The healing process was unbelievably painful. Alabama doctors applied strips of gauze soaked with an ointment called Furacin to the burns, wrapping the patient like a mummy—then shipped him home to California. California doctors decided the Furacin strips needed to be peeled off, which was a long and painful ordeal—far worse than the original accident. John lay on his stomach in various states of discomfort for three months. The pain slowly gave way to severe itching, and the ordeal seemed as if it would never end. “But,” John says, “by the time I had recovered, I was truly ready to do whatever God wanted me to do.”

As it turned out, John's athletic career was by no means over. He transferred to Los Angeles Pacific College, where he was able to play three sports—football, baseball, and basketball. But now he regarded sports only as means to a greater end. “It became a platform for me to give my testimony and have a ministry,” he says. For example, after being named Player of the Week in football, he was invited to speak at a Kiwanis Club luncheon. “I just got up and gave my testimony about Christ,” he remembers. After that luncheon, a man approached John and told him about a girl who had recently been shot through the neck by an angry boyfriend. The bullet had penetrated her spinal column and left her a quadriplegic. This former head cheerleader was still hospitalized and suffering severe depression, and the man asked John if he would visit her and share the gospel with her. John did, and he led her to Christ.

Recalling that incident, he says, “It was so incredible that God could use me to bring this young woman to Christ when she had been a quadriplegic for only a week or two. She even went on to marry a Christian guy who cared for her. And I said, ‘You know, *this* is what matters.’”

But as if to test his resolve, professional football teams seemed to step up their recruiting efforts. When the Cleveland Browns' star wide receiver, Paul Warfield, broke his collarbone in practice, the team contacted John MacArthur to see if he would be interested in signing as a backup. "No," he told them. "I'm going to seminary."

Now fully committed to preparing for full-time ministry, John began to excel academically. He graduated in 1961 with a major in religion and a double minor in Greek and history. Three years later he graduated *magna cum laude* from Talbot Theological Seminary, where he majored in biblical exposition. Just before his final year in seminary, in August of 1963, John married Patricia, and the eldest of their four children (Matt, Marcy, Mark, and Melinda, in that order) came a year later, not long after John's graduation from seminary.

During and after those years in seminary, John served as assistant pastor to his father in a Burbank church. He also became a much sought-after speaker for church conferences, family camps, and youth groups. A year or so after graduating from seminary, he joined the staff of Talbot Seminary as an extension speaker. Itinerant speaking occupied John full-time for the next three years. For two months every summer, he was the featured speaker at Hume Lake Summer Camp. On most Sundays during the rest of the year, he filled pulpits for various southern California churches.

John's desire, however, had always been to pastor a church. By 1968, he was convinced it was time to pursue that goal. He had always believed strongly that the church is the center and focus of God's work in the world. Itinerant ministry gave him an exposure to a broad range of churches and denominations. Many of them were struggling churches lacking full-time pastors, and John had a burden to help them all. But he had a growing conviction that he could do more to strengthen churches by anchoring his ministry within a single church and modeling what pastoral and church ministry ought to be, rather than always speaking from the perspective of a visiting preacher.

In September of that year, Dr. Richard Elvee, senior pastor of Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA died of a heart attack in the church office. The church's elders, familiar with John MacArthur through his conference speaking, invited him to candidate for the pastoral position. A couple of other churches had previously considered calling John, but their pulpits committees had decided he was too young.

His youthfulness was a tremendous advantage in the eyes of Grace Church's elders, though. The church had lost two successive senior pastors to heart attacks in less than five years. They were looking for a younger man who might lead the church for many years to come. That foresight was spot on, and it is clear today that the Lord's hand was in it. The candidating process moved quickly, and in January of 1969 the elders extended an invitation for John MacArthur to become the third pastor of Grace Community Church. John, only 29 at the time, stepped into the pulpit as senior pastor for the first time on Sunday morning, February 9, 1969. The sermon he gave that morning, "How to

Play Church,” is still one of the most-listened-to messages in the catalogue of John’s sermon recordings.

Grace Church had been growing consistently in numbers and in depth since its founding in 1956. The founding pastor, Don Householder, was a Methodist. Dr. Elvee was a Baptist. But the church itself had no denominational affiliation or label. The church bulletin and doctrinal statement simply described the church as “interdenominational, evangelical, evangelistic.” The real distinctive of the church was a hunger for biblical preaching, and John MacArthur was the perfect pastor to whet that appetite.

Church growth accelerated almost immediately. And it was not just numerical growth. Grace Church soon developed a nationwide reputation for being a congregation that took the Bible seriously. So many lay people became active in hands-on ministry that, in 1973, *Moody Monthly* published a feature article about Grace Community, titled “The Church with Nine Hundred Ministers.” John MacArthur comes across in the article almost like a minor character.

But John’s preaching is and always has been the mainstay and strength of Grace Church. His great skill as a communicator and his commitment to the hard truths of Scripture are evident from the very first sermon he preached. Already an excellent preacher and a precocious student of Scripture in 1969, John has applied himself with unflagging diligence for the past 42 years. His preaching today reflects a maturity and depth that few in 1969 could have even imagined. Late-twentieth-century American evangelicalism, best known for flashy techniques and market-driven messages, has produced no other expositor whose breadth and depth even comes close to that of John MacArthur. In fact, forty-two years (and counting) of faithful, verse-by-verse exposition of the New Testament puts John MacArthur in the rarefied company of truly great names like John Calvin, Thomas Manton, Stephen Charnock, and D. Martyn Lloyd Jones. What makes John’s unique ministry even more notable is that he has remained at the task—and his influence continues to be felt worldwide—while the vast majority of well-known preachers in the evangelical mainstream have chased popular culture’s fads, becoming more and more trivial and superficial in a mad quest to seem “relevant.”

John’s ministry proves how timeless preaching can be when it is merely sound, clear biblical exposition. As John himself would point out, the power of a great sermon does not belong to or emanate from the preacher. *The Word of God* is living, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). All truly great preaching starts with that recognition. Preachers who rely solely on their skill, technique, or creativity may sometimes appear “successful” when the only measurement is human applause. But if the aim of preaching is the awakening of spiritually dead souls and the cleansing and transformation of lives spoiled by sin, then all that really counts is that the preacher be faithful in proclaiming the Word of God with clarity, accuracy, and candor. His people must also be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

The founding of The Master's Seminary in 1986 in retrospect seems nothing more than a natural expression of John MacArthur's ministry philosophy in full flower. John had always been devoted to the task of training others for ministry. (That, after all, was what gave Grace Church its reputation as the church with hundreds of ministers.) A seminary on the church campus made it possible to provide in-depth training for full-time ministers in a context where ministry was constantly flourishing, with the emphasis on expository preaching. That, of course, is still the key distinctive of The Master's Seminary today.

In twenty-five brief years, The Master's Seminary has grown into one of the leading seminaries in America. Well-known for its outstanding academic quality, doctrinal soundness, and practical training for Bible-based, church-centered ministry, the seminary is a reflection of the same biblical values that have shaped and ennobled the ministry of its founding president, Dr. John MacArthur.

Congratulations to John and to the seminary faculty on this memorable milestone. I count it a high privilege to have witnessed the growth and early success of The Master's Seminary more or less from a front-row seat. And I hope and anticipate that (until the Lord returns) the Seminary will continue to enjoy the Lord's blessing and the support of His people, remaining faithful to the biblical principles and philosophy of ministry modeled so superbly and consistently for all these years under the leadership of John MacArthur.



## THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND ISAIAH 7:14<sup>1</sup>

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*Isaiah 7:14 continues to be one of the most debated texts in the Bible. After surveying various scholarly opinions, two key Hebrew words, ‘almâ (young woman) and b’tûlâ (maiden) are discussed as to the immediate historical and prophetic intent of Isaiah. After also consulting the LXX version and Matthew’s use (1:23) of Isaiah 7:14, it is concluded that the passage is a signal and explicit prediction of the miraculous conception and nativity of Jesus Christ.*

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No student of the Old Testament need apologize for a treatment of Isaiah 7:14 in relation to the doctrine of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. From earliest times to the present the discussions which have centered about this theme have been both interesting, varied, and at times even heated. Lindblom characterizes Isaiah 7:14 as “the endlessly discussed passage of the Immanuel sign.”<sup>2</sup> Rawlinson maintains: “Few prophecies have been the subject of so much controversy, or called forth such a variety of exegesis, as this prophecy of Immanuel. Rosenmueller gives a list of twenty-eight authors who have written dissertations on it, and himself adds a twenty-ninth. Yet the subject is far from being exhausted.”<sup>3</sup> Barnes emphasizes the obscurity of the passage: “Who this virgin was, and what is the precise meaning of this prediction, has given, perhaps, more perplexity to commentators than almost any other portion of the Bible.”<sup>4</sup> Again, he insists, “Perhaps there is no prophecy in the Old Testament

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Charles Lee Feinberg (1909–1995), longtime Dean of Talbot Theological Seminary and highly esteemed Old Testament scholar, served as Dr. MacArthur’s mentor and favorite seminary professor during his study for ministry at Talbot. This essay was published by Dr. Feinberg in *Is the Virgin Birth in the Old Testament?* (Whittier, CA: Emeth Publishing, 1967), 34–48 and is used by permission of the *Charles Lee Feinberg Family Trust*. This article appears essentially in its original form.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes Lindblom, “A Study on the Immanuel Section on Isaiah vii, 1–ix, 6,” *Scripta Minora* 1957–58:4 (Lund, Sweden: Lund CWK Gleerup, 1958), 15.

<sup>3</sup> George Rawlinson, “Isaiah: An Exposition,” in *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell (1892; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 10:129.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Barnes, “Isaiah,” in *Notes on the Old Testament: Explanatory and Practical*, ed. Robert Frew (1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 1:148.

on which more has been written, and which has produced more perplexity among commentators than this. And after all, it still remains, in many respects, very obscure.”<sup>5</sup> Skinner seeks in a general way to pinpoint the source of the difficulties. He states: “Probably no single passage of the Old Testament has been so variously interpreted or has given rise to so much controversy as the prophecy contained in these verses. The difficulties arise mainly from the fact that while the terms of the prediction are so indefinite as to admit a wide range of possibilities, we have no record of its actual fulfillment in any contemporary event.”<sup>6</sup> In view of these statements concerning the difficulties in the passage, one may scarcely expect unanimity among either liberals or conservatives in theology.

The logical point at which the investigation should be initiated is a careful treatment of the immediate context. It was in the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah,<sup>7</sup> that a coalition was formed between Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, against Ahaz. Their avowed objective (Isa 7:5–6) was the dethronement of Ahaz and the setting up in his place of a Syrian pretender, a vassal king, Tabeal. When the fact of the confederacy was made known to the royal house, the consternation was great indeed. The text states it (v. 2) under a strong figure. But God had not been consulted in the matter, and He made known that the plottings of Judah’s enemies would be frustrated. Moreover, in yet sixty-five years the northern kingdom of Ephraim would be no more. In that dark hour it required faith to lay hold of this pronouncement of Isaiah, and he warned that if God’s word through him were not believed, there would be no establishment of the king and his people.

Then it was that God, out of His boundless love and mercy to the Davidic house, wishing to confirm the strong assurances already made, invited Ahaz to ask for a sign in attestation of these predictions. Ahaz was not to feel in the least confined, for he was allowed a latitude of request from heaven above to Sheol below. Any request within these extensive areas was permissible. But Ahaz in a hypocritical display of sudden piety refused to put God to the test. This was an affront to God to disobey in so peremptory a manner. Isaiah’s patience had long since been exhausted with the vacillating, faithless monarch. Will Ahaz now wear out God’s patience as well?

In spite of the king’s disobedience and without his co-operation, the Lord Himself promised a specific sign: a virgin with child was to bring forth a

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>6</sup> J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I.–XXXIX*, The Cambridge Bible (Cambridge: The University Press, 1900), 60. See also: Robert W. Rogers, “Isaiah” in the *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, ed. Frederick Carl Eiselen (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1929), 643–44; W. Fitch, “Isaiah” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Davidson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 569; and Emil M. Kraeling, “The Immanuel Prophecy,” *JBL*, 50, no. 4 (1931): 277–95.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1951), 104. He places his accession date at 722 BC, at the age of twenty.

son whose name would be Immanuel. Before certain stages of growth were reached in the life of the child, both Syria and Ephraim would no longer be threatening powers to Judah. How is this passage to be understood in the large? Is it a prediction of an ominous nature? Is it a prophecy of a salutary character? Or is it composed of both elements?<sup>8</sup> In order to determine this basic question it will be necessary to treat the individual terms of the passage.

What is meant by the word *'ôt* (*sign*)? If there were agreement here among interpreters of the prophecy, one could feel he were off to a good start. But the variety of views is disconcerting, to say the least. Brown has counted seventy-nine occurrences of the word in the Old Testament, forty-four times in the singular and thirty-five in the plural. He understands the usages in our passage as relating to a sign which "takes place before the promised event happens, and serves as a pledge to those to whom it is given that the event suggested by it will come to pass. We shall expect, then, to find in the sign given to Ahaz something which occurred prior to the deliverance foretold in the same passage, and became a pledge to him of that deliverance."<sup>9</sup> Fitch holds that the sign was "not necessarily miraculous."<sup>10</sup> Gray feels that the sign has in view something which was previously foretold, but has now actually happened.<sup>11</sup>

But the traditional position that a miracle is demanded by the context is not without its able exponents. Barnes unequivocally maintains that the sign is "a miracle wrought in attestation of a Divine promise or message. This is its sense here."<sup>12</sup> Kraeling concludes that something unusual is to be looked for, "so that the ancient virgin birth interpretation was not without a good psychological basis when viewed from this angle."<sup>13</sup> J.A. Alexander reasons that "it seems very improbable that after such an offer, the sign bestowed would be merely a thing of everyday occurrence, or at most the application of a symbolical name. This presumption is strengthened by the solemnity with which the Prophet speaks of the predicted birth, not as a usual and natural event,

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<sup>8</sup> Kraeling, "Immanuel," 281, ably sets forth the three groups of interpretation.

<sup>9</sup> Charles R. Brown, "Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17," *JBL*, 9, no. 1 (1890): 119.

<sup>10</sup> Fitch, "Isaiah," 569.

<sup>11</sup> George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXVII*. ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), I:121. Also Skinner denies that an objective miracle is here called for (*Isaiah*, 60). See also Cuthbert Lattey, "The Term *Almah* in Is. 7:14," and "Various Interpretations of Is. 7:14," *CBQ* 9 (1947): 95 and 147-54, who would appear to take the same position.

<sup>12</sup> Barnes, "Isaiah," 155.

<sup>13</sup> Kraeling, "Immanuel," 280.

but as something which excites his own astonishment, as he beholds it in prophetic vision."<sup>14</sup>

Those who insist that Isaiah must be speaking of an event already past or one on the contemporary scene are not giving the interjection *hinnēh* (Behold) its proper force. Delitzsch maintains: "*hinnēh* with the following participle (here participial adjective; cf. 2 Sam xi. 5) is always presentative, and the thing presented is always either a real thing, as in Gen. xvi. 11 and Judg. xiii. 5; or it is an ideally present thing, as is to be taken here; for except in chap. xlvi. 7 *hinnēh* always indicates something future in Isaiah."<sup>15</sup> We are indebted to Young for bringing to bear upon the term the light from Ras Shamra literature. After pointing out similar constructions to Isaiah 7:14 in Genesis 16:11; 17:19; and Judges 13:5, 7, he states: "At present it is sufficient to remark that the phrase introduced by *hinnēh* is employed in the Scriptures to announce a birth of unusual importance. It is therefore of particular interest to note that this formula has been found upon one of the texts recently excavated at Ras Shamra."<sup>16</sup>

The storm center of the text is, of course, the word *'almā* (young woman). Reams have been written upon it and, doubtless, reams will be written on it in the future. What is the exact translation of this important and pivotal word? Is there an element of ambiguity in it, or has the vagueness been imported into the discussion by interpreters? Here the exegete of Isaiah has a splendid opportunity to go slowly and plough deeply. To be accurate in one's conclusions all the evidence available must be weighed properly. First of all, it must be noticed that the noun has the definite article. For many this phenomenon is without significance, but Lindblom affirms: "The most natural explanation is that a definite woman is in view."<sup>17</sup> Hengstenberg is even stronger when he declares: "In harmony with *hinnēh*, the article in *ha-'almā* might be explained from the circumstance that the Virgin is present to the inward perception of the prophet—equivalent to 'the virgin there.'"<sup>18</sup> The better interpretation of the passage would see a significance in the prophet's use of the definite article, pointing to a specific person.

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah* (1865; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953), 167.

<sup>15</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on The Prophecies of Isaiah*, trans. James Martin (1879; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 1:206.

<sup>16</sup> Edward J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (London: Tyndale, 1955), 159. His conclusion is: "Isaiah, therefore, because of the tremendous solemnity and importance of the announcement which he was to make, used as much of this ancient formula of announcement as suited his purpose." (160).

<sup>17</sup> Lindblom, "Immanuel," 19. Also A. R. Faussett, "Hebrews," in *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental and Practical* by Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown (1893; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 3:586.

<sup>18</sup> E.W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (1892; repr., Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1970), 2:44. Young explains it thus: "More natural, however, is the generic usage in which the article serves to designate some particular unknown person." (*Studies*, 164).

But what is the precise meaning of *‘almâ*? There are numerous scholars who are noncommittal as to whether the term signifies a virgin or a married woman. Rogers states his position clearly: “First of all, it must be said that the Hebrew word *‘almâ* may mean ‘virgin,’ but does not necessarily mean anything more than a young woman of marriageable age. Had the prophet intended specifically and precisely to say ‘virgin,’ he must have used the word *b<sup>e</sup>tûlâ* (maiden), though even then there would be a faint shade of uncertainty.”<sup>19</sup>

It is in place here to indicate that many reputable scholars have held and do hold that the Hebrew term in this context means virgin. Gray affirms that “*‘almâ* means a girl, or young woman, above the age of childhood and sexual immaturity...a person of the age at which sexual emotion awakens and becomes potent; it asserts neither virginity nor the lack of it; it is naturally in actual usage often applied to women who were as a matter of fact certainly (Gen 24:43; Ex 2:8), or probably (Song 1:3; 6:8; Ps 68.26), virgins.”<sup>20</sup> Gordon, an able Jewish Semitic scholar, presents an interesting sidelight on the problem. He maintains: “The commonly held view that ‘virgin’ is Christian, whereas ‘young woman’ is Jewish is not quite true. The fact is that the Septuagint, which is the Jewish translation made in pre-Christian Alexandria, takes *‘almâ* to mean ‘virgin’ here. Accordingly, the New Testament follows Jewish interpretation in Isaiah 7:14. Little purpose would serve in repeating the learned expositions that Hebraists have already contributed in their attempt to clarify the point at issue. It all boils down to this: the distinctive Hebrew word for ‘virgin’ is *b<sup>e</sup>tûlâ*, whereas *‘almâ* means a ‘young woman’ who may be a virgin, but is not necessarily so. The aim of this note is rather to call attention to a source that has not yet been brought into the discussion. From Ugarit of around 1400 B.C. comes a text celebrating the marriage of the male and female lunar deities. It is there predicted that the goddess will bear a son.... The terminology is remarkably close to that in Isaiah 7:14. However, the Ugaritic statement that the bride will bear a son is fortunately given in parallelistic form; in 77:7 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew *‘almâ* ‘young woman’; in 77:5 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew *b<sup>e</sup>tûlâ* ‘virgin.’ Therefore, the New Testament rendering of *‘almâ* as ‘virgin’ for Isaiah 7:14 rests on the older Jewish interpretation, which in turn is now borne out for *precisely this annunciation formula* by a text that is not only pre-Isaianic but is pre-Mosaic in the form that we now have it on a clay tablet.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Rogers, “Isaiah,” 643–44. For the same approach compare: Lindblom, “Immanuel,” 18; C.W.E. Naegelsbach, “The Prophet Isaiah,” in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical* by John Peter Lange (1869; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 6:121–23; and Conrad von Orelli, *The Prophecies of Isaiah* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1899), 53. Skinner holds that *b<sup>e</sup>tûlâ* is not wholly free from ambiguity, while contending that *‘almâ* does not necessarily connote virginity (*Isaiah*, 56).

<sup>20</sup> Gray, *Isaiah*, 126–27.

<sup>21</sup> Cyrus H. Gordon, “Almah in Isaiah 7:14,” *JBR* 21, no. 2 (April, 1953): 106. Some have overlooked or minimized the fact that Joel 1:8 indicates a *b<sup>e</sup>tûlâ* has been married and lost her

The position espoused here has been ably set forth by many, but not more cogently than by Machen who contended: "The question, we think, cannot be settled merely by a consideration of the meaning of the Hebrew word *'almâ*. It has been urged, indeed, on the one hand that the Hebrew language has a perfectly unmistakable word for 'virgin,' *b<sup>e</sup>tûlâ*, and that if 'virgin' had been meant that word would have been used. But as a matter of fact there is no place among the seven occurrences of *'almâ* in the Old Testament where the word is clearly used of a woman who was not a virgin. It may readily be admitted that *'almâ* does not actually indicate virginity, as does *b<sup>e</sup>tûlâ*; it means rather 'a young woman of marriageable age.' But on the other hand one may well doubt, in view of the usage, whether it was a natural word to use of anyone who was not in point of fact a virgin."<sup>22</sup>

The reference is undoubtedly to the virgin Mary, a fact clearly attested by Matthew 1. Those who cannot interpret *'almâ* as a virgin present a variety of views as to the identity of the young woman. Some assert it was the consort of Ahaz, any contemporary young woman, Isaiah's wife, one of Ahaz' harem, or a princess of the court of Ahaz. Manifestly, these do not meet the requirements of the context for a miraculous occurrence.

If there is divergence of thought on the identity of the mother of the child, there is no less agreement on the child himself. One position is that the child is an unknown one born in that day to confirm the prophecy of Isaiah. Others hold that the son is the son of Isaiah. Still others maintain that the child is Hezekiah, not realizing or overlooking the chronological difficulty here. A number of expositors contend for a double or multiple fulfillment, one in Isaiah's day and one in the life of Christ Himself. Alexander states a valid refutation: "It seems to be a feeling common to learned and unlearned readers, that although a double sense is not impossible, and must in certain cases be assumed, it is unreasonable to assume it when any other explanation is admissible. The improbability in this case is increased by the want of similarity between the two events, supposed to be predicted in the very same words, the one miraculous, the other not only natural, but common, and of everyday occurrence."<sup>23</sup>

Against the view that verses 14–16 relate wholly and entirely to the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the position maintained here, has been leveled the charge that it gives the prophecy no relevance to the day in which it

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husband. See the interesting reference of William S. LaSor in his "*Isaiah 7:14—'Young Woman' or 'Virgin'?*" (Altadena, CA: By Author, 1953), 3–4; especially the larger issues involved at the end of his treatment.

<sup>22</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper, 1930), 288.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander, *Isaiah*, 170. In order to avoid some of the difficulties involved here, the view has been taken that verse 14 refers to Christ, whereas the rest of the passage, that is, verses 15 and 16, relate to Shear-jashub, son of Isaiah. See William Kelly, *Lectures on Isaiah* (London: Morrish, 1871), 125.

was uttered. This is a serious matter, for the prophet must speak to his own generation as well as to future ones. To many a fulfillment centuries later would be worthless to Ahaz and his contemporaries in their distress. But the exact opposite is true. Ahaz and his courtiers were fearful of the extinction of the Davidic dynasty and the displacement of the king by a Syrian pretender. However, the longer the time needed to fulfill the promise to the Davidic house, the longer that dynasty would be in existence to witness the realization of the prediction. It is well stated by Alexander: "... The assurance that Christ was to be born in Judah, of its royal family, might be a *sign* to Ahaz, that the kingdom should not perish in his day; and so far was the remoteness of the sign in this case from making it absurd or inappropriate, that the further off it was, the stronger the promise of continuance of Judah, which it guaranteed."<sup>24</sup> The conclusion, then, is inescapable that "...there is no ground, grammatical, historical, or logical, for doubt as to the main point, that the Church in all ages has been right in regarding this passage as a signal and explicit prediction of the miraculous conception and nativity of Jesus Christ."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Alexander, *Isaiah*, 171.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 172.



## EXPOSITORY PREACHING: THE LOGICAL RESPONSE TO A ROBUST BIBLIOLOGY

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*With postmodernism as a contemporary backdrop, this essay first warns of eight current attacks on the authority of Scripture. Biblical authority is next discussed in the context of expository preaching by defining this kind of preaching and demonstrating its essential relationship to divine authority. Finally, the author asserts that a robust bibliology, especially the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility, is inseparably linked to authoritative exposition and always upholds preaching that is true to God's intent and authority in the biblical text.*

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The *scholar* in his *study* asks what the Bible *meant*. The *Christian* in the *pew* asks what the Bible *means*. The *preacher* in the *pulpit* is charged to ask and answer both.

Written over the course of a millennium-and-a-half and separated from our world by another two, the Holy Bible stands unchallenged as the most special book ever written. However, its ancient pedigree has provoked both the most ardent loyalty and the fiercest criticism. Why? Because "Bible-believing" Christians assert that as Scripture speaks, God speaks. This assertion has emboldened martyrs at the stake and infuriated kings on their thrones.

If theology is truly the Queen of the Sciences, then bibliology is her crown. Approaching the written text of Scripture is the most determinative endeavor of the Christian faith. Every dimension of Christianity is defined and regulated by the Word of God. Our confidence that "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness" is predicated on "the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2 Pet 1:2-3). This sufficient knowledge of God is housed in the Bible, the written revelation of the living God.

The challenge of apprehending a written text stood center stage for me in a high school literature class. We had just read J.R.R. Tolkien's classic, *The Hobbit*. I loved the book, reading it in only a few sittings. Then the time came to discuss it in class. That was a lecture I will never forget. For an hour I was informed of three truths that were deeply disturbing. First, the text didn't

necessarily mean what it said. Second, the text meant much more than it said. Third, what it meant to me was more important than what Tolkien intended.

Ascribing the meaning of Bilbo Baggins' departure from his home as an allegory for childbirth and interpreting his adventures as representative chapters of my own life was not what I was expecting from the debrief. I felt embarrassed and naive at the revelation that I had simply taken the book at face value.

Little did I know that I had been rudely introduced to the principles of the infected arm of biblical criticism, a force that has shaped biblical studies since the Enlightenment. Not all these forces are impure. In fact, some are "indispensable to our understanding of Scripture; but all of them can become destructive if used without due care and attention."<sup>1</sup>

That afternoon in English literature was more than a lesson in criticism. It was also illustrative of what has happened and can happen in the pulpit. Within the same time that a typical sermon takes, our teacher accomplished something remarkable. She convinced our class that what she thought about the book was the right view, even though it was not what the class had previously believed. But even more, *her* interpretation was authoritative.

Analogously, the same phenomenon happens weekly in the pulpit. This article will explore the issue of the preacher's real power and authority, and what sets the trajectory of this influence. I contend that it is the robustness of a preacher's bibliology. Homiletical power either comes from the Bible and its authority, or from the preacher and his ingenuity. Authority rests either in the handler of the text or in the text itself. My supposition is that a robust bibliology will logically lead to expository preaching as its homiletical expression.

### THE POSTMODERN PEW

The exposition of Scripture has become increasingly more challenging to practice and justify in today's postmodern<sup>2</sup> culture. Where truth is relative, ethics are situational, and authority is ever-questioned, there is certainly no welcome mat out for the expository sermon that delineates truth, defines morality, and declares the authority of God.<sup>3</sup> Not only does expository

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<sup>1</sup> Brian H. Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 29. Scholarly criticism of the Bible involves Textual Criticism (lower criticism), Literary Criticism (higher criticism), Source Criticism, Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism, Historical Criticism, and Canonical Criticism.

<sup>2</sup> For a succinct etymology and history of the word "postmodern," see R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 67-88. Mohler traces the origin of the term to Frederico de Oniz in 1934 and the first significant treatise by Arnold Toynbee in 1939.

<sup>3</sup> Parts of this section have been adapted from this author's D.Min. Project Thesis, *The Exposition of Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 as a Means of Teaching the Collegians of Grace Community*

preaching go against the grain of postmodernism<sup>4</sup> as a cultural phenomenon, it also goes against postmodern trends in hermeneutics and homiletics. Expository preaching is both the antithesis of and the antidote for postmodernity. Darrell W. Johnson writes that "...postmodernity has fundamentally lost faith in nearly everything."<sup>5</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer summarizes the essence of postmodernism as "incredulity toward meaning."<sup>6</sup> Yet, the essence of expository preaching is to summon *faith* in the gospel by explaining the *meaning* of the Bible.

The postmodern pew is made from the scrap yard of the Enlightenment's failures. The advances of the Enlightenment (e.g., transatlantic travel, scientific discoveries, the printing press) garnered confidence that rationalism could provide solutions to man's (and culture's) plights. However, the twentieth century exponentially showcased the results of rationalism. Technology proved to be rationalism's progeny, providing stunning scientific advancements on the macroscopic level (e.g., landing on the moon, antibiotics and vaccines, nuclear weaponry) and attainable conveniences on the common level (e.g., washing machines, air conditioning, automobiles). Yet, the twenty-first century has begun with widespread disillusion. Technology did not turn out to be the cultural messiah it was touted to be.<sup>7</sup> Peace and happiness were not the outcome of the Enlightenment's latest century. As David Wells points out:

The Enlightenment promises have proved to be empty, and our world, once the stage for our freedom, now looks increasingly hostile and inhospitable to us. We are in the curious position of knowing ourselves

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*Church, Sun Valley, CA, to Find Their Satisfaction in God* (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 49-82.

<sup>4</sup> Defining "postmodernism" is not a simple task. Craig Gay notes that postmodernity attempts to move beyond modernism, but does so unsuccessfully. He writes: "There is very little agreement as yet as to what "post-modernity" means. While the term occasionally simply denotes dissatisfaction with modernity, it is increasingly used to suggest that we have entered into an entirely new cultural situation in which none of the old "modern" rules and habits of mind need to be taken seriously anymore. All such suggestions are mistaken and misleading. . . . [T]he ideals of the modern project are still very firmly embedded in the central institutional realities of the contemporary society." Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 230.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Graham Johnston points out, "Technology and progress not only failed to solve all human dilemmas but in the course of events have actually contributed to human suffering as evidenced in such cases as: the threat of nuclear annihilation, the destruction of rainforests, cyber-pornography, global pollution, and the depletion of the ozone, to name just a few." Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 27.

to be the children of modernity, the recipients of its blessings and the psychology that goes with them, while at the same time wanting to move beyond the part of it that has betrayed us.<sup>8</sup>

Such disillusionment has birthed a cry for a new worldview that improves upon modernism. This is not the first time for such a cultural reflex. History is a repeating cycle of secular solutions for the soul's gnawing sickness of depravity. Still, no earthborn worldview has won the battle for authority over the minds of men. But like the turtle in the fabled race with the rabbit, the Bible has maintained a steady pace in its authority amid a hailstorm of attacks.

### ATTACKS ON THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Word of God has been under attack since our first parents listened to the serpent in the Garden (Gen 3; 2 Cor 11:3). But the most sophisticated and erudite attacks were generated in the nineteenth-century.<sup>9</sup> A.T.B McGowan observes:

At the heart of the Enlightenment were two key elements, an affirmation of human autonomy and an affirmation of the final authority of reason. Both of these factors militated against the orthodox Christian doctrine of revelation. After all, if reason is the final authority, then no appeal can be made to a Word purporting to have come from a divine being; and if human beings are autonomous, then they must decide for themselves what to believe without any interference from God, church, or Bible.<sup>10</sup>

These humanistic ideals gave biblical critics a red marker to write question marks on almost every page of the Bible.

Before discussing the Bible's authority, the challenges to affirming its authority will be outlined. These challenges, or attacks, find their roots in the nineteenth-century's elevation of man's reason over divine revelation.

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<sup>8</sup>David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 63.

<sup>9</sup>For example, inerrancy was not seriously questioned until the nineteenth-century when Higher Criticism formalized doubts about textual veracity and authorial authenticity of the biblical text(s). See James Burthchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1820: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 1-2.

<sup>10</sup>A.T.B. McGowan, *Divine Authenticity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 51.

### The Challenge of Authorial Authenticity

The higher critics were the first to attack Scripture's authority. The base from which the attacks were launched was René Descartes' motto, *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). With this mindset, God was excluded from the study of the Bible and human reason became the final arbiter of knowledge. Doubt became a key exegetical principle in the study of the Bible.<sup>11</sup> Authority shifted from God and the Bible to man's reason.<sup>12</sup> These critics proposed that the books of the Bible are composites of authors, editors, and redactors rather than divine revelation as mediated through human authors.<sup>13</sup> The focus in biblical studies shifted from the text of Scripture to the critical issues behind the text,<sup>14</sup> none of which can be answered with certainty. Consequently, according to the critics, one cannot be sure of the text's message because one cannot be sure of the human source of the message.

### The Challenge of Textual Veracity

Closely related to the first challenge is higher criticism's questioning of the reliability of the extant biblical manuscripts. Higher criticism is made up of many tributaries that all lead to the conclusion that the texts we have cannot be taken at face value. Form criticism functions as a tool to discern fact from myth on the pages of Scripture. The Gospels are victimized by this methodology and are accused of providing a deceptive portrayal of Jesus, which leads to the scholars' bifurcation between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. The text cannot be trusted to convey historical fact and therefore must be evaluated through the grid of human reason, which is prejudiced against the supernatural and all inconsistencies with the scientific method.

### The Challenge of Historical Accuracy

If the author and the text are not authoritative, then we should expect that the Bible contains historical errors (e.g., geographical errors, factual errors, dating errors). Scripture is put on trial by other ancient documents and by archaeology to determine its accuracy. The underlying premise is that the Bible

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<sup>11</sup> Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 5.

<sup>12</sup> "At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Bible was the universal authority in all fields of knowledge, but by the end of the century that authority was eroded." See Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 11.

<sup>13</sup> "In the second half of the eighteenth century, in connection with the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment, within Protestant theology the insight began to prevail that the Bible is a book written by men, which, like any product of the human mind, can properly be made understandable only from the times in which it appeared and therefore only with the methods of historical science." Werner Georg Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1973), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 11.

is just like any other book. Spinoza promoted a historical-linguistic study of the Bible, approaching it like any other text and arguing that it should be understood without any aid to reason. Behind this approach are inductivism,<sup>15</sup> anti-supernaturalism, and evolutionism. These three philosophical presuppositions attacked the supernatural character of the Bible, reducing it to mere myth and stories that demonstrate literary and social evolution.<sup>16</sup> The historical facts of the Bible were undermined and the conclusion was that the Bible speaks truthfully on matters of faith but not history, geography, or science.

### The Challenge of Supernatural/Scientific Plausibility

In the wake of scientific advances, the supernatural accounts in the Bible were judged by the scientific method. Darwin and evolutionary theory sharpened the sword of this challenge with a view of the origin of creation and creatures antithetical to the Genesis account. When Scripture and science were presumed to be at odds, the Bible was doubted. One theologian writes, "Science is no longer informed by Scripture, but Scripture is to be interpreted by means of the conclusions of science. Thus the Bible's authority was diminished."<sup>17</sup> This approach has a critical impact on the picture of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels. Rudolf Bultmann attempts to discern fact from myth in his study of Jesus and concludes the following, "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist."<sup>18</sup> The removal of the supernatural led to a Jesus reinvented according to a purely scientific and rationalistic hermeneutic. This is what was behind Thomas Jefferson's revision of the Gospel accounts when he created the Jefferson Bible<sup>19</sup> by physically cutting out with a razor the virgin birth, miracles, references to the deity and resurrection of Christ, and the Trinity.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Francis Bacon's inductivism spearheaded the divide between faith and reason. Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> Norman L. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars," *JETS* 42, no. 1 (March 1999): 7.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 25-26.

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L.P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 8, quoted in Donald A. Hagner, "The New Testament, History, and the Historical-Critical Method," in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, eds. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 78.

<sup>19</sup> Also referred to as *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*.

<sup>20</sup> Dickinson W. Adams, *Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels*, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 2nd series (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1983), 39-42.

### The Challenge of Religious Pluralism

Technological advances made the world smaller through accessibility of books, paved roads, mechanized travel, and most recently, the internet. Along with shrinking the world, it exposed us to religious pluralism. John Caputo describes our pluralistic world when he writes, “We live in a world of instant global communication, linked by satellite communication systems to the most remote corners of the world, which exposes us at every turn to a plurality of voices and choices, races and places, cultures and religions, to the multiplicity of lifestyles and ways to be.”<sup>21</sup> The multiplicity of religions in our world collides with the gospel’s claim of exclusivity. This claim is met with skepticism and suspicion, and Christianity is charged with religious arrogance and intolerance. Instead of turning to the authority of Scripture, most Christians chose the easier path—non-resistance—which only aggravated the problem of pluralism.<sup>22</sup>

### The Challenge of Social Relevance

Coming later to the battle, ideologies such as feminism dismissed the Bible as socially out of date. The Word was deemed chauvinistic, old-fashioned, out of vogue. Recently, a professor from a national university visited our church and published her opinion of our church’s teaching on man’s headship in the home and masculine leadership in the church in an online journal. The title of the article reveals her opinion of our church’s doctrine and praxis, “The Persistence of Patriarchy.” After disagreeing with complementarianism, she directed her attacks toward the doctrine of inerrancy and authority of Scripture by suggesting that to persist in patriarchy, one must ignore the evidence of scholarship in the dating of the Pastoral epistles to the second century. Instead of Paul, the Pastoral epistles are attributed to a pseudonymous author who is less authoritative on matters of social hierarchical traditions. She concludes her article by asking the question, “Is God permanently committed to the kinds of social hierarchy that existed in the first and second millennium B.C.E.?”<sup>23</sup> Appealing to higher criticism, she argues that in social matters, the Bible’s authority is irrelevant and outdated.

### The Challenge of Moral Accountability

As men have continued to proceed “from bad to worse” (2 Tim 3:13), the stubbornness of depravity has organized itself in an all-out blitz on the

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<sup>21</sup> J.D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 42.

<sup>22</sup> Todd L. Miles, *A God of Many Understandings?* (Nashville, TN: Baker, 2010), 7, 140-41.

<sup>23</sup> Anne Eggebroten. [http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=\\_magazine.article&issue=soj1007&article=the-persistence-of-patriarchy](http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=_magazine.article&issue=soj1007&article=the-persistence-of-patriarchy). (Accessed 1/12/2011). For an evaluation of her article, refer to R. Albert Mohler’s critique at <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/07/14/hard-to-believe-biblical-authority-and-evangelical-feminism/> (Accessed 1/12/2011).

Bible's moral standards and mandates. The homosexual agenda is an example of this kind of challenge that stiff-arms the audacity of the Bible to be authoritative over moral choices. Not only is the homosexual movement resisting the biblical teaching, many Christian leaders are unwilling to articulate biblical teaching on this question. When asked what he thought about homosexuality, Brian McLaren answered,

Frankly, many of us don't know what we should think about homosexuality. We've heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say 'it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us' . . . If we think that there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships, we know that the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex. We aren't sure if or where lines are to be drawn, nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn.<sup>24</sup>

McLaren is a well known postmodern pastor and, as evident in the above answer, the pressure of moral relativism shapes his interpretation of Scripture.

#### The Challenge of Condescending Presentism

Presentism is the patronizing slant against the past. Since the Bible is an ancient book, it draws the suspicion from the modern mind that considers itself too sophisticated to subscribe to such rudimental mythologies. Presentism is the zenith of the philosophical attacks on the Bible, boldly promoting man above God, Scripture, and history while remaining inseparable from rationalism's original claim, *Cogito ergo sum*.

These categorical challenges have caused widespread doubt that the Bible has binding authority over men and the only hope of salvation. This is the fog through which the expositor is called to navigate.

### RECOVERING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

In a culture that disdains authority, authority is exactly what is dispensed in the faithful exposition of the Word of God. Foundational to a commitment to expository preaching is a commitment to biblical authority. This allegiance to the authority of the Scriptures is the point of greatest friction between the evangelical church and postmodernity. One must remember that "The Bible is not authoritative because of what we make it, but because of what it *is* . . . . The Bible is our final authority because it is authoritative; it is not

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<sup>24</sup> Brian McLaren, [http://www.outofur.com/archives/2006/01/brian\\_mclaren\\_o.html](http://www.outofur.com/archives/2006/01/brian_mclaren_o.html). (Accessed 1/12/2011).

authoritative because we consider it to be authority.”<sup>25</sup> However, recent trends in hermeneutics have inadvertently (or in some cases purposely) resulted in undermining the Bible’s authority and integrity. David Allen explains this erosion of authority in the following statement:

The issue of authority was the quintessential issue of modernity with its celebration of the autonomy of reason over the authority of revelation. Modernity distrusted authority. Postmodernity dismantles authority. Biblical authority particularly suffers under the weight of postmodernity.<sup>26</sup>

Vanhoozer insightfully connects the question of authority to the discipline of hermeneutics. He writes, “Disputes about authority quickly turn into disputes about interpretation and who determines which interpretation is correct.”<sup>27</sup> This all leads to the question of ultimate authority.

The implications of biblical authority are extensive. John Frame stresses: “To say that Scripture is authoritative is not only to say that its propositions are true, it is also to say that its commands are binding, its questions demand answers of us . . . its exclamations should become the shouts of our hearts . . . its promises must be relied upon, and so forth.”<sup>28</sup> Scripture’s authority then is tantamount to God’s authority. Wayne Grudem concurs: “The authority of the Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”<sup>29</sup>

This conviction about the authority of the Scripture is decidedly *presuppositional*. However, I would suggest that postmodernism’s radical relativity ascribes authority to individuals without credible criteria. It could be said that the authority ascribed to the individual by postmodernism is in itself presuppositional. The sovereignty of the individual, under the banner of tolerance, is protected as a supreme value. At the same time, the veracity of the Bible’s authenticity and authority has been the target of postmodernity’s attack.

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<sup>25</sup> Scott Hafemann, “The SBJT Forum: Evangelical Responses to Postmodernism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 91-92.

<sup>26</sup>David L. Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism: an Evangelical Comes to the Dance,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 73.

<sup>27</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 44.

<sup>28</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 201.

<sup>29</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 73.

The Scriptures have withstood the attack unscathed.<sup>30</sup> The Bible is indeed self-authenticating.<sup>31</sup>

### EXPOSITORY PREACHING AS THE EXPRESSION OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

In the mid-twentieth century Merrill F. Unger charged, "The authority and power, which the inspired oracles possess, become manifest in the pulpit ministry of the faithful expositor of the Bible."<sup>32</sup> But this expository power is largely off the radar in postmodernism. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix relate this absence to the issue of authority:

A high view of biblical inspiration issues forth into a clear conviction regarding the Bible's *authority*. If the Bible is inspired by God and consequently void of error, then it can be trusted as the sole authority for matters of faith. The sparsity of good expository preachers at the close of the twentieth century is in part due to a lack of conviction in this area.<sup>33</sup>

As authority continues to disintegrate in postmodernism (except in terms of self-authority), the need grows for people to be exposed to the authority and relevancy of God's self-revelation in the pages of the Bible.

When properly understood, expository preaching proves to be the only sure lighthouse to guide the church through postmodernism's turbulent waters. Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues that the condition of a society which disdains exposition is ultimately the fault of the pulpit's negligence of real, biblical preaching. He writes:

[I]n many ways it is the departure of the Church from preaching that is responsible in a large measure for the state of modern society. The Church has been trying to preach morality and ethics without the Gospel as a basis; it has been preaching morality without godliness; and it simply does not work. It never has, and it never will. And the result is

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<sup>30</sup>See Grudem's defenses of the Bible's authority. *Ibid.*, 73-89.

<sup>31</sup>Scott M. Gibson, "Biblical Preaching in an Anti-Authority Age," *Reformation and Revival* 9:1 (Winter 2000): 42.

<sup>32</sup>Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 24.

<sup>33</sup>Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 53-54.

that the Church, having abandoned her real task, has left humanity more or less to its own devices.<sup>34</sup>

If Lloyd-Jones is right, some liability for the postmodern mindset can be laid at the feet of the church for failing to preach the Scriptures faithfully and accurately.

Perhaps the greatest impact of postmodern thinking on the church has been made in the pulpit, and in particular on expository preaching. “Numerous influential voices within evangelicalism suggest that the age of the expository sermon is now past.”<sup>35</sup> The tolerance and relativity of postmodernism have rendered the Bible as antiquated and irrelevant. That many have lost confidence in the Bible’s relevance is truly sad, but that many preachers have abandoned the Bible’s relevance is catastrophically tragic. The responsibility and liability of the preacher and his task must be rediscovered according to the biblical standard.

### WHAT IS EXPOSITORY PREACHING?

Discussions about preaching typically distinguish expository preaching from topical and textual preaching.<sup>36</sup> Richard L. Mayhue defines expository preaching as preaching that,

... focuses predominantly on the text(s) under consideration along with its (their) context(s). Exposition normally concentrates on a single text of Scripture, but it is sometimes possible for a thematic/theological message or a historical/biographical discourse to be expository in nature. An exposition may treat any length of passage.<sup>37</sup>

Mayhue continues to explain expository preaching by providing a helpful summary of the essential elements of expository preaching:

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<sup>34</sup>D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 35.

<sup>35</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Urgency of Preaching,” *The Tie* 65 (July 1997): i.

<sup>36</sup>“Topical messages usually combine a series of Bible verses that loosely connect with a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that generally serves as gateway into whatever the preacher chooses to address.” Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition*, ed. John MacArthur Jr. (Dallas: Word, 1992), 9. It should be noted, however, that some use the term “textual preaching” to describe expository preaching. Sidney Greidanus comments, “Textual preaching is preaching that is based on a biblical text and expounds the message of that text. This definition implies that all textual preaching requires not only a text but also exposition of that text. All textual preaching is therefore understood as expository preaching.” Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 123.

<sup>37</sup>Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” 9.

1. The message finds its sole source in Scripture.
2. The message is extracted from Scripture through careful exegesis.
3. The message preparation correctly interprets Scripture in its normal sense and its context.
4. The message clearly explains the original God-intended meaning of Scripture.
5. The message applies the Scriptural meaning for today.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, what God says in the Bible, what God meant/means by what He says, and how the Word connects by way of application unto the glory of God and the good of believers is the heart of expository preaching.

The motivations that compel the expositor are grounded in three areas: a commitment to the Bible as the Word of God, the mandates from the Word of God, and the legacy of preaching in biblical and church history. First, expository preaching is driven by a commitment that the Bible is the Word of God. The preacher's view of the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of Scripture will dictate his approach to sermon making. "Where the Bible is esteemed as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, preaching can flourish. But where the Bible is treated merely as a record of valuable religious insight, preaching dies."<sup>39</sup>

If the preacher really recognizes the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, that "philosophy" will govern all decisions about sermon material. Obviously, given the options of delivering his thoughts on God's Word, the commitment to explaining God's Word is the highest priority and privilege. In reference to Paul's charge to Timothy to preach the authoritative word of God (2 Tim 4:1-2), Sidney Greidanus rightly suggests that the need for today's society to hear authoritative preaching is more urgent than in Timothy's day. He writes that,

...if preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must proclaim this message of the inspired Scriptures, for the Scriptures alone have divine authority. If preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must submit themselves and echo the Word of God. Preachers are literally to be ministers of the Word.<sup>40</sup>

Submission to the Word of God and to the command to preach this Word only comes from a genuine commitment to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. John MacArthur asks:

Should not our preaching be biblical exposition, reflecting our conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God? If we

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 40.

<sup>40</sup> Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 12-13.

believe that “all Scripture is inspired by God” and inerrant, must we not be equally committed to the reality that it is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17)? Should not that magnificent truth determine how we preach? . . . The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it *expositionally*.<sup>41</sup>

Based on the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God, the preacher’s mandate is the proclamation of that very Word. The most forceful words on this subject were written by the apostle Paul while he was awaiting his execution in a Roman prison in the final lap of his life. He instructs his protégé with the following words:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim 4:1-5).

Phil Newton says in reference to this passage, “The preacher must expound the Word of God or else he has failed in his calling. He may be a wonderful administrator, a winsome personal worker, and effective leader. But if he fails to expound the Word of God, he is a failure to his calling to ‘preach the Word.’”<sup>42</sup> The preacher’s decision to preach expositionally is not an option; rather, it is an issue of pastoral obligation and obedience!

Why is expository preaching needed today? Scott Gibson answers, “Because [it] has authority and relevance for men and women to live in an anti-authority age.”<sup>43</sup> Communicating God’s authoritative and relevant Word is the

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<sup>41</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., “The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition*, ed. John MacArthur, Jr. (Dallas: Word, 1992), 23.

<sup>42</sup>Phil Newton, “Biblical Preaching,” *Reformation and Revival* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 19. Other passages exhorting the preaching of the Word are Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:2; and Titus 2:1.

<sup>43</sup>Scott M. Gibson, “Biblical Preaching in an Anti-Authority Age,” *Reformation and Revival* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 42.

chief concern of the preacher. Evaluating this communication in the postmodern context is the prudent concern of preaching in the twenty-first century.

### EXPOSITORY PREACHING IN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT

A convergence of postmodernism and expository preaching is not without complication. Gibson explains, "The receptivity of many people to the message we proclaim is a function of a set of assumptions that are themselves strongly influenced by postmodern thought."<sup>44</sup> Yet, postmodern complexities do not erase the universal issues of sin and salvation. They remain constant and require expository attention. The question then is how should a faithful expositor respond to (and in) the postmodern context? Not surprisingly, liberalism has responded by means of accommodation. Interestingly, Allen finds that:

The popularity of postmodernism in the last quarter of the twentieth century coincides somewhat with the rise and popularity of the New Homiletic. Fred Craddock's *As One Without Authority* was published in 1971 and is rightly looked upon as initiating a "new era" and a "Copernican revolution" in homiletics.<sup>45</sup>

To provide a satisfying response to the New Homiletic is beyond the scope of this essay. But suffice it to say that postmodernism's dismissal of metanarratives has proven fertile ground for relative subjectivism fed by narrative (or inductive) preaching. This inductive approach to preaching is the approach favored by theologically liberal preachers. The idea is to use stories/narratives to raise questions inductively. Answering them is less important than raising them.

Inductive methodology in preaching certainly can contribute to genuine learning. However, if questions are raised by an inductive element in the sermon, exposition of the Scripture should be the source for answers. Furthermore, care should be taken not to assume too much of the listener's ability to be inductive. Rick Gosnell's confidence is suspect when he writes:

Inductive preaching lays out the evidence and the examples and postpones the conclusions until the listeners have a chance to weigh the evidence, think through the implications, then come to the conclusion with the preacher at the end of the sermon. In fact, the hearer is allowed to complete the sermon. The sermon becomes a part of the listener's experience.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Jon Hinkson and Greg Ganssle, "Epistemology at the Core of Postmodernism: Porty, Foucault, and the Gospel," in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 68.

<sup>45</sup>Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism," 63.

<sup>46</sup>Rick Gosnell, "Proclamation and the Postmodernist," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 383.

Remarkably, inductive (or narrative) preaching places an unjustified credibility on the listener's reliability to "complete the sermon" rightly. Absent from radical inductive preaching is the foundational doctrine of total depravity. The fact seems to be ignored that the reasoning abilities of man are in a decimated state, entirely without ability to deduce divine truth by powers of induction. The New Homiletic ascribes authority in preaching to the listener rather than to the Scriptures.

Again, certain elements of inductive communication should be welcomed by the expositor. Raising questions that the Scriptures answer is an excellent way to ensure reception of the message. But often in inductive preaching, the prescriptive authority of the Bible is sacrificed on the altar of self-discovery. Narrative preaching is a case of accommodating postmodernism and compromising the biblical mandate of prescription (1 Tim 4:11; 5:7; Titus 2:1).

A more biblical approach would be to respond to a postmodern audience without ignoring the immediate context of their lives. Engaging listeners at the level of their worldview for the purpose of presenting the gospel and biblical truth is exactly what Paul did with the Athenians in Acts 17:22-31.<sup>47</sup> In *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, Graham Johnston makes the following noteworthy suggestions regarding this kind of contextualization:

Before one can begin to bring meaning and relevance to the listener, the preacher must gain entry into his or her sphere of understanding.<sup>48</sup>

Biblical preaching needs to recognize the current needs and issues from the listeners' perspective in order to move them to God's perspective.<sup>49</sup>

Preaching must demonstrate a working understanding of the issues, concerns, and the interaction of people's daily lives, helping the listeners to interpret their world from a biblical standpoint.<sup>50</sup>

Your effectiveness will increase when you understand the concerns on the hearts and minds of your listeners and are able to recognize problems as they arise in the particular text.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Perils of Ignoring Postmodernism," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 3.

<sup>48</sup>Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 68.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 150-51.

These comments indicate the need for an expositor to have a working knowledge of his world and his people. In pastoral nomenclature, the more an expositor understands the sheep and their environment, the better he will know how to shepherd. This is best illustrated in how differently a preacher might exposit the same text to a group of children, teens, collegians, young married couples, senior saints, or a tribal church in Africa. Same text, same message, but different sermons relative to the preaching context.

But Thomas Schreiner notes a tempting danger to avoid. He writes, "We could begin to think that our knowledge of our culture, our expertise in postmodernism, is the key to evangelism."<sup>52</sup> However, the message is never contextualized. It is merely our applications and illustrations that adjust to the listener's context.

John the Baptist illustrates the kind of expertise a preacher should acquire. His preparation for engaging his culture with the truth did not include years of cultural study. Instead, his preparation involved retreating into the wilderness to focus on God and His message. And his preaching was anything but inductive. It was authoritative, penetrating, relevant, and confrontive. Should the faithful expositor be in touch with his culture and his people? It is impossible not to be. But this should never replace the indispensable requirement and privilege of knowing God and His Word well enough to wield it with accuracy and authority. This authority is available to the preacher because of the inherent quality of the Bible that is summarized in three historic Christian doctrines—inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility.

### THE THREE PILLARS OF A ROBUST BIBLIOLOGY

Every preacher must, by definition, say something and say it publically. He proclaims his message to a group of people who have ascribed to him the right to address them. These congregants are volunteers in this preaching exercise. The challenge for every preacher is what to say to these people and why. Even deeper, what authority does the man in the pulpit have to say what he says?

The legitimate expositor who preaches the Bible in the contemporary fog of postmodern relativism and confusion must depend upon his bibliology to give him justification, motivation, and guidance to preach authoritatively. In order for his bibliology to withstand the challenges described above, it must be vigorous and full-bodied; it must be *robust*. The historical pillars for Scripture's authority are grounded in the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility.

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<sup>52</sup>Schreiner, "The Perils of Ignoring Postmodernism," 3.

## Inspiration

Inspiration answers the most fundamental question of bibliology: “Why should the Bible be trusted?”<sup>53</sup> It speaks to the origin and originator of Scripture. The doctrine of inspiration takes its name from the translation of the Greek word θεόπνευστος (*theopneustos*) in 2 Timothy 3:16 which is translated “God-breathed.” This word is a *hapax legomenon* consisting of two words combined: θεός (*theos*; God) and πνέω (*pneō*; to breathe).<sup>54</sup> In reference to Scripture being θεόπνευστος, “the main thought would be that the *graphē* is thoroughly permeated with the breath of God.”<sup>55</sup> B.B. Warfield published a seminal work on this term and concluded that it relates to production of the sacred Scripture.<sup>56</sup> God breathed does not mean that God breathed *into* the men as they wrote, rather that God breathed *out from* them as they wrote.<sup>57</sup> How much of the Bible is God-breathed? The predicative use of θεόπνευστος in relationship to γραφή indicates that all and every Scripture is God-breathed.<sup>58</sup> This is the central idea in Paul’s charge to Timothy, that every part of the sacred writings, even the smallest, which provide wisdom unto salvation is a product of God. This is the sense of verbal, plenary inspiration, where *every* part and *all* parts of Scripture are God-breathed.

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<sup>53</sup> Ronald Satta highlights the importance of the doctrine of inspiration and its extent: “Throughout the history of Christianity the doctrine of biblical inspiration has been inextricably linked to, and in fact determined, the nature and extent of biblical authority—they have been two sides of the same coin. If God composed the Scripture, using human writers as his amanuensis, it logically followed that everything contained therein, whether pertaining to matters of faith or fact, must be without error—how could deity make a mistake? If, on the other hand, only some parts of Scripture possessed such divine markings or if only the thoughts of and not the words came forth from God, one might argue—as some did—that the Bible’s authority was limited, consisting only of those admonitions, precepts, or doctrines judged evident of divine composition.” Ronald F. Satta, *The Sacred Text: Biblical Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2007), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, “Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 278.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>56</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 281-83.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth*, 122.

<sup>58</sup> There are two options for the grammatical relationship between θεόπνευστος and γραφή, predictively or attributively. The former means that “every Scripture is inspired” while the latter has the sense of “every inspired Scripture.” Feinberg lists five reasons in support of the former, (1) due to the absence of a verb, it is preferable to interpret both adjectives (θεόπνευστος and ὠφέλιμος) similarly, (2) 2 Tim 3:16 is parallel to 1 Tim 4:4 where the two adjectives are predicative, (3) if the construction was attributive, θεόπνευστος would precede γραφή, whereas in this case it follows it; (4) words linked with καὶ are understood to be in this conjunction; and (5) the attributive interpretations allow for the possibility of some uninspired γραφή. Refer to Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” 279.

While 2 Timothy describes the origin of Scripture, 2 Peter 1:20-21 discusses the means by which it was delivered to us. The biblical authors were not co-authors with God; they were instruments in God's hand. Peter, a professional angler, explained the dynamic relationship between God and the authors of Scripture in the moment of Scripture writing with the language of his fishing profession. He compares them to a ship at sea that is borne along by wind.<sup>59</sup> The writers were moved (φέρω; *pherō*) by the Holy Spirit as they wrote down the words of God in their own style and vocabulary, and within their culture and experiences. Brian Edwards provides a helpful explanation of this synergistic approach when he writes, "The inspiration of Scripture is a harmony of the active mind of the writer and the sovereign direction of the Holy Spirit to produce God's inerrant and infallible word for the human race."<sup>60</sup>

Inspiration's influence on what, how, and why we preach expositionally cannot be overstated. If we have a canon that was breathed out from writers by God, what could possibly rival it as sermonic subject matter?

### Inerrancy

Inerrancy results from inspiration. While inspiration answers the question of *why* the Bible can be trusted, inerrancy answers the question of to what degree can the Bible be trusted. If Scripture is not qualitatively inerrant, how can we offer the world "a reliable gospel presented in unreliable Scripture?"<sup>61</sup> Contemporary scholars' doubts of historical facts articulated in the Bible undermine the theological truth conveyed in its pages. When the teachings of "faith and practice" are enveloped inside history, these teachings are invalidated once the wrapping of history is confirmed to be erroneous. The doctrines of incarnation, redemption, and reconciliation are inseparably wedded to historical accounts of the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ. If the details of Jesus' life are with error, why should His claims of salvation from sin and resurrection be believed? Edwards says it well, "We cannot have a reliable Savior without a reliable Scripture."<sup>62</sup> Inerrancy substantiates the accuracy of the theological claims made in the Bible by providing verifiable historical and scientific specifics surrounding those claims.

Four lines of reasoning uphold biblical inerrancy.<sup>63</sup> First, the biblical portrayal of the impeccable character of God strongly demands the doctrine of inerrancy. The Bible is bold to affirm that God cannot lie (Num 23:19; 1

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<sup>59</sup> Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth*, 138.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>63</sup> For a detailed presentation of these four principles refer to Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," 276-87.

Sam15:29; Rom 3:4; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18), He cannot change (Mal 3:6), and His Word is true (John 17:17). The overwhelming evidence of Scripture in reference to itself points unmistakably to its believability in every part of the whole.

Second, the Bible's attestation to its own authority and truth upholds inerrancy. Jesus personally affirmed that *every* jot and tittle will be fulfilled (Matt 5:17-20) and God's Word cannot be broken (John 10:35). The Psalmist attested to the truthfulness of God's revelation with statements such as "The sum of Your word is truth" (Ps 119:160) and "I have seen a limit to all perfection; Your commandment is exceedingly broad" (Ps 119:96). These inspired writers speak to the quality and extent of the accuracy of Scripture.

Third, the precise manner in which Scripture is used by Scripture presupposes inerrancy. Jesus and Paul constructed arguments that were based on single words (Matt 22:43-45; Ps 110:1; John 10:34-35; Ps 82:6), on the tense of a verb (Matt 22:32), and on the singular form of a word, in contrast to the plural (Gal 3:16; Gen 3:15). If the intention was not to indicate the precision and accuracy of the Scripture, then these arguments are unnecessarily specific.

Fourth, the biblical expectation and accreditation of the authors of Scripture confirms inerrancy. In Deuteronomy, Moses establishes a threefold criteria for the content communicated by the true messenger of God. The prophet must (1) only speak in the name of God (Deut 13:1-2, 18:20), (2) not speak what is not true (Deut 13:1-5, 18:22), and (3) speak only that which will come to pass (Deut 18:22). This restriction to speak only total truth implies God's governance over Scripture to maintain its truthfulness.

What then is the claim of inerrancy? Paul Feinberg defines it as "...the claim that when all facts are known, the scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be without error in all that they affirm to the degree of precision intended, whether that affirmation relates to doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, etc."<sup>64</sup> To put it simply, John Frame says, "When we say that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the Bible makes good on its claims."<sup>65</sup> This doctrine is not merely for scholastic conversation; rather it provides authority and integrity to our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ that is contained and constrained by Scripture.

### Infallibility

Of the three I(s), infallibility has been most misrepresented. Some have restricted the meaning to statements in Scripture without extending this truthfulness to their factual and historical accuracy.<sup>66</sup> Others have merely

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<sup>64</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, "Infallibility and Inerrancy," *Trinity Journal* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 120.

<sup>65</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 174.

<sup>66</sup> Edwards, *Nothing But the Truth*, 25.

approached infallibility as interchangeable with inerrancy.<sup>67</sup> The thrust of infallibility is that in reference to God's Word, it cannot deceive since it is the revelation of God. When evaluated in the light of inspiration, infallibility is a necessary deduction from the doctrine of inspiration. In other words, the Bible cannot deceive because its Author is not able to deceive and is always without exception trustworthy.

These three I(s) converge in expository preaching which has as its premise the inerrancy and the infallibility of the biblical text which stand or fall on the divine inspiration of the text. "Infallibility and inerrancy are correlative to inspiration. In other words, if Scripture is God-authored, then what is authored is naturally and necessarily free from error (*inerrant*) and incapable of failing in its divinely-ordained purpose (*infallible*)." <sup>68</sup>

The sermon, then, should serve as a bridge from the historical to the contemporary, the particular to the universal, and the past to the present. As John Stott puts it, "... a true sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both."<sup>69</sup> This is only a priority for the preacher whose bibliology guides and regulates his preaching. God froze His Word to humanity in time and space, in ancient Near Eastern culture and context, and in literature and text. God is a verbal God. He left us a book, not a video. Why? The most clearly understood and interpretable communication to the senses is words. Therefore, interpreting and explaining the authorial intent of Scripture is the highest goal for a faithful expositional preacher.

#### ACKNOWLEDGING A DEBT

This essay has been written in honor of my friend and mentor, John MacArthur. Most of what I believe about expository preaching finds its genesis in that watershed statement he penned in 1992, "The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it *expositionally*."<sup>70</sup> Countless expositors owe John a debt of thanks for how this conviction has manifested itself in his model of expository preaching. I am confident that when our chapter in the history of the church is reviewed, the expository preaching of John MacArthur will stand out as a beacon of fidelity to God's Word. His preaching has been the scriptural and logical response to his robust bibliology.

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<sup>67</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary Press, 2009), 1:88.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 10.

<sup>70</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," 23.

In 2009, Grace Community Church honored John for his fortieth anniversary as its pastor. During the commemoration, the words of Alfred Gibbs from almost a century ago were shared with him. They still ring true. Gibbs wrote:

A preacher occupies a far more prominent place in the public eye than those who take no part in public preaching, therefore the need for a correspondingly circumspect walk before men. A pocket watch and a public clock both serve the same purpose—to tell time. If a watch gets out of order, only the owner is affected; but if a public clock goes wrong, [many] are misled. Thus a prominent position carries with it a greater responsibility for a consistent life. This will involve merciless self-judgment, separation from all known sin and, sometimes, even the denying of the legitimate things in life, that the testimony of Christ and the ‘ministry be not blamed.’<sup>71</sup>

John MacArthur’s life and ministry have served as that reliable public clock at Grace Community Church for over four decades and now The Master’s Seminary for twenty-five years. The worldwide impact of his relentless faithfulness and commitment to God and His Word knows few parallels. He has remained above reproach in his character, unwavering in his hermeneutic, and dependable in his exposition.

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<sup>71</sup> Alfred Gibbs, *The Preacher and His Preaching* (Fort Dodge, IA: Walterick, 1939), 46.



## STRIKING SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TWO EXTRAORDINARY EXPOSITORS

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*In each generation, God raises up one dominant voice in the church that speaks with the greatest biblical authority and theological profundity, yet with far-reaching appeal. Through his prolific pulpit and pen, such a pivotal figure becomes the primary instrument that most influences the direction of God's work around the world. Whether it be John Calvin in the sixteenth century, John Owen in the seventeenth, Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth, or Charles Spurgeon in the nineteenth, every hour of human history has one such strategic leader who marries both depth and breadth of ministry, and most impacts the times in which he lives. For the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a compelling case can be made that these two individuals are, respectively, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John MacArthur. Six remarkable resemblances characterize their comparable, extraordinary preaching.*

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Through Lloyd-Jones' prolific Westminster pulpit in London, and later by the global distribution of his printed sermons, this formidable leader came to be widely regarded in his day as "the greatest preacher in Christendom."<sup>1</sup> Affectionately known as "the Doctor," this brilliant physician-turned-preacher became the foremost expositor in the mid-twentieth century and was the leading influence in bringing about a resurgence of biblical preaching. "There is little doubt," Eric J. Alexander writes, "that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the greatest preacher the English-speaking world has seen in the twentieth century."<sup>2</sup> Through his strategic pulpit, only a short walk from Buckingham Palace, Lloyd-Jones spoke to the nation and impacted the evangelical church around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilber M. Smith, *Moody Monthly* (October 1955), 32 as quoted by Iain Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1990), 329.

<sup>2</sup> Eric J. Alexander, "Foreword," in *Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Cross: God's Way of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1986), vii.

With unflagging confidence in Scripture, this fiery Welsh-born preacher burned like a bright torch in a day that had witnessed “the decline in powerful biblical preaching in the English-speaking world.”<sup>3</sup> Despite contemporary trends to the contrary, Lloyd-Jones staunchly refused to cave in to the many pressures around him that clamored for man-centered programs to attract a crowd. While others looked to church growth techniques, this feisty Puritan-born-out-of-due-time relied chiefly upon the exposition of the Word to build the church. In spite of his many skeptics, Lloyd-Jones eventually preached to capacity crowds of 2,500 on Sunday mornings and evenings and 1,200 each Friday evening. Throughout his ministry, Lloyd-Jones emphasized that the preaching of the Word must always be the priority.

Recognizing Lloyd-Jones' enduring legacy, Peter Lewis writes, “In the history of the pulpit in Britain, the preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones is outstanding. He takes his place in a long line of great preachers since the Protestant Reformation, who have stood for the reformation and renewal of the church, the evangelization and awakening of the world.”<sup>4</sup> Despite the spiritual decline in post-World War II England, this exemplarily expositor stood virtually alone in his commitment to biblical preaching. Hughes Oliphant Old states, “The greatest impact of Lloyd-Jones on the English-speaking pulpit of today is the recovery of true expository preaching.”<sup>5</sup> In addition, Lloyd-Jones founded the Banner of Truth Trust, a publishing house for the distribution of Puritan and Reformed literature. Moreover, he chaired the annual Puritan Conference and moderated the Westminster Minister's Fraternal, leaving an indelible mark upon the Christian church.

#### RAISING UP OF A NEW VOICE

As Lloyd-Jones stepped down from his Westminster pulpit on October 9, 1968, none could have known that at that moment, the next strong voice was being raised up across the Atlantic Ocean, one that would continue this same resurgence of biblical preaching. On February 9, 1969, only four months after Lloyd-Jones resigned his pastorate, a twenty-nine-year-old preacher assumed the pulpit of Grace Community Church in Los Angeles, California and launched what would become more than four decades of prodigious sermon output. His name is John MacArthur, and like Lloyd-Jones before him, the focal point of his prolific ministry would be the clear and compelling exposition of the Scripture. Under his preaching, Grace Church would witness explosive growth from the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Lewis, “The Doctor As A Preacher,” in *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Chosen By God*, ed. Christopher Catherwood (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1986), 92-93.

<sup>5</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*: Vol. 6, *The Modern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 938.

300 who first heard him in a small chapel to two morning services and one evening service filled to capacity in its newly-built 3,000-seat auditorium. As with Westminster Chapel, so Grace Church would witness the unmistakable power of the Word of God preached.

The influence of MacArthur's preaching has reached far beyond the walls of Grace Community Church, gaining "a reputation for solid expository preaching."<sup>6</sup> Flowing out of this pulpit has come nearly 400 books and study guides either written or edited by MacArthur. Included in this prolific ministry came the *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* series, a thirty-one volume commentary set that when completed, will address every verse of every book in the New Testament. What is more, the *MacArthur Study Bible* is the direct fruit of this prolific pulpit and has become the cornerstone resource of his ministry, available in English, Spanish, Russian, German, French, Italian, Chinese, Arabic, with more languages on the way.

Reaching around the globe, the Grace pulpit has truly become a world pulpit, exerting an influence of staggering, if not unprecedented, proportions. Through "Grace to You" radio broadcasts, MacArthur's sermons are heard daily some 1,000 times throughout the English-speaking world in the United States, Canada, Europe, the Philippines, South Africa, and beyond. In addition, his sermons are heard another 1,000 times daily in 23 Spanish-speaking countries, including Mexico, Spain, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia. Moreover, under this far-reaching pulpit, The Master's Seminary was birthed in 1986 for the purpose of training men in expository preaching. Remarkably, a series of fourteen training centers has emerged around the world, known as The Master's Academy International (TMAI). These institutions are staffed by TMS graduates and are designed to equip a new generation of biblical expositors throughout the world.<sup>7</sup>

In the summer of 2011, MacArthur will complete his verse-by-verse exposition through the Gospel of Mark, which will mark a far greater milestone—the completion of his preaching at Grace Community Church through the entire New Testament. This monumental achievement of long term, consistent exposition will become a model inspiration and resource for pastors and teachers for generations to come. So remarkable is this accomplishment that one must go back to the voluminous output of Calvin in Geneva to find a comparable standard.

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*: Vol. 7, *Our Own Time* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 553.

<sup>7</sup> These training centers include Albania (Southeastern Europe Theologian Seminary), Croatia (Theological Biblical Academy), Germany/Switzerland (European Bible Training Center), Honduras (*Ministerios Evangelicos de las Americas*), India (Pastoral Training Seminary), Italy (Italian Theological Academy), Japan (Hamadera Bible Institute), Mexico (Word of Grace Biblical Seminary), New Zealand (The Shepherd's Bible College), The Philippines (The Expositor's Academy), Russia (Samara Preachers' Institute & Theological Seminary), Russia (Word of Grace Bible Institute), South Africa (Christ Seminary), and Ukraine (Irpin Biblical Seminary).

## A STRIKING RESEMBLANCE

Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur have proven to be, arguably, the premier expositors of the last two generations. What Lloyd-Jones was to the middle of the twentieth century, MacArthur has become to the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Though these two luminous preachers would never meet, and each would be his own man, many striking parallels can be identified between their pulpit ministries. The common ground shared by these two gifted preachers should serve as a positive example for all preachers to pattern their ministries.

In this article, the focus will be upon noted similarities between the expository preaching of these two extraordinary men. What core commitments distinguished them as great preachers in their day? What can we learn from their distinguished ministries that are worthy of imitation by this generation of preachers? What are the common cornerstones upon which their pulpits were built? To answer these questions, the following parallels should be noted between these two extraordinary expositors.

## THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The similarities between Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur begin with their unwavering commitment to the authority of Scripture. Both these pulpit stalwarts have strongly affirmed the sovereignty of Scripture over the life of the church and every individual. For both men, the Bible is, indisputably, the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the living God, fully sufficient to accomplish God's purposes upon the earth. Herein lies the underlying genius for their powerful expositions.

## The Sovereignty of Scripture

With unshakable certainty, Lloyd-Jones asserts that "the Scriptures are a divine product breathed out by God."<sup>8</sup> He maintains, "They were produced by the creative breath of the almighty God." "It is not merely that the thoughts are inspired, not merely the idea," Lloyd-Jones contends, "but the actual record, down to the particular words."<sup>9</sup> Regarding the divine inspiration of Scripture, he states, "The Holy Spirit has thus overruled and controlled and guided these men, even in the particular words, in such a way as to prevent any error, and above all to produce the result that was originally intended by God."<sup>10</sup> With deep

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<sup>8</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God the Father, God the Son: Volume I, Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

conviction, Lloyd-Jones insisted that the Bible is the very breath of God, and that it speaks with perfect accuracy and divine authority.

To this point, Lloyd-Jones affirms: “This subject of authority is indeed the great theme of the Bible itself. The Bible presents itself to us as an authoritative book.”<sup>11</sup> The Doctor adds, “The authority of the Scriptures is not a matter to be defended, so much as to be asserted...it is the preaching and exposition of the Bible that really establish its truth and authority.”<sup>12</sup> “The Scriptures *themselves* claim that authority,” Lloyd-Jones asserts. “They come to us as the Word of God... You cannot read the Old Testament without feeling that everywhere there is the assumption that this is the Word of God.”<sup>13</sup> He further notes, “Our Lord Himself fully accepted that position. How often does He say, ‘It is written’! And He directs men to that as the final authority. He meets the attack of Satan by quoting Scripture.”<sup>14</sup> Only when the Scripture is held to be supremely authoritative can the preacher wield the sword of the Spirit with power.

Regarding the Old Testament, Lloyd-Jones writes: “To the Lord Jesus Christ, the Old Testament was the Word of God; it was Scripture; it was something absolutely unique and apart; it had authority which nothing else has ever possessed nor can possess.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, this distinguished preacher recognizes this same authority in the New Testament: “The authority of the apostles undergirds and underlies the authority of the Gospels and the Epistles, the Book of Acts, indeed the whole of the New Testament. And we either accept that or we do not. It is the only authority: it is the final authority.”<sup>16</sup> To be sure, Scripture is the highest authority and final word in the Westminster pulpit, the undisputed arbitrator in all matters.

### Absolute Authority

Assuming this same stance, MacArthur likewise affirms the absolute authority of Scripture. This noted expositor believes that this fundamental truth is rooted and grounded in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible: “All Scripture is God’s inerrant Word.” He writes, “God divinely superintended the accurate recording of His divinely breathed truth by His divinely chosen men.”<sup>17</sup> MacArthur believes that divine inerrancy is inseparably connected with biblical

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<sup>11</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority* (1958; repr., Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1984), 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>15</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 187

<sup>16</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Authority*, 55, 59.

<sup>17</sup> John MacArthur, *2 Timothy*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 142-43.

authority: “Those God-given, humanly-recorded words became God’s written Word, inerrant and authoritative as originally given.”<sup>18</sup> He further asserts, “If the Bible is infallible and inerrant, it must be the final word—the highest standard of authority.”<sup>19</sup> Consequently, MacArthur argues that “the truth of Scripture...has the full weight of *God’s own* authority behind it.”<sup>20</sup> Because the Bible is divinely inspired, it is divinely authoritative, a truth that mandates biblical preaching.

“If the Bible is true,” MacArthur insists, “then it is also authoritative. As divinely revealed truth, it carries the full weight of God’s own authority. If you claim to believe the Bible at all, you ultimately must bow to its authority.”<sup>21</sup> To this end, he states: “Preaching the Bible establishes the authority of God over the mind and the soul. When we preach the Word of God, our people understand who has sovereignty over their souls—it is God alone who reigns over their thoughts and their actions.”<sup>22</sup> The Bible, MacArthur notes, “is not a book of suggestions. Its divine mandates are authoritative and binding. Those who treat it lightly place themselves in eternal peril. Those who take it seriously find eternal blessing.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently, “The Bible claims complete authority over our lives.”<sup>24</sup> This is to say, Scripture possesses supreme authority over every part of every life.

Such biblical authority, Old notes, breeds great confidence in MacArthur as he preaches: “What he seems to have is a witness to true authority. He recognizes in Scripture the Word of God, and when he preaches, it is Scripture that one hears.”<sup>25</sup> He adds: “Surely one of the greatest strengths of MacArthur’s preaching ministry is his complete confidence in the text.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, MacArthur’s approach to the biblical text must surely be defined by his complete reliance upon its unrivalled authority. Old further stresses: “This basic assumption that the text of Scripture is reliable is part of the foundation of his effectiveness as an interpreter.”<sup>27</sup> Unquestionably, MacArthur’s firm

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>19</sup> John MacArthur, *How to Get the Most from God’s Word* (Dallas: Word, 1997), 51.

<sup>20</sup> John MacArthur, *Why One Way? Defending an Exclusive Claim in an Inclusive World* (Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, 2002), 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>22</sup> John MacArthur, “Why I Still Preach the Bible,” in *Preaching the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 149.

<sup>23</sup> John MacArthur, *Truth Matters* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 6.

<sup>24</sup> MacArthur, *How to Get the Most from God’s Word*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 7:558.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 555.

commitment to the absolute authority of Scripture emboldens his preaching. In this, both Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur speak with one voice.

### THE PRIMACY OF THE PULPIT

Flowing out of their common recognition of biblical authority is a second striking similarity, namely, their strict commitment to the primacy of biblical preaching. Though both men have faced demands on many fronts, they, nevertheless, are, first and foremost, preachers of the Word. In their ministries, the public exposition of Scripture occupied the central place. For both men, the pulpit was the principle means by which they exerted their greatest influence.

#### High Calling to a Sacred Task

By all accounts, the Westminster pulpit was central to every aspect of the spiritual life of the church. Accordingly, Lloyd-Jones maintained that preaching is the loftiest task to which anyone could commit himself. He writes, “The work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.”<sup>28</sup> What is more, Lloyd-Jones insists: “The most urgent need in the Christian church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also.”<sup>29</sup> Nothing, he maintained, must ever supplant the primacy of the pulpit in the church.

Lloyd-Jones came to this conviction early as a brilliant young physician. He came to the sobering realization that he was merely assisting the physical healing of people who would return to godless living and suffer eternal destruction. He lamented, “We spend most of our time rendering people fit to go back to their sin.”<sup>30</sup> Of his patients, he realized: “A man with a healthy body and a diseased soul is all right for sixty years or so and then he has to face an eternity of hell.”<sup>31</sup> Once converted, Lloyd-Jones came to see that only the Word of God can bring about what ultimately matters, the healing of eternal souls. With this conviction, he was being drawn to the ministry of preaching: “The primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God.”<sup>32</sup> Everything in the church, he believed, should be shaped and influenced by the pulpit.

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<sup>28</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 9. So strongly did he believe this that the first chapter in this book is titled “The Primacy of Preaching.”

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Lloyd-Jones, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s,” (Matt. 22:20-21), April 28, 1929 as cited in Iain Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 80.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 19.

Substantiating this claim, Lloyd-Jones pointed to the earthly ministries of Jesus Christ: "In the life and ministry of our Lord Himself, you have this clear indication of the primacy of preaching and of teaching."<sup>33</sup> In addition, he understood that Christ assigned this same priority to His apostles. When these men were "filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost," he notes, they immediately "began to preach."<sup>34</sup> As other needs arose in the early church, Lloyd-Jones paraphrased Peter's assertion, stating: "We are here to preach this Word, this is the first thing. We will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word."<sup>35</sup> By this statement, he maintained that preaching, empowered by prayer, is job number one in the church. He states that these "priorities are laid down once and forever...and we must not allow anything to deflect us from this."<sup>36</sup> No other ministry or church activity must ever supplant the primacy of the pulpit.

#### In Season and Out of Season

Standing shoulder to shoulder with Lloyd-Jones, MacArthur has voiced this same conviction: "The church's most important function is to proclaim the Word of God in an understandable, direct, and authoritative way."<sup>37</sup> Assigning the pulpit this proper place, MacArthur declares: "Preaching the Word *must* be the very heart of our ministry philosophy."<sup>38</sup> Resisting present day trends, he emphatically states: "In corporate worship, the preaching of the Word should take first place."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, MacArthur maintains: "Preaching is an irreplaceable aspect of all corporate worship. In fact, the whole church service should revolve around the ministry of the Word. Everything else is either preparatory to, or a response to, the exposition of Scripture."<sup>40</sup> At Grace Church, the centrality of the Word preached is an irrefutable core value.

MacArthur is indefatigable in this fundamental commitment: "Preaching is the non-negotiable heart of the church's ministry. This fact does not change because public opinion changes."<sup>41</sup> MacArthur states that this

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 59-60.

<sup>38</sup> John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (1993; repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 45.

<sup>39</sup> John MacArthur, "How Shall We Then Worship?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, gen. ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 181.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>41</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., "Unafraid to Preach" in *Whatever Happened to the Reformation?*, eds. Gary L. W. Johnson and R. Fowler White (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 274.

biblically-assigned priority is non-negotiable: “Some people today argue that the church could draw more ‘unchurched’ people by featuring drama and music instead of preaching. But Paul’s instructions to Timothy were clear. He was to preach the Word whether preaching was popular or not—’in season and out of season.’”<sup>42</sup> Thus, MacArthur sounds this clarion warning: “A ‘church’ where the Word of God is not regularly and faithfully preached is no true church.”<sup>43</sup> Only where the Scripture is rightly expounded, he believes, does a true church meet.

Unswayed by contemporary trends, MacArthur states, “Many things have come along to try and supplant preaching. And unfortunately, most people just let it happen. If you open your newspaper and look at the church page, instead of reading about men preaching the Word of God, you read about musical phantasmagorias, movies, and all sorts of other things going on.”<sup>44</sup> He staunchly insists, “They must never supplant the preaching of the Word. A holy man, who is gifted to preach by the Spirit of God and prepared in the Word of God, has no equal in a power presentation of the truth. That is the pattern of Scripture.”<sup>45</sup> Such a fundamental commitment to preaching lies at the heart of every great preacher. Bottomline, MacArthur concludes: “Preaching is to be the priority.”<sup>46</sup>

## THE CONTINUITY OF EXPOSITION

If preaching is to be primary, it demands a certain kind of preaching, specially, biblical preaching. To this end, Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur have been known for their expository pulpits, a fundamental approach that involves long series through entire books in the Bible. Whether preaching verse-by-verse through whole books, or through sections within books, both men have used the *lectio continua* approach, meaning “continuous expositions.” This comprehensive *modus operandi* has served a balanced diet to their well-balanced congregations.

### New Life into a Classic Form

Amid many barren pulpits, Lloyd-Jones so gave himself to sequential expository preaching that, Old insists, he was “breathing new life into a very classic form.” Lloyd-Jones was able to “recover and popularize” expository preaching “throughout the English-speaking world.”<sup>47</sup> He accomplished this

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> MacArthur, “How Shall We Then Worship?” 182.

<sup>44</sup> John MacArthur, *Exalting the Crucified Christ* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace, 1982), 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 6:946.

resurgence at a time when “classic expository preaching...had all but died out.”<sup>48</sup> Resisting this trend, Lloyd-Jones insisted: “The message should always arise out of the Scriptures directly.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, the sermon must start and stay with the Scripture, saying explicitly what the text says. But more than that, Lloyd-Jones asserted: “It should be clear to people that what we are saying is something that comes out of the Bible. We are presenting the Bible and its message. That is the origin of our message.”<sup>50</sup> In short, he maintained that true preaching “must always be expository.”<sup>51</sup>

By this approach, Lloyd-Jones delivered over 4,000 sermons from his Westminster pulpit, preaching twice on Sundays, once in the morning and once in the evening, and on Friday evenings (September to May). Further, he conducted regular journeys throughout the English countryside, preaching at least two to three times during the week, including numerous pastors’ conferences.

Lloyd-Jones’s Sunday morning sermons were intentionally directed toward Christians. From his Westminster pulpit, he preached through: 1 Peter (twenty-five sermons, 1943-1944), 2 Peter (twenty-five sermons, 1946-1947), Philippians (thirty-seven sermons, 1947-1948), 1 John (sixty-seven sermons, 1948-1950), and Habakkuk (six sermons, 1950). The most famous Sunday morning series by Lloyd-Jones was the Sermon on the Mount, a thorough treatment of Matthew 5-7 (sixty sermons, 1950-1952). Other Sunday morning series included an exposition of John 17 (thirteen sermons, 1952-1953), Psalm 73 (eleven sermons, 1953), Spiritual Depression from Psalm 42 (twenty-one sermons, 1954), Revival (twenty-six sermons, 1959), Ephesians (260 sermons, 1954-1962), Colossians 1 (fourteen sermons, 1962), and the Gospel of John chapters 1-4 (1962-1968).

In the Sunday evening messages, Lloyd-Jones was purposefully evangelistic, preaching through: Isaiah 35 (six sermons, 1946), Isaiah 40 (nine sermons, 1954), Psalm 107 (seven sermons, 1955), Authority (three sermons, 1957), Galatians 6:14 on the Cross (nine sermons, 1963), Psalm 1 (four sermons, 1963), Isaiah 1 (nine sermons, 1963), Isaiah 5 (seven sermons, 1964), Joy Unspeakable (twenty-four sermons, 1964-1965), and Acts 1-8 (110 sermons, 1965-1968). In addition, Lloyd-Jones started a Friday night Bible study, early in his Westminster ministry, focused primarily upon Christians, an on-going series which became enormously popular. His first Friday night series was on Great Doctrines of the Bible (eighty-one sermons, 1952-1955). Far from being dry lectures, these messages were delivered with all the elements of dynamic preaching. This series was followed by his magisterial exposition of the book of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 187.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 196.

Romans (372 sermons, 1957-1968), culminating in Romans 14:17, when he retired from the Westminster pulpit.

### The Only Legitimate Way to Preach

Like Lloyd-Jones, MacArthur made the same commitment to expository preaching. He writes: “Preaching and teaching must be expositional, setting forth as clearly, systematically, and completely as possible the truths of God’s Word and only those truths.”<sup>52</sup> MacArthur emphatically asserts: “It is for that reason that expository preaching—preaching that systematically and thoroughly explains the meaning of Scripture—is the only legitimate way to preach.” Consequently, he states that the message must never originate with himself: “The preacher’s responsibility is not to create messages from his own wisdom or cleverness or to manipulate or sway his listeners by means of his own persuasiveness of charisma but to interpret, explain, and apply God’s Word as clearly and completely as possible.”<sup>53</sup> This is the genius of MacArthur’s preaching. Starting at the first verse of chapter one and moving consecutively through the entire book, he simply reads, explains, and applies God’s Word. MacArthur is a mouthpiece for the biblical text.

In all, MacArthur has delivered some 3,000 expositions at Grace Community Church. For over forty years, he has stood in one pulpit and faithfully expounded the Scripture, Sunday by Sunday.<sup>54</sup> On Sunday mornings, MacArthur has preached, verse by verse, through: Romans (1969), the Gospel of John (seventy-eight sermons, 1970-1972), Acts (103 sermons, 1972-1975), 1 Corinthians (eighty-one sermons, 1975-1977), Ephesians (sixty sermons, 1978-1979), the Gospel of Matthew (226 sermons, 1978-1985), 1 Timothy (fifty sermons, 1985-1987), 2 Timothy (twenty-seven sermons, 1987-1988), Philippians (forty-six sermons, 1988-1989), 1 Thessalonians (thirty-six sermons, 1990-1991), Philemon (four sermons, 1991), 2 Thessalonians (seventeen sermons, 1992), Titus (twenty-four sermons, 1992-1993), 2 Corinthians (ninety-six sermons, 1993-1998), the Gospel of Luke (298 sermons, 1998-2008), the Gospel of Mark (2009-2011).

On Sunday evenings, MacArthur has likewise expounded: Habakkuk (three sermons, 1969), 1 and 2 Peter (1969), Hebrews (forty-three sermons, 1972-1973), Galatians (twenty-four sermons, 1973-1974), Colossians (twenty-three sermons, 1976), Zechariah (nineteen sermons, 1977), Daniel (thirty-one sermons, 1979-1980), Romans (124 sermons, 1981-1986), James (thirty-four

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<sup>52</sup> John MacArthur, *Titus*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 49.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that MacArthur preached consecutively through the first seventy-five psalms on Wednesday evenings during his early years at Grace Community Church until the demands of growing ministry, as well as increasing preaching opportunities outside the church, necessitated that his time be reinvested more strategically. Sadly, these early Wednesday evening messages were not recorded.

sermons, 1986-1987), 1 Peter (fifty sermons, 1988-1990), 2 Peter (twenty-seven sermons, 1990-1991), Revelation (eighty-seven sermons, 1991-1995), Genesis 1-11 (forty-nine sermons, 1999-2001), 1 John (forty-two sermons, 2002-2003), 2 John (four sermons, 2003), 3 John (two sermons, 2003), Jude (fifteen sermons, 2004).

In addition, MacArthur has also preached the following topical expository series: *The Superiority of Christ* (seven sermons, 1972), *The Second Coming of Jesus Christ* (twenty-three sermons, 1973), *Is the Bible Reliable?* (twelve sermons, 1974), *God, Satan, and Angels* (nine sermons, 1975), *The Charismatic Movement* (twelve sermons, 1977), *Spiritual Bootcamp* (four sermons, 1978), *True Worship* (eight sermons, 1982), *The Anatomy of a Church* (eight sermons, 1983), *Heaven* (eight sermons, 1987), *Spiritual Growth* (four sermons, 1988), *Seven Steps to Spiritual Stability* (six sermons, 1989), *Whatever Happened to the Holy Spirit?* (six sermons, 1989), *The Love of God* (six sermons, 1994-1995), *The Fulfilled Family* (eleven sermons, 1996), *A Biblical Perspective on the Middle East and Terrorism* (four sermons, 2001), *The Doctrines of Grace* (ten sermons, 2004), *Spiritual Terrorism* (ten sermons, 2004), *Making a Case for the Bible* (five sermons, 2006), *Why Every Calvinist Should be a Premillennialist* (six sermons, 2007), *The Kind of Worship God Desires* (five sermons, 2008), *Romans chapters 3, 4 and 5* (ten sermons, 2009), *Hebrews 11* (twelve sermons, 2009-2010), *1 Corinthians 13* (four sermons, 2010), *1 Corinthians 15* (six sermons, 2010).<sup>55</sup>

## THE INTEGRITY OF THE TEXT

Fourth, Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur are equally committed to serious study in their sermon preparation. Possessing commanding intellects, these two master expositors feverishly devoted themselves to the diligent study of the Scripture. The depth of their sermon preparation has determined the breadth of their ministry. Both men have labored to search the Scripture in order to discover its essential meaning, key doctrines, and timeless principles.

### Digging into the Scripture

As a promising medical student, Lloyd-Jones knew the discipline required in rigorous academic study. Following his demanding schooling, he joined the staff of the foremost teaching hospital in the world, St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London. There he became the chief clinical assistant to Sir Thomas Horder, a leading heart physician and doctor to the royal family. Under this privileged tutelage, Horder's Socratic approach to logic and learning

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<sup>55</sup> Other shorter topical series have been preached by Dr. MacArthur from the Grace pulpit. Consulting *Grace to You* ([www.gty.org](http://www.gty.org)) will provide the listing for the few other smaller series.

sharpened the intellectual prowess of this future preacher.<sup>56</sup> Horder acclaimed Lloyd-Jones to be “the most acute thinker that I ever knew.”<sup>57</sup> Once converted and called into ministry, Lloyd-Jones applied his ingenious mind to the study of Scripture.

As Lloyd-Jones approached the Bible, it was as though he was examining a patient. Of each text, he asked probing questions, synthesized his findings, and determined the proper diagnosis. He said: “You have to question your text, to put questions to it, and especially this question—What is this saying? What is the particular doctrine here, the special message? In the preparation of a sermon, nothing is more important than that.”<sup>58</sup> In scrutinizing the Scripture, Lloyd-Jones insisted that his analysis must involve studying in the original languages. He stated that the Greek and Hebrew “are of great value for the sake of accuracy; no more, that is all. They cannot guarantee accuracy, but they promote it.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, he insisted, linguistic tools need to be employed in interpreting the Scripture. After digging into the text, Lloyd-Jones then urged the consulting “commentaries or any aids that you may choose to employ.”<sup>60</sup>

In this pursuit, Lloyd-Jones’s entire life was “immersed in Scripture.”<sup>61</sup> Using the Robert Murray McCheyne system of daily Scripture reading, he poured over four passages of Scripture each day, two in the morning and two at night. Those who knew him best said: “He knew that Bible inside and out!”<sup>62</sup> For Lloyd-Jones, this gave him a thorough knowledge of the whole Bible. As he dug into each text, he looked for the doctrine taught therein. Lloyd-Jones said: “Biblical study is of very little value if it ends in and of itself and is mainly a matter of the meaning of the words. The purpose of studying the Scripture is to arrive at its doctrine.”<sup>63</sup> Like a hard-working miner, he explored each passage until he extracted its theological gems, core doctrines, and biblical principles. Out of this daily reading and sermon preparation, he was armed with the truth and, in turn, preached the Word.

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<sup>56</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: A Family Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 30.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *Five Evangelical Leaders* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1985), 56.

<sup>58</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 76.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-73.

<sup>61</sup> Catherwood, *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: A Family Portrait*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Murray, David *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, 261.

## Rightly Dividing the Word

Hard study has been equally present in MacArthur's sermon preparation. Iain Murray notes this relentless pursuit in study of the Scripture: "For forty-four or forty-five Sundays, through forty years, two new sermons have been prepared every week; in the early years it was three, as MacArthur also spoke at the church on Wednesday nights. The pattern of his week has been to give the best of his time, from Tuesday to Friday, to preparation for preaching."<sup>64</sup> This regimented study has been consistent over the lengthy span of more than four decades. Murray adds: "In early years, this meant some fifteen hours of work for each sermon; and he still requires from eight to ten hours."<sup>65</sup> Week after week, month after month, year after year, MacArthur has devoted himself to the meticulous study of the biblical text. The deeper he has dug down into the text, the stronger his pulpit has grown.

Regarding his approach, MacArthur states: "I always begin by reading the whole book. It is imperative for the expositor to be familiar with the overall message and flow of the book before he begins preaching any passages from it."<sup>66</sup> In so doing: "I also read the introductory sections in several good commentaries" in order to "become familiar with the author of the book, the addresses, the book's theme or purpose, the date of its writing, and other important background material."<sup>67</sup> With the individual passage isolated, "I ask myself, 'What is the primary message of this passage? What is the central truth? What is the main expositional idea?'"<sup>68</sup> Having found the main point, "I begin to look for the subordinate points that support it."<sup>69</sup> Subsequently, "The next step is a detailed analysis of its words and grammar"<sup>70</sup> to find "any problems in the passage, such as an important textual variant, an unusual word, or a difficult grammatical construction."<sup>71</sup> Then he will "diagram the passage" to become

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<sup>64</sup> Iain Murray, "John MacArthur: A Sketch of An Evangelical Leader," in *Truth Endures: Commemorating Forty Years of Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time 1969-2009* (Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2009), 30.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> John MacArthur, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Study Method for Faithful Preaching," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, eds. Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 86.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> John MacArthur, "A Study Method for Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 220.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

“aware of the grammatical structure.”<sup>72</sup> At last, “I put together a preliminary outline.”<sup>73</sup>

MacArthur contends, “Rightly dividing the Word of truth demands great effort. It was originally written many years ago in very different contexts, today’s exegete has to work hard to bridge the gaps of language, culture, geography, and history. He must also do his best to understand the flow of the argument, as it would have been understood by its original readers” and “intended by its original human author.”<sup>74</sup> In summary, MacArthur states, “The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. If you do not have the interpretation of the passage right, then you do not have the Word of God, because only the true meaning is the Word of God.”<sup>75</sup> Consequently, MacArthur has shown himself firmly committed to finding the proper interpretation of the biblical text. Until he has it, he realizes, he can proceed no further.

### THE PURITY OF DOCTRINE

Fifth, Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur have been keenly aware they must exposit doctrinal truths. This focus has yielded a depth lacking in other expositors. Murray observes there is “a growing difference between the older, [G. Campbell] Morgan tradition of exposition and MacArthur’s. In his case, as with Lloyd-Jones, the devotional thought is grounded on the bringing out of clear doctrinal principles. Exposition needs to lead hearers to doctrinal certainties.”<sup>76</sup> Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur have been committed to preaching biblical and systematic theology from each text.

#### Theology on Fire

Lloyd-Jones was adamant that true preaching must be doctrinal preaching: “What is preaching?... It is theology on fire. And a theology which does not take fire, I maintain, is a defective theology; or at least the man’s understanding of it is defective. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.”<sup>77</sup> Each sermon, he maintained, must set forth doctrinal truths. To this point, Lloyd-Jones reiterates: “Preaching must always be theological, always based on a theological foundation... There is no type of preaching that should be non-theological.”<sup>78</sup> With deep conviction, he states: “You cannot deal

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> MacArthur, “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth” 79-80.

<sup>75</sup> MacArthur, *Why One Way?*, 34.

<sup>76</sup> Murray, “John MacArthur: A Sketch of an Evangelical Leader,” 28-46.

<sup>77</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 97.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

properly with repentance without dealing with the doctrine of man, the doctrine of the Fall, the doctrine of sin and the wrath of God against sin.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, preaching must be aimed at teaching “doctrinal certainties.”

Consequently, Lloyd-Jones believed that strong preaching demands that the preacher have a strategic grasp of systematic theology: “To me there is nothing more important in a preacher than that he should know it and be well grounded in it. This systematic theology, this body of truth which is derived from the Scripture, should always be present as a background and as a controlling influence in his preaching.”<sup>80</sup> For Lloyd-Jones, sound doctrine was the very backbone of his preaching. Each passage must be tested by the analogy of Scripture and show its perfect consistency with the rest of Scripture.

Murray explains that for Lloyd-Jones, preaching expositively is “not simply to give the correct grammatical sense of a verse or passage. It is rather to set out the principles or doctrines which the words are intended to convey. True expository preaching is, therefore, doctrinal preaching, it is preaching which addresses specific truths from God to man.”<sup>81</sup> Without teaching the doctrine of a passage, a sermon is devoid of power. Thus, Lloyd-Jones asserted, “The purpose of studying the Scripture is to arrive at doctrine.”<sup>82</sup> Setting forth the doctrine of the passage, he believed, is essential to the sermon.

#### The Faith Once for All Delivered

This same focus upon sound doctrine is found in MacArthur’s preaching. This noted preacher writes: “The pastor’s purpose is not to make Scripture relevant to his people but to enable them to understand doctrine, which becomes the foundation of their spiritual living.”<sup>83</sup> No matter what people want, MacArthur states, solid theology must be put forth. He writes: “People’s ears may be itching for anything but sound doctrine, but the faithful pastor will defy the spirit of the age, confront his own fear, and boldly preach the truth anyway.”<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, he states: “In his preaching and teaching, it should be the pastor’s sole objective to enlighten his congregation in doctrine that protects and preserves their spiritual health.”<sup>85</sup> In other words, right living results from right doctrine.

In MacArthur’s preaching, Murray notes: “The necessity for doctrinal content—the making clear of biblical principles—became an increasingly

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>81</sup> Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 261.

<sup>82</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial* (Clover, SC: Christian Heritage, 2008), 88.

<sup>83</sup> MacArthur, *Titus*, 49.

<sup>84</sup> MacArthur, “Unafraid to Preach,” 271.

<sup>85</sup> MacArthur, *Titus*, 48-49.

important part of MacArthur's preaching."<sup>86</sup> To this end, MacArthur states: "Authentic Christianity is concerned first and foremost with truth. The Christian faith is not primarily about feelings although deep feelings will surely result from the impact of truth on our hearts. It is not about human relationships, even though relationships are the main focus in many of today's evangelical pulpits...Biblical Christianity is all about truth."<sup>87</sup> Consequently, MacArthur stresses that the absolute nature of truth necessitates that every pastor teach sound doctrine. He writes: "An excellent minister is to disseminate sound teaching to all people at all times through all means. That is the heart and soul of the ministry."<sup>88</sup>

Regarding current trends, MacArthur notes: "There is much relational preaching today that attempts to make people feel better about themselves and about how God might feel about them, but there is little forceful defense of the full truth. As in most periods of church history, strong and effective defenders of the faith are at a premium."<sup>89</sup> Expositors of sound doctrine is the dire need in this present hour, he believes, those who uphold the standard of sound words. Such a commitment to preaching "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" galvanizes the pulpit.

#### THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SPIRIT

Sixth, Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur have stressed their utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit in preaching. Their complete reliance involves the Spirit's role in the preacher's study, as well as in the pulpit. The expositor's preparation in diligent study of the Word is entirely dependent upon the Holy Spirit must enlighten the expositor's understanding of the biblical text and deepen his convictions in it. The same can be said regarding the Spirit's role in delivering the sermon. There can be *no* real preaching apart from the supernatural empowering of the Spirit of God.

#### Spirit-Empowered Preaching

Lloyd-Jones asserted that the Spirit's work in the preacher's delivery is "the greatest essential in connection with preaching."<sup>90</sup> Authoritative preaching, he claimed, "is God giving power, and enabling [him], through the Spirit... [to] do this work in a manner that lifts it up beyond the efforts and endeavors of

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<sup>86</sup> Murray, "John MacArthur: A Sketch of an Evangelical Leader," 28.

<sup>87</sup> MacArthur, *Why One Way?*, 41-42.

<sup>88</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 176.

<sup>89</sup> MacArthur, *2 Timothy*, 125.

<sup>90</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 304.

man.”<sup>91</sup> Such preaching is God in the preacher, energizing him to expound the Scripture with supernatural ability. He states, “If there is no power, it is not preaching. True preaching, after all, is God acting. It is not just a man uttering words; it is God using him. He is being used of God. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>92</sup> Lloyd-Jones believed this divine element in preaching is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Recognizing this supernatural dimension, Lloyd-Jones described the Spirit’s activity in the preacher: “You are a man ‘possessed,’ you are taken hold of, and taken up...you have a feeling that you are not actually doing the preaching...You are looking on at yourself in amazement as this is happening. It is not your effort; you are just the instrument, the channel, the vehicle: and the Spirit is using you, and you are looking on in great enjoyment and astonishment.”<sup>93</sup> By this, Lloyd-Jones affirmed the sovereign work of the third member of the Godhead in preaching, quickening his mind, enflaming his affections, and deepening his convictions.

In the pulpit, Lloyd-Jones acknowledged that the Spirit gives an expansion of thought and depth of profound expression: “It is of the very essence of the act of preaching—this freedom in your own mind and spirit, this being free to the influences of the Spirit upon you. If we believe in the Holy Spirit at all, we must believe that He is acting powerfully while we are engaged in this most serious and wonderful work.”<sup>94</sup> Therefore, he urged that the preacher should earnestly pray that God would “let Him manifest His power in you and through you.”<sup>95</sup> Lloyd-Jones believed: “Nothing but a return of this power of the Spirit on our preaching is going to avail us anything. This makes true preaching.”<sup>96</sup> In short, Lloyd-Jones affirmed that if preaching is to know God’s blessing, it must know the power of God’s Spirit.

#### In Demonstration of Power

MacArthur, likewise, emphasizes the preacher’s complete reliance upon the Holy Spirit. “Powerful preaching occurs,” he writes, “only when a Spirit-illuminated man of God expounds clearly and compellingly God’s Spirit-inspired revelation in Scripture to a Spirit-illuminated congregation.”<sup>97</sup> The Holy Spirit, who inspired the biblical text, is the same Spirit who must enlighten the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> MacArthur, “The Spirit of God and Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 103.

preacher and the congregation. MacArthur clarifies: “Illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit that opens one’s spiritual eyes to comprehend the meaning of the Word of God. It involves the preacher of Scripture and his audience. God’s objective and historically past revelation in Scripture cannot be understood accurately apart from the present, personal, and subjective work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>98</sup> Without the Spirit teaching both the preacher and the listener, the Bible remains something of a closed book. Without His empowerment, the preacher will resort to manipulative techniques and fleshly coercions with the listener.

In preaching, MacArthur affirms that the preacher must not depend upon mere rhetoric, but upon the Holy Spirit: “Regardless of the erudition, the compelling logic, the soaring rhetoric, or the clever and interesting communication style, if the truth spoken is not accompanied by the power of God, it accomplishes nothing. But when empowered by God as it enters the prepared soul, the gospel truth saves.”<sup>99</sup> To this end, MacArthur stresses that the Spirit must be at work, or preaching is in vain: “Genuine soul-transforming power accompanying gospel preaching is the work of the Spirit energizing both the preacher and the hearer.”<sup>100</sup> The preacher can deliver the truth to the listener’s ear, but the Holy Spirit must take it to the mind and heart.

Aware of his vulnerability, MacArthur states: “I just pray that my own church would be a place of powerful preaching, and that we would never substitute anything for the Spirit-energized preaching of Christ, His cross, and the Word of God.”<sup>101</sup> No amount of truth, if delivered without the Spirit’s ministry, can impact those who hear it. Is it any wonder that God has chosen to bless these two faithful servants, Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur, as they have relied upon the Holy Spirit in their respective pulpits?

### THE GRAVITY OF THE MESSAGE

Finally, Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur, as they have stood in their pulpits with an open Bible, have been gripped by the weightiness of their message. These are both no nonsense men, marked by sobriety, gravity, and dignity. These men are expositors, not entertainers. Lloyd-Jones was fond to say that the preacher must be as Richard Baxter once stated: “I preached as never sure to preach again and as a dying man to dying men.”<sup>102</sup> As they have proclaimed the Word, the weightiness of their message has rested upon them. Such *gravitas* has made their preaching impactful upon their listeners.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 196.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>101</sup> John MacArthur, *Exalting the Crucified Christ: Study Notes Acts 2:14-42* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace, 1982), 5.

<sup>102</sup> As quoted by Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 75.

### The Weightiness of the Truth

Lloyd-Jones maintained that the preacher must be dominated by what he preaches: "A preacher must always convey the impression that he himself has been gripped by what he is saying. If he has not been gripped, nobody else will be... He must impress the people by the fact that he is taken up and absorbed by what he is doing. He is full of matter, and he is anxious to impart this."<sup>103</sup> Lloyd-Jones believed that the truth must sober the man of God: "The preacher must be a serious man; he must never give the impression that preaching is something light or superficial."<sup>104</sup> Such seriousness was certainly seen in Lloyd-Jones' pulpit demeanor. Lloyd-Jones warns: "A preacher of necessity must give the impression that he is dealing with the most serious matter that men and women can ever consider together."<sup>105</sup> The preacher "should always create and convey the impression of the seriousness of what is happening the moment he even appears in the pulpit."<sup>106</sup> The preacher should reflect a sense of gravity in his countenance, tone, and delivery.

Lloyd-Jones also believed the preacher must never go to the other extreme: "Seriousness does not mean solemnity, does not mean sadness, does not mean morbidity."<sup>107</sup> The Doctor stressed that sobriety is never a license to be dour: "The preacher must never be dull, he must never be boring... With the grand theme and message of the Bible, dullness is impossible."<sup>108</sup> Expository preaching must never be mundane. Rather, he insists: "This is the most interesting, the most thrilling, the most absorbing subject in the universe; and the idea that this can be presented in a dull manner makes me seriously doubt whether the men who are guilty of this dullness have ever really understood the doctrine they claim to believe, and which they advocate."<sup>109</sup> Bottomline, "I would say that a dull preacher is a contradiction in terms; if he is dull, he is not a preacher."<sup>110</sup> Simply put, a lackluster preacher is one who has never been gripped by the truth he proclaims. If he remains stoic, it is because the truth has not affected him.

Lloyd-Jones stresses: "A man who is not moved by these things, I maintain, has never really understood them. A man is not an intellect in a

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 87

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

vacuum; he is a whole person. He has a heart as well as a head; and if his head truly understands, his heart will be moved.”<sup>111</sup> Despondent over monotone preaching, Lloyd-Jones agonized: “Where is the passion in preaching that has always characterized great preaching in the past? Why are not modern preachers moved and carried away as the great preachers of the past so often were? The Truth has not changed. Do we believe it, have we been gripped and humbled by it, and then exalted until we are ‘lost in wonder love and praise?’”<sup>112</sup> If the preacher is not on fire, the truth will never ignite the people.

### A Mandate from God

In the same way, MacArthur embodies a similar gravity in preaching. Describing the passion that must be present in preaching, he urges: “Feel deeply about the truth you are to preach. Remember that expositors have a mandate from God to preach the truth and that eternal consequences hang in the balance. This mandate is not easy to obey, nor is it a light load to carry.”<sup>113</sup> No one, after hearing MacArthur, would conclude that he is anything less than blood-earnest in his preaching. He adds: “Taking this charge seriously produces an inner compulsion to reach the pulpit better prepared than when leaving the study.”<sup>114</sup> In other words, every preacher must feel the responsibility of his calling weighing heavily upon him. Without this inner sobriety, MacArthur concludes, there is no true preaching.

Tragically, MacArthur warns that many of today’s preachers “cater to the tastes of their audience—precisely what Paul warned against. They want to minister to people’s ‘felt needs.’ They are obsessed with being ‘relevant.’ They think too much doctrine, or too much Scripture, is a turn-off to the ‘unchurched’ people they want to reach.”<sup>115</sup> Consequently, he notes: “They allow opinion polls to determine the content of their message. Their greatest fear is offending their hearers. This style of ministry is often labeled ‘seeker-sensitive’ or ‘user-friendly,’ but Scripture calls it ear-tickling.”<sup>116</sup> This kind of lifeless rhetoric, MacArthur contends, lacks the necessary gravity of real preaching. Such shallowness that marks many contemporary pulpits defies the biblical mandate to proclaim the transcendent truth, “Thus says the Lord!”

To this end, MacArthur sounds this clear warning: “Evangelicals have lost their tolerance for bold, confrontative, biblical preaching. People have demanded to be entertained. Pastors, fearful of ‘turning people off,’ have

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> MacArthur, “Delivering the Exposition,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 323.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> MacArthur, “Unafraid to Preach,” 276.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

acquiesced to public opinion. And now the church, on several fronts, is flirting with serious doctrinal error, unable to distinguish truth from falsehood. Having turned aside from the truth, they are susceptible to myths."<sup>117</sup> But to the contrary, MacArthur asserts that the man of God must be fearless in the pulpit: "The preacher of the Word must be bold, thorough, unrelenting, persevering in the face of hardship and opposition—and above all, fearless."<sup>118</sup> Sadly, he states, "This kind of sobriety is the polar opposite of the flaky, whimsical, superficial, celebrity-type televangelists who color the public perception of preachers today."<sup>119</sup> Thus, MacArthur earnestly pleads, "The faithful preacher should be well-rooted and grounded, steadfast, stable—rock-solid."<sup>120</sup> In short, if a man is to truly preach, a sobering sense of God must weigh heavily upon him. If there is to be biblical exposition, the preacher must first be gripped by the Word of God. Without question, MacArthur has ardently demonstrated this kind of awe-inspiring preaching to an entire generation.

### PREACHING THAT ELECTRIFIES

What is the effect of preaching that is thoroughly biblical, authoritative, and well-studied? What is the result of expository preaching that is intensely doctrinal, Spirit-empowered, and delivered with a sense of urgency? How has God used the expository preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John MacArthur?

#### The Thunder of the Truth

J. I. Packer, then a student in London, has reflected upon what it was like to be under Lloyd-Jones' preaching at Westminster Chapel. Packer writes: "I had never heard such preaching and was electrified"<sup>121</sup> Further, Packer stated: "I have never heard another preacher with so much of God about him."<sup>122</sup> The effect of such preaching was powerful: "There was in the Doctor's preaching thunder and lightning that no tape or transcription ever did or could capture... Through the thunder and lightning, I felt and saw as never before the glory of Christ and of His gospel as modern man's only lifeline and learned by experience why historic Protestantism looks on preaching as the supreme means

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Letter to Iain Murray, May 21, 1981. As quoted by Iain Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, 188.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching*, eds., Clyde Fant, Jr. and W. M. Pinson, Jr. (Waco, TX: Word, 1971) 11:269.

of grace and of communion with God.”<sup>123</sup> Such is the power of God in the preaching of His Word.

Reflecting upon Lloyd-Jones’s biblical preaching, Eric Alexander writes, “Those of us who have had the privilege of hearing him will not easily forget the sense of awe which came upon one’s soul as he was gripped by the glory of the gospel and God spoke with such power through him.”<sup>124</sup> This is the effect of such preaching, which “left an indelible mark on his hearers.”<sup>125</sup>

### Compellingly Clear

From untold numbers of people, the same testimonies can be offered concerning the authority of John MacArthur’s preaching. The Scripture proclaimed from his pulpit has come with life-changing impact upon those who have sat under its force. Baptismal services on Sunday evening at Grace Community Church reveal the repeated testimonies of those who have been converted under the power of the Word of God preached. Students at both The Master’s Seminary and College bear witness that the supernaturally empowered force of MacArthur’s pulpit has drawn them from across the country or the world to sit at his feet.

“What one hears from MacArthur’s pulpit,” Old states, “is a very straight Christian message.”<sup>126</sup> He “has an amazing ability to explain Scripture by Scripture” in such a way that is “richly informative and mightily convincing.”<sup>127</sup> Old adds, “The strength of his preaching is the content,”<sup>128</sup> as MacArthur speaks with “complete clarity.”<sup>129</sup> The truth is this, “He recognizes in Scripture the Word of God, and when he preaches, it is Scripture that one hears.”<sup>130</sup>

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of John MacArthur’s presidency of The Master’s Seminary, it is only fitting that we give praise to God for this faithful servant. For over four decades, this distinguished leader has given himself to the preaching of God’s Word at Grace Church with unwavering tenacity. What is more, the Lord has used his influence in the training of the next generation of Spirit-empowered biblical expositors, who follow in their president’s footsteps.

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<sup>123</sup> Charles Turner Packer, ed., *Chosen Vessels: Portraits of Ten Outstanding Christian Men* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine, 1985), 119.

<sup>124</sup> Eric J. Alexander, “Foreword,” vii.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 7:552.

<sup>127</sup> Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 7:554-55.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 7:557.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 7:556.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 7:558.

May John MacArthur's prolific life and pulpit legacy impact a new generation of preachers. And may there come from his faithful ministry the next wave of leading voices in the church.

## THE BIBLE'S WATCHWORD: DAY OF THE LORD

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*The biblical phrase "Day of the Lord" (DOL) stands as a key term in understanding God's revelation about the future.<sup>1</sup> The NT writers' use of DOL rested upon their understanding of the OT prophets. A survey of the OT indicates that it was used by the prophets when speaking of both near historical and future eschatological events involving God's wrath. The NT writers picked up on the eschatological use and applied DOL both to the judgment which will climax the Tribulation period and the judgment which will usher in the new earth. This view is not only compatible with but also strengthens the case for Futuristic Premillennialism and a Pretribulation Rapture.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Because "day of the Lord" appears so frequently in Scripture, it is incumbent upon the Bible interpreter/expositor to get it right. The implications are not minor. Yet, it is one of the most hotly contested elements in the field of eschatology.

This writer's approach has been to follow a basic protocol:

1. Determine what DOL meant to OT authors.
2. Assume that with nineteen appearances of DOL in the OT, then this meaning was carried forward to the four NT occurrences.
3. Test this thesis to see how it relates to a dispensational/futuristic eschatology.

DOL appears in four uncontested NT passages (Acts 2:20; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; and 2 Pet 3:10). However, OT prophets actually wrote more about DOL. The OT provided the basis for whatever Peter and Paul understood about DOL. Beecher argued that

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<sup>1</sup> The original work on this theme first appeared in Richard Lee Mayhue, "The Prophets' Watchword: DAY OF THE LORD." (doctoral diss: Grace Theological Seminary, 1981). The author has updated his research and refined his thinking to 2011.

All doctrines in regard to the millennium, the second coming of Christ, and the final judgment depend greatly on the passages in the New Testament that use the formulas, "the day of the Lord," "the day of our Lord," "that day," and the like; such passages, for example, as 2 Pet. iii:10, 1 Thess. v:2, 1 Cor. i:8, v:5, 2 Cor. i:14, 2 Thess. i:10, 2 Tim. i:12, Matt. xxv:13, etc. The meaning of these passages is, in turn, greatly dependent on the relations that exist, both in ideas and in phraseology, between them and the texts in the Old Testament that speak of "the day of the Lord," that is, "the day of Jehovah." Necessarily, the study of these places in the Old Testament will be profitable, both in itself and for the light it throws on New Testament eschatology.<sup>2</sup>

### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND<sup>3</sup>

God's servants, the prophets, spoke of DOL as both near historical and far eschatological events. In many passages DOL moves from the near to the far. This relationship between near and far can be seen in Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, and Zephaniah.

NEAR	FAR
Obadiah 1-14	15-21
Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11	2:31; 3:14
Isaiah 13:6	13:9
Zephaniah 1:7	1:14

Beecher commented, "The prophets thought of the day of Yahweh as generic, not occasions which would occur once for all, but one which might be repeated as circumstances called for it."<sup>4</sup> Kaiser, who has been influenced by Beecher, similarly explains, "That final time would be climactic and the sum of all the rest. Though the events of their own times fitted the pattern of God's future judgment, that final day was nevertheless immeasurably larger and more permanent in its salvific and judgmental effects."<sup>5</sup>

DOL prophecies found fulfillment in various ways. These included (1) the Assyrian deportment of Israel ca. 722 BC (Amos 5:18, 20), (2) the Assyrian invasion of Judah ca. 701 BC (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11), (3) the Babylonian exile of Judah ca. 605-586 BC (Isa 13:6; Ezek 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Zeph 1:7), (4)

<sup>2</sup> W.J. Beecher, "The Day of Jehovah in Joel," *The Homiletic Review* 18 (1889): 355.

<sup>3</sup> The following OT summary has been abstracted from Richard Mayhue, "The Prophets' Watchword: Day of the Lord," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (Fall 1985):23-46.

<sup>4</sup> W.J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1905), 311.

<sup>5</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 191.

the Babylonian defeat of Egypt ca. 568 BC (Ezek 30:3), (5) the demise of Edom ca. 845 BC (Obad 1–14), and (6) the eschatological judgments of the Tribulation period (Isa 2:12; 13:9; Joel 2:31; 3:14; Obad 15; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:5).

Specific fulfillments of DOL prophecies are detailed in Scripture. But the question arises whether there are DOL events which are not specifically named as such in Scripture. This is a difficult question because God has certainly intervened in human affairs on more occasions than the prophets specifically outlined. The Genesis flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would seem to be cases in point. On the other hand, some seem to view every disaster in history as a DOL event. The solution to the question is to understand that the prophets were calling for present repentance in light of both a near historical judgment and an ultimate eschatological judgment. Charles Feinberg provides a biblically balanced approach to this problem: "Some have interpreted the significant phrase (DOL) to mean any time in which God's judgments are experienced on earth. Although such an interpretation will allow for all the references to be included under it, nevertheless it empties the words of their well-known eschatological force."<sup>6</sup>

The prominent theme of every DOL prophecy is God's judgment of sin.<sup>7</sup> God's blessings are anticipatory and attendant to the DOL but do not assume their intended expression until the DOL concludes; thus the full experience of God's blessing follows, rather than encompasses, DOL.

Imminency often characterizes DOL. In Joel 1:15; 2:1; Isaiah 13:6; Zephaniah 1:7; and Ezekiel 30:3, near historical fulfillments are prominent. The far event is described as "near" in Obadiah 15; Joel 3:14; and Zephaniah 1:14. In the prophets' minds, the event was certainly coming and would one day occur in the indeterminate future. DOL judgments are poured out on individual nations, such as Edom, Egypt and its allies, and Israel. Yet such judgments will one day be inflicted upon all of the nations according to Obadiah 15 and Zechariah 14:1. Tasker has written this lucid summary:

The expression "the day of the Lord" at the time of the rise of the great prophets of Israel denoted an event to which the Israelites were looking forward as the day of Jehovah's final vindication of *the righteousness of His people* against their enemies. One of the tasks of the prophets was to insist that in fact "the day of the Lord" would be a day on which God would vindicate "His *own righteousness*" not only against the enemies of Israel, but also against Israel itself. This "day of the Lord" throughout Old Testament prophecy remains a future reality, though there were events within the history covered by the Old Testament

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 172.

<sup>7</sup> L. Cerny, *The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems* (Prague: Nakladem Filosofické Fakulty University Karlovy, 1948). Appendix A documents over twenty-five OT words/phrases involving God's wrath/judgment associated with and describing DOL in the OT.

story which were indeed days of judgment both upon Israel and upon the surrounding nations which had oppressed her.<sup>8</sup>

Ladd has succinctly stated the historical-eschatological tension which pressed and pulled at the prophet. His comments are worth noting:

In all of these prophecies, history, and eschatology are so blended together as to be practically indistinguishable. Sometimes, however, the eschatological Day stands in the background on the distant horizon.<sup>9</sup>

The prophets viewed the immediate historical future against the background of the final eschatological consummation, for the same God who was acting in history would finally establish his Kingdom. Therefore, the Day of the Lord was near because God was about to act; and the historical event was in a real sense an anticipation of the final eschatological deed, for it was the working of the same God for the same redemptive purpose. This historical imminence of the Day of the Lord did not include all that the Day of the Lord meant; history and eschatology were held in a dynamic tension, for both were the Day of the Lord. This bond was broken in the apocalypses. Eschatology stood in the future, unrelated to present historical events. The God of eschatology was no longer the God of history.<sup>10</sup>

The DOL is a generic biblical phrase used by God's prophets to describe either the immediate future or the ultimate eschatological consummation.<sup>11</sup> It is not a technical term in the sense that it always refers only to one event in God's plan.

It may designate a divinely-sent locust plague (Joel 1:15) or the providential fall of Babylon (Isa 13:6) or of Jerusalem (Zeph 1:14–15, 18; 2:1) and in one given context it may describe first a judgment and then a corresponding deliverance (compare with the above prophecies

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<sup>8</sup> R.V.G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: Tyndale, 1951), 45.

<sup>9</sup> George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 68.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>11</sup> Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*, 130, defines a generic prophecy as one which "regards an event as occurring in a series of parts, separated by intervals, and expresses itself in language that may apply indifferently to the nearest part, or to the remoter part, or to the whole—in other words, a prediction which, in applying to the whole of a complex event, also applies to some of its parts."

Joel 3:14, 18 and Zeph 3:8, 11, 16; cf. also Obad 15, 17; Zech 14:1, 9–11).<sup>12</sup>

DOL is used to describe several events and is limited only by its mention in biblical revelation. Each appearance of DOL must be interpreted in its context to determine whether the prophet expected the immediate historical act of God or Yahweh's ultimate eschatological visitation.<sup>13</sup> DOL is not bound to a definite time duration. It could last for only hours or it could continue for days. Context alone can determine DOL longevity, and even then only general approximation can be made. This is how DOL appears in the OT.

### NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The revelation of God through eight Old Testament prophets provided New Testament writers with a comprehensive description of the DOL concept. Peter and Paul, the only authors to use the phrase ἡμέρα κυρίου (*hēmera kuriou*), apply and expand this central OT prophetic concept in the NT.<sup>14</sup>

Acts 2:20

There have been four major interpretations:

1. Fulfillment at Pentecost—The prophecy of Joel was fulfilled fully and finally on the day of Pentecost. The fulfillment of this prophecy of grace occurred when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2:17).<sup>15</sup>
2. Completed at Pentecost—The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy partially occurred in Joel's day and was finalized at Pentecost.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 60.

<sup>13</sup> Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 74.

<sup>14</sup> The following NT summary has been abstracted from Richard L. Mayhue, "The Apostles' Watchword: Day of the Lord," in *New Testament Essays in Honor of Homer A. Kent, Jr.*, ed. Gary T. Meaders (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1991), 239–63. See F.F. Bruce, "Eschatology in the Apostolic Fathers," in *The Heritage of the Early Church*, eds. David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 77–89 who establishes that very little was written about DOL at this time immediately following the close of the NT Canon.

<sup>15</sup> E.J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 155. Also E. Henderson, *The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1845), 115; R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1904), 27.

<sup>16</sup> C.F. Keil, *Minor Prophets. Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. X., trans. James Martin (n.d.; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 216, acknowledges this position, but does not affirm it as correct.

3. The “Partial” or “Earnest” Fulfillment—The Pentecost experience was in part a fulfillment of Joel’s words. Some add the idea that the outpouring of God’s Spirit at Pentecost was a guarantee that it would happen in full later.<sup>17</sup>
4. The Eschatological Only Fulfillment—Joel’s prophecy by strict interpretation deals only with DOL, which occurs at the Tribulation period conclusion.<sup>18</sup>

This writer champions the latter interpretation and offers these reasons for support:

1. The phrase that Peter uses to introduce the quote from Joel, “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel,” is not the typical phrase used by New Testament writers. The phrase “In order that it might be fulfilled” is usual fare. Even then, this explicit phrase can be used to introduce an analogous relationship (Jer 31:5; Matt 2:18) or a preview/partial fulfillment (Isa 53:4; Matt 8:17). While this point alone does not secure a favorable verdict, it certainly allows for it.
2. The verb εἰμί (*eimi*) is often used, not only in the sense of equation, but also metaphor. That is what Jesus meant when he said, “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7) or “This is my body” (Matt 26:26). It is reasonable to assume that it could be used that way here.<sup>19</sup>
3. Peter is here most likely saying, “this is the sort of thing.” He is arguing from analogy or illustration and applying it representatively to his current experience.
4. The exclusive theme of DOL is judgment for sin. Because Pentecost was a day of blessing, Peter could not be saying that it fulfilled Joel’s prophecy.

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<sup>17</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (n.d.; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1962), 383; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Promise of God and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Joel 2:28–32 and Acts 2:16–21,” in *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz*, eds. Morris Inch and Ronald Youngblood (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 109–22. George Eldon Ladd, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, eds. C.F. Pfeiffer and E.F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody, 1962), 1127; Gotthard V. Lechler, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, ed. J.P. Lange, trans. C.F. Shaeffer (1877; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 9:41; Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), 155; Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 212; Walter K. Price, *The Prophet Joel and the Day of the Lord* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 66.

<sup>18</sup> Roy E. Beacham, “Joel, Eschatology of” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, gen. ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 213–19; Timothy L. Decker, “A Fresh Look at Darrell Bock’s Interpretation Concerning Peter’s Use of Joel 2 in Acts 2 with Regard to Enactment of the New Covenant,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology*, 14(August 2010): 63–79; Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 82; cf. Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 100.

<sup>19</sup> *BAGD*, 2nd ed., s.v. “εἰμί.”

5. Note carefully that Peter begins with the outpouring of God's Spirit (Acts 2:17; cf. Joel 2:28) and concludes with the offer of salvation (Acts 2:21; cf. Joel 2:32). These are the only two points that Peter finds parallel to Joel in his present circumstance.
6. The very content of Joel's prophecy argues against its fulfillment at Pentecost. The Spirit was not poured out upon all mankind (Joel 2:28) but rather upon the disciples. Secondly, the cosmic signs were in no way present (Joel 2:30–31). I would agree on this point with Kaiser who calls this Acts 2 experience "a preliminary fulfillment," "mere harbingers," or "samples" of the final Holy Spirit downpour.<sup>20</sup>
7. It has been argued that "the last days" began with the church at Pentecost and encompasses time to the end. Both the Hebrew text and the LXX can be translated "afterward" or "after these things," noting general chronology between burden and blessing. It seems a strange methodology then to use Peter's phrase "in the last days" and make it a technical term referring to the church age. Rather, it seems best to take it at face value, meaning "the last days of the period that Joel mentions," i.e., the end of the Tribulation period and the inception of the Millennium. In its most general sense, it means "days that are subsequent to the days now under consideration without regard for intervening time or event." Only context can help determine the time.<sup>21</sup>

This writer suggests that Peter's mention of DOL within his quote of Joel 2:28–32 was probably incidental to his purpose. It adds no interpretive value to our understanding of DOL that had not already been obtained from a study of Joel's prophecy.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:2

They were reminded that the well-known and frequently-taught DOL concept in the Old Testament would come unannounced and thus unexpectedly, just like a thief comes unexpectedly, without prior warning.<sup>22</sup> DOL here is to be understood as DOL was in the Old Testament—a time of judgment upon the unbelieving world. Paul's following discussion about night and darkness demands this.

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<sup>20</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 99.

<sup>21</sup> See Hans Kosmala, "At the End of the Days," *Swedish Theological Annual* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), 2:27–31, for an excellent discussion of these terms.

<sup>22</sup> See Joel 2:9; Matt 24:42–44; Luke 12:35–40; 1 Thess 5:4; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3 and 16:15 for κλέπτῃ (*kleptēs*) used in a prophetic motif. Note also Luke 21:34 where the illustration of a trap παγί (*pagis*) is used. Cf. Richard Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians: Triumphs and Trials of a Consecrated Church* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1999), 125–36.

There is a major grammatical indicator in 5:3. Paul switches from the second person plural pronoun referring to the Thessalonians to the third person plural pronoun referring to those who are unsaved. This indicates that the Thessalonians will not be present. Paul gives further explanation in 5:4ff.

Those who do inhabit the earth at that time will expect a time of peace and safety when in fact destruction is inevitable and inescapable. It shall come suddenly and irreversibly (like the birth pangs of a mother-to-be) upon them (5:3; cf. Isa 66:7–8; Mic 4:9; Matt 24:8).

This was not a new phenomenon in the annals of history. Jeremiah cried out to God that false prophets had led the people astray by promises of lasting peace without war or famine (Jer 14:13; see also 6:14; 8:11). This was during a time which preceded the DOL manifestation in the Babylonian captivity and is analogous to the time preceding the eschatological DOL.

Ezekiel indicted the pseudo-prophets for misleading God's people when there was no peace. Significant here is that it appears in the immediate context of a primary DOL text (Ezek 13:5). The people in Amos' day also foolishly but sincerely expected blessing rather than judgment (5:18).

Paul is saying that the basic circumstances which existed and provoked the historical DOL will also bring about the eschatological DOL. It will be through the deception of Satan (Rev 12:9; 13:11–14) and the permitted delusion by God (2 Thess 2:11) that they will, like those of old, believe what is false in spite of evidence around them to the contrary.

This writer believes that 1 Thessalonians 5:4 holds the real key to understanding the import of this to the Thessalonian church. Paul asserts that these precious believers were not in darkness. He is referring to their spiritual state. Thus, it is implied here, as well as stated explicitly (5:5), that they are sons of light and day.<sup>23</sup>

Because of their right spiritual relationship with God, Paul concludes that "the day," referring to DOL in 5:2, would not overtake them. That is to say, they will not be involved in the DOL.

1 Thessalonians 5 teaches several significant qualities about the eschatological DOL.

1. The Thessalonians knew all that they needed to know about the time of DOL (5:1).
2. The day like a thief will come uninvited, unannounced, and unexpected (5:2).
3. The day will come as a complete shock to those expecting peace and safety (5:3)
4. The day is inevitable and irreversible (5:3), like the birth pangs of a woman entering labor.

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<sup>23</sup> See John 1:4, 5, 7–9; 3:19–20; 8:12; Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:14; 1 Pet 2:9; and 1 John 1:5–7 where the idea of light is used in the sense of spiritual purity.

5. The day will not come upon those of light (5:4), like the Thessalonians.

#### 2 Thessalonians 2:2<sup>24</sup>

The Thessalonians had been shaken from their composure and alarmed by the erroneous report or teaching that they were in the midst of the DOL (2:2). The source of error was a false teacher (πνευμα; *pneuma*, cf. 1 John 4:1–3), or a messenger from someone with a false message (λόγοι; *logos*), or the carrier of a letter allegedly written by the apostle. It is most likely that their theology was supported by and defended with the trials and tribulations that presently attended the Thessalonians' life circumstances.

Paul answers the Thessalonians' question and addresses the eschatological error by arguing that the present circumstances could in no way be the DOL. But, what did the errorists say?

First, it is possible that the errorists taught that the Thessalonians were in the DOL knowing that Paul had taught Posttribulationism. But one would expect the Thessalonians to rejoice because the Rapture would be imminent. In fact, the Thessalonians panicked and thus it is concluded that this is not the correct reconstruction.

Second, it is possible that the errorists taught that the Thessalonians were in the DOL knowing that Paul had taught Pretribulationism. The conclusion would be that the Thessalonians had missed the Rapture. But this seems unlikely because the Thessalonians would know that the errorists themselves and certainly many others, including Paul, had missed the Rapture.

A third possibility does exist. The false teachers taught the Thessalonians that they were in the DOL and additionally that Paul was wrong altogether in that there would be no rapture. Regardless of what Paul taught about the time of the Rapture, they insisted that Paul was wrong about the fact of the Rapture, i.e., there would be none. The following reasons make this possibility the most compelling.

1. This third possibility explains why Paul does not appeal directly to the Rapture.<sup>25</sup> To do so would have opened Paul to the charge of circular reasoning, and there were no Old Testament passages to which he could point. Therefore, he possibly appealed to Daniel to

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<sup>24</sup> The TR reads χριστου<sup>ι</sup> (*Christou*) along with D<sup>3</sup> and K. κυρίου (*kurion*) is overwhelmingly supported by the uncial evidence, the early versions, and both Greek and Latin fathers. Cf. Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 168–84.

<sup>25</sup> Some have labored torturously to see rapture in ἀποστασία (*apostasia*) like H. Wayne House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 261–96. Cf. Paul D. Feinberg, "2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture," in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 309–11 who decisively demonstrates why ἀποστασία must refer to "apostasy" and not "rapture."

show that the Thessalonians could not be in the DOL. Paul's strategy was to show that the errorists were wrong on one major point and therefore were unreliable in other major areas such as the fact of the Rapture.

2. It explains why he showed them that they were not in the Great Tribulation of the last 3½ years of the tribulation period. He wanted to teach them how misleading it was to develop or interpret their theology based on current events.
3. It explains why the Thessalonians were shaken. They tested the errorists' theology against the times in which they lived and concluded that they were right and the apostle was wrong. If Paul was wrong on this point, he could have been wrong anywhere.
4. It explains why Paul appealed to his previous messages. His theology had not changed and it was in perfect harmony with Daniel. Paul supported revelatory authentication of theology and discredited experiential verification.
5. It explains why Paul did not assertively appeal to his apostolic authority. The Thessalonians were already under intense pressure from unbelievers in the community and from the disappointment that Paul might be wrong. Paul apparently turns them to the Scriptures.

## 2 Peter 3:10

This former Galilean fisherman makes a unique contribution to the study of DOL. He applies the term of judgment to God's terminal wrath poured out on the earth. No other OT or NT DOL passage uses the term in a detailed reference to the event that immediately precedes eternity future.

The figure of a thief is used, as it was at 1 Thessalonians 5:2, to describe the uninvited, unannounced, and unexpected invasion of God into the affairs of this world. This time the results are devastating. The heavens, the elements, the earth and its works are purged by fire. Parallel passages include Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:1. Few would dispute placing this occurrence of DOL at the millennium's end as preparatory to eternity future.<sup>26</sup>

But an important question is raised. Is the DOL a lengthy period that includes the entire millennial period? Most dispensationalists insist that the extended period concept is right. John Walvoord is used here merely to illustrate the point.

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<sup>26</sup> See R. Larry Overstreet, "A Study of 2 Peter 3:10–13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:548 (Oct–Dec, 1980): 354–71; George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), 2:504–9 and Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days* (Chicago: Moody, 1954), 179–83, argue unconvincingly that Peter refers to the time immediately preceding the Millennium.

“...the day of the Lord” is an extensive time period which includes not only the tribulation and the judgments taking place at the second advent, but which includes also the entire millennial reign of Christ as a time period in which the Lord deals directly with human sin.<sup>27</sup>

Other than the fact that DOL is used to describe a judgment which precedes the Millennium and is used to describe the postmillennial, pre-eternity judgment (Rev 20:7–10), there is minimal biblical evidence to warrant extending DOL into the Millennium. Because DOL is chiefly a time of judgment, the Millennium is *not* a part of DOL. In the New Testament, like the Old, DOL is a multiple fulfillment concept which moves toward the final and complete judgment revealed in 2 Peter 3:10.

R.H. Charles said it best:

...the Day of Yahweh does not in itself constitute the blessed future, but only the decisive act of judgment which inaugurates it.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, Peter is dependent upon Joel 2:28–32 which he quotes in his powerful proclamation on Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21). Paul mentions DOL twice in his Thessalonian correspondence. In 1 Thessalonians 5:2, he evidences dependence on Joel 2:9 for the terminology “like a thief.” Joel pictures soldiers coming on DOL and entering through windows like thieves. He also associates DOL as coming upon those who cry when disaster is imminent (5:3). This was Ezekiel’s indictment of false prophets in the DOL context of Ezekiel 13. Second Thessalonians 2:2 makes a unique contribution to the study of DOL. Paul writes facts about the precursors to DOL that had not yet appeared anywhere else.

Second Peter 3:10 adds the most unique feature of all the DOL passages. Peter discloses that the DOL concept has an ultimate expression which even the Old Testament prophets did not envision or did not separate from that which they viewed as final. The termination of earth’s history is marked by God’s final judgment and cleansing of His creation. It is possible that Peter used the terminology of Zephaniah 1:14. However, he definitely transferred it to the end of time in preparation for the entrance of eternity future.

## PRECURSORS TO THE DAY OF THE LORD

As discussed above, two DOL events yet remain in God’s revealed prophetic plans. The first will occur during Daniel’s 70th week; the other

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<sup>27</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 273.

<sup>28</sup> R.H. Charles, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), 83.

happens at the end of Christ's millennial reign. For the latter, the only precursors will be the approach of the 1000th year of Christ's kingdom and the Satan-led rebellion against Christ's kingship (Rev 20:7–10). However, for the former, Scripture provides five precursors to establish the *terminus a quo* during the seven-year interim between the Rapture and Christ's arrival to rule. There are also strong indications of the *terminus ad quem*.

Malachi 4:5

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

The best way to understand Malachi is to see that John was a type of Elijah, but he did not completely fulfill Malachi's prophecy. Another, as a type of Elijah, will precede Christ at His posttribulational coming as the *first* precursor. This view seems most reasonable in that,

1. It allows for a future type fulfillment in the same fashion that John was a type fulfillment at Christ's first advent (Matt 11:14).
2. It accounts for Christ referring to both the past coming (John) and the future coming as Elijah's coming. What is true in Matthew 17:12 will be also true in 17:11.
3. There is prophetic precedent for referring to Christ's future forerunner as Elijah in Ezekiel's reference to Christ as David (Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos 3:5).

Therefore, if we concluded that:

1. John the Baptist was Elijah in type only (Matt 17:12–13; Luke 1:17; John 1:21).
2. John partially fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 4:5–6 as Christ's forerunner at the first advent (Luke 1:17).
3. Malachi 4:5–6 will be finally fulfilled before the second advent by a type of Elijah (Matt 17:12–13) in much the same manner as John was one in "spirit and power" of Elijah at Christ's first coming.

The question remains, Where in Scripture does he come? The answer is that the Bible does not say conclusively. The only clue is to assume that what was generally true of John will be generally true about his future replacement. The only prophetic mention of a prophet who (1) comes to herald the King before the King is crowned and (2) is martyred for that cause is in Revelation 11:1–13.

It is very possible that one of these two prophets will be an Elijah-like person who will have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain might not

fall during the days of his prophesying (Jas 5:17). This would easily fulfill Malachi's prophecy.<sup>29</sup>

If the second is a Moses-like person who will have the power to turn water to blood (Ex 7:17) and plague the earth, then the Transfiguration experience (Matt 17:1–8) was a preview of this prophecy in Revelation 11 which was partially revealed in Malachi 4:5–6.

On the other hand, if this hypothesis is wrong, then the Scripture makes no further mention of Christ's forerunner at the second advent. Either way is possible. Neither one disrupts the basic thesis that Malachi 4:5 will be fulfilled by an Elijah-like person who will come in the 'spirit and power' of John the Baptist.

This precursor to DOL has been dealt with first not because of its chronological certainty but because of its uncertainty. If the relationship of John's death to Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem is paralleled, then the martyrdom of the two witnesses would occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation period or shortly thereafter. This does not mean that DOL begins at the midpoint, but only that the midpoint occurs before DOL.

## 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed wither by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Paul is writing to convince the Thessalonians that they were not in the midst (ἐνέστηκεν; *enestēken*) of DOL.<sup>30</sup> His first apologetic centers on the fact that certain future events precede the DOL (2:3–4). The obvious conclusion to be reached is that if events not future precede DOL then DOL is even further in the future and therefore the Thessalonians could not be in the DOL. He provides precursors two and three.

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed discussion of the interpretive history surrounding Revelation 11:3 and the identity of the two witnesses, see John P. Lange, "Revelation," in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (1874; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 12:227–33.

<sup>30</sup> This perfect tense of ἐνέστηκεν (*enestēken*) is used to denote present time at Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22; Hebrews 9:9. It commonly is used in the papyri to denote the *current* month and year. See James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (1930; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 215 for examples.

The *second* precursor is the apostasy (ἡ ἀποστασία; *ē apostasia*). The word primarily means a deliberate abandonment of a formerly professed position or view and is limited in the LXX, papyri, and New Testament to political or religious rebellion.<sup>31</sup>

What apostasy, which Paul had previously taught the Thessalonians (2:5), could he refer to here? It is proposed that it is the most daring attempt by Satan, through the Antichrist, to draw to himself the glory, honor, and worship that are rightfully God's. Paul taught this to the Thessalonians from the prophet Daniel.

The Tribulation period, which consists of one week of years, is the subject at Daniel 9:27.<sup>32</sup> For the first half of the week or 3 ½ years (1260 days), the Antichrist abides by the seven year covenant. During this time, temple worship and sacrifice flourish. But at the mid-point (Rev 13:5), the Antichrist stops the sacrifices (9:22), involves himself in the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15) and takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God (2 Thess 2:4; Rev 13:6, 8, 12, 15).

Because this epitome of blasphemy does not occur until the mid-point of the Tribulation period, DOL could in no way occur before. Like precursor one (Mal 4:5), this only establishes the earliest time that DOL could begin, but it does not demand that it commence at this point.

The *third* precursor involves the man of sin following after the apostasy which came first (πρῶτον; *prōton*). He is described by four terms:

1. the man of lawlessness who is characterized by sin (Dan 7:25; 8:25);
2. the son of perdition who is characterized by ultimate loss of well being (Dan 8:25; 9:27; John 17:12);
3. the opposing one who challenges God (Dan 7:25; 11:36);
4. the exalting one who places himself temporarily in the place of God (Dan 11:36).

This one will be the leader and personification of the apostasy, which will have its day from the abomination of desolation until Armageddon. Whoever he is, Paul expected his audience to understand in light of the DOL topic and what Paul had previously taught from the Old Testament.

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<sup>31</sup> Read the discussions of Robert Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 114–18 and George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 98. Key uses of the term include Acts 21:21 and Joshua 22:22. It is appropriate that ἀποστασία was used of Antiochus Epiphanes against Israel in 1 Maccabees 2:15. He is the historical prefigurement of Antichrist as portrayed by Daniel.

<sup>32</sup> See Alva J. McClain, *Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940) for an excellent treatise on this subject.

A careful study of Daniel 7–11, Matthew 24, and Revelation 13 confirms that this one is the second person of the Satanic trinity (Rev 16:13) known biblically as Anti-Christ or the beast (Rev 13:1–8). It is this final and most blatant attempt by Satan and his diabolical partners to displace the triune God as ruler of the kingdom that will cause Christ to come as conqueror and execute DOL and inaugurate God's kingdom on earth.

Until the beast has been given his forty-two months (Rev 13:5), DOL cannot arrive.

Joel 3:14

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

The *fourth* precursor comes when Joel 3 pictures a time when God will restore Judah (3:2; cf. Ezek 37) and judge the nations (3:12–17). It will be a time of God's wrath poured out upon the world's population (3:13; cf. Rev. 14:14–20).

Other prophets also spoke of this event. For instance Ezekiel 38:17–23; 39:1–8; Zechariah 12:3, 6, 8–9; 14:2–3; Revelation 16:12–16.

The war encompasses all of Palestine. The focal point seems to be Jerusalem. The carnage will be throughout the land (Rev 14:7–20). As in the days of King Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:15), the battle was not the Jews' but God's. God would prevail (20:22–23) and Jerusalem would rejoice (20:26–30). Joel pictures the armies gathered and poised for war *before* DOL. These events are the climactic experiences of the Tribulation period prior to the DOL.

This study of events which are explicitly said in Scripture to precede DOL have led from the mid-point of the Tribulation period to the conclusion of Daniel's 70th week.

Joel 2:31

These harbingers of the Lord's soon intervention were included in the near eschatological fulfillment of DOL (Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:10). They will also be prominent immediately prior to the premillennial DOL as the *fifth* precursor.

The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood...

Joel 2:31

The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness.

Joel 3:15

For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light.

Isaiah 13:10

But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Matthew 24:29

But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT.

Mark 13:24

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves.

Luke 21:25

And I looked when he broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;

Revelation 6:12

And the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were smitten, so that a third of them might be darkened and the day might not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.

Revelation 8:12

The clearest text from which to see the order of events in the final days of this unprecedented period is the Olivet Discourse. Jesus is describing the events of the Tribulation period (Matt 24:15ff.).

In Matthew 24:29, Jesus said, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days..." He is referring to the time which began at the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15), i.e. the middle of the 70th week and continued to the time of signs from heaven.

The stellar signals follow the tribulation of those days (Matt 24:29). Here our Lord is referring to Joel 2:31. These cosmic wonders come at the very end of the Tribulation period as noted in the sixth seal and the sixth trumpet. Joel wrote that these indications are "before" the DOL. Thus the Tribulation period has come to its grand finale and the prophets still claim DOL has not quite yet arrived.

Jesus then says in Matthew 24:30 that after all of this:

1. the sign of the Son of Man will appear;
2. they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky.

This is the premillennial DOL when the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 16:16) visibly appears to pour out the wrath of God (Rev 6:17; 11:18; 14:19; 16:19; 19:15) upon the diabolically rebellious world population. Revelation 19:19–21 describes with brevity the righteous DOL judgment of God.

### Summary

God has not left the student of Scriptures without sufficient evidence to locate the premillennial DOL in relationship to the Tribulation period. Precursors or events antecedent to the DOL are described in Malachi 4:5, 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, Joel 3:14, and Joel 2:31 (Matt 24:29; Acts 2:20). These preceding indicators cannot begin until the middle of the seven-year Tribulation period.

1. An Elijah-like forerunner will precede Christ at the DOL as John the Baptist came before the first advent (Mal 4:5).
2. The great rebellion of the earth's inhabitants against God (2 Thess 2:3) comes before DOL.
3. The revelation of the lawless one at the abomination of desolation (2 Thess 2:3–4) will precede DOL.
4. The nations will be assembled in the valley of decision as DOL draws near (Joel 3:14).
5. Unmistakable signs in the sun, moon, and stars herald the nearness of DOL (Joel 2:31; cf. Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12–13).

Joel 2:31 with Matthew 24:29–30 indicates that the premillennial DOL actually begins with the appearance of Jesus Christ to judge the world. The duration of this short period is not revealed and therefore any attempt to quantify it would be mere speculation and without spiritual profit.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Through the years some questions/objections have been raised regarding this writer's view of DOL. For the most part, these inquiries have revolved around the idea that this DOL view undermines the dispensational position of "Futuristic Premillennialism" and a "Pretribulation Rapture."

As the answers will indicate, there has never been a one-size-fits-all approach to DOL among dispensationalists. Yet, with a very few exceptions, they all have remained, "Premill/Pretrib." There are differing thoughts on the nature of DOL, the *terminus a quo*, the *terminus ad quem*, the frequency, and the duration. Yet, the same basic eschatology remains.

*How do you explain these many variations regarding DOL without undermining a uniform futurist eschatology?*

It would appear that the many variations result not from an inductive study of DOL, first in the OT and second in the NT. Rather, it seems to come about in a sincere, but misguided attempt, to defend Dispensational

Premillennialism even if less than skillful exegesis might have been involved. The purpose of this article has been to go where Scripture leads as the first priority. In this case, the writer's view is that the positions of "Futuristic Premillennialism" and "Pretribulational Rapture" are strengthened, not weakened by the proposed view of DOL.

*Since DOL (end of Daniel's 70th week) and DOL (conclusion of the Millennium) are bookends to the Millennium in your view, is not the Millennium a continuous part of DOL?*

Unquestionably, the Millennium is a time of blessing and the time before and after are times of judgment. However, there is no explicit basis in either the OT or NT to include blessing as a part of DOL. Blessing comes sometimes as a result of DOL but is never included in the DOL. "While it is true that 'in that day' includes both a time of judgment (tribulation) and a time of blessing (millennium), the same is not true of the 'Day of the Lord,' which in every context is always judgment and is never found in a millennial context."<sup>33</sup>

*Does not the phrase "that day" in Zechariah 14:1 prove that DOL is a time of both judgment and blessing?*

It is taught by some that DOL is a time of both judgment and blessing. The "that day" phrase in Zechariah becomes their court of appeal. The phrase appears seven times in Zechariah 14. Verses 4, 6, 13, and 21 describe God's judgment while verses 8, 9, 20 really do not describe the DOL blessings but rather events subsequent to DOL. Joel 2:18–30 and 3:18–21 also talk of restoration blessing, which is a prominent promise of God to Israel throughout the prophets. But again it is insisted that blessing is subsequent to, not the reason for DOL. Blessing can be (but not always) the end, but DOL judgment is the means.

Consider these observations.

1. Every Old Testament DOL passage speaks in the context of sinfulness and God's chastisement in judgment.
2. The fulfillment of DOL in the near eschatological sense never involved blessing.
3. Not all of the passages that deal with DOL in the far eschatological realm even mention blessing (cf. Isa 2:12, Isa 13:9, Zeph 1:14).
4. DOL is always described as a day of God's anger and wrath, never a day of God's blessing.

As "day" is employed in Genesis 1–2 in two different senses, so it can be with "that day." Day is used in Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, etc. in a narrow sense to speak of a twenty-four-hour day. But in Genesis 2:4, it speaks in a broad sense of the entire creation period consisting of six days. So it is in Joel 3:14 (the

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<sup>33</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Is There a Pre-wrath Rapture?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 390.

narrow sense of DOL) and Joel 3:18 (the broader sense of a longer time frame beyond DOL which includes resultant blessing). The same would be true of Zech 14:1 where 14:8, 9, 20–21 speak to a time of blessing beyond DOL.

DOL is the time when God intervenes as the righteous judge to impose and execute His divinely decreed punishment. Only after the primary eschatological DOL which climaxes the Tribulation, and after the judgments are fulfilled, will God reign on earth with millennial blessing.

*Are not supposed precursors to DOL actually events within DOL?*

Malachi 4:5 writes that an Elijah-like person will arrive on the scene “before” the coming of DOL. Joel 3:12–14 reports that DOL is “near” when the armies are gathered in the valley of decision. Matthew 24:27–30 expects there to be unequalled stellar activity “immediately” before the coming of Christ and DOL. The language seems unmistakable. Each of these three activities precede or, put another way, are precursors to DOL.

While some may want to take issue with 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, it seems clear that Paul’s immediate point is that they could not be in the DOL as falsely taught because two events that have not yet occurred precede DOL – (1) the great apostasy and (2) the appearing of the man of lawlessness, i.e., Antichrist.

For those who want to start DOL with the Pretribulation Rapture or the Posttribulation Rapture this presents a major problem. One cannot have imminency in regard to the Rapture, if there are precursors. However, if DOL occurs after the Pretribulation Rapture, then Scripture has spoken and there is no problem.

*Isn't DOL starting with the Rapture an essential part of dispensational eschatology?*

The short answer is “No!” Never has been; never will be. There is no necessary connection between a Pretribulation Rapture and the *terminus a quo* of DOL. For instance, the original *Scotfield Reference Bible* began DOL at the end of Daniel’s 70th week<sup>34</sup> while the *New Scotfield Reference Bible* pointed to the Rapture just before this seven-year period.<sup>35</sup> Yet both teach a Pretribulation Rapture.

There is a range of dispensational opinions on when DOL begins.

1. With the Rapture<sup>36</sup>
2. Soon after the Rapture<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> C.I. Scotfield, ed. *The Scotfield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 1349, n.1.

<sup>35</sup> C.I. Scotfield and E. Schuyler English, gen. eds. *The New Scotfield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1372, n.5.

<sup>36</sup> Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993), 264; D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 211.

3. Midpoint of Daniel's 70th week<sup>38</sup>
4. End of Daniel's 70th week<sup>39</sup>

*Doesn't your view of DOL support a Posttribulation view of the Rapture?*

Not at all. There are a variety of views on the nature of DOL, all of which also hold to a Pretribulation Rapture. There is no necessary connection between the time of the Rapture and the nature of DOL. Just because some dispensationalists<sup>40</sup> and non-dispensationalists<sup>41</sup> hold to a Posttribulation Rapture, does not make it necessary to the time of the Rapture.

For instance, some see DOL as a time of judgment and blessing which starts with judgment (Daniel's 70th week), continues with blessing (the millennium) and concludes with judgment (Rev 20:7–10).<sup>42</sup> While others see DOL as a time of judgment only. Views on the duration of judgment vary.

1. Entire week<sup>43</sup>
2. Last half of week<sup>44</sup>
3. End of week<sup>45</sup>

There is a fourth view, a conflated view. This position, which tries to take advantage of both the "wrath only" and "wrath/blessing" views, proposes

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<sup>37</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, in *Things To Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 230–31; Robert Saucy, "The Eschatology of the Bible," in *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 1:107; John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 110.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, -Mid, or Post-Tribulation?*, ed., Richard R. Reiter, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 61.

<sup>39</sup> Louis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4: 398.

<sup>40</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 10.

<sup>41</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1135.

<sup>42</sup> John F. Walvoord, "The Day of the Lord," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 4:2 (Fall 2000):14.

<sup>43</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Trumpet Sound*, 390; "Day of the Lord," *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, Mal Couch, ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 37.

<sup>44</sup> P. Feinberg, "Pretribulation Rapture," 61.

<sup>45</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (NASB) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 940, 1168, 1240, 1243, 1263, 1818, 1929. John A. Spoule, *In Defense of Pretribulationism* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1980), 35.

that there is a “narrow” view of DOL and a “broad” view of DOL.<sup>46</sup> The “narrow” definition includes only the judgment at Christ’s second coming, while the “broad” view includes the entirety of Daniel’s 70th week and the Millennium. In this writer’s opinion, this is not a “both/and” topic. One must choose (1) judgment only or (2) judgment and blessing. This is one theological issue where one cannot have his eschatological cake and eat it too.

*What is involved with your view of DOL?*

1. *Terminus a quo* – The last part of David’s 70th week
2. *Terminus ad quem* – The very end of Daniel’s 70th week
3. Duration – Days or possibly a few weeks
4. Frequency – Twice
  - a. Last part of Daniel’s 70th week
  - b. Last part of the Millennium
5. Nature – Judgment and wrath only

*Why should this view of DOL be considered?*

1. This is the only DOL view that corresponds to the historical OT paradigm of (1) multiple occurrences and (2) involving judgment only (although blessing at times can be a result, a subsequent experience).
2. This is the only DOL view that allows for the OT/NT precursors to DOL.
3. This DOL view, when used in 1 Thessalonians 5/2 Thessalonians 2, minimizes problems for pretribulationism, e.g. trying to make ἀποστασία the rapture or trying to eliminate the precursors.
4. In so doing, this DOL view strengthens the case for a Pretribulation Rapture.<sup>47</sup>

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

### Summary

Numerous attempts have been made to explain the origin of DOL from its alleged pre-prophetic history either without or within Palestine. The truth is that there is no substantial evidence for this supposed origin prior to the prophets.<sup>48</sup> The DOL idea was considered peculiar to the prophets and the

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<sup>46</sup> Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, rev.ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 232–33; Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 39.

<sup>47</sup> See Richard L. Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulation Rapture?”, *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, 13(Fall 2002): 241–53.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed treatment of this subject see Mayhue, “Prophet’s Watchword,” 34–54 (doctoral diss.). Also see Hans M. Barstad, “Religious Polemics in Amos 5,” *Vetus Testamentum*, xxxiv (Leiden: Brill, 1984): 89–93; Yair Hoffman, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature,” *Zeitschrift Für die Altesamentliche Wissenschaft* 93 (1981): 37–50; Michael S. Moore, “Yahweh’s Day,” *Restoration Quarterly* 29:4 (1987): 193–208; Willem A.

apostles, thus its study was limited to the nineteen explicit statements in the Old Testament and four in the New Testament.

The Hebrew concept of time was normally oriented towards quality not quantity and DOL is no exception. The DOL was presented by the prophets as a day of undetermined length which uniquely belongs to Yahweh for judgment.<sup>49</sup>

The Old Testament uses of DOL involved the near prophetic and far eschatological perspectives. At times they were compressed together into one text. The context alone enables the interpreter to separate the multiple fulfillments. Near prophetic expressions of DOL included God's judgment of Israel by Assyria, of Judah by Babylon, of Egypt by Babylon, and of Edom. The far event is yet future and will occur twice—once at the end of the Tribulation period and once at the end of the Millennium.

Obadiah and Joel proved to be the *loci classici* of this study. This following model was inductively developed.

1. DOL combines near and far eschatological truth in one context.
2. DOL involves a singular national application in the near view.
3. DOL involves an international application in the far view.
4. DOL consists of judgment and destruction to the godless.
5. The restoration of Israel is a result in the far view but is not evident in the near.
6. The near includes a preview of what the far will involve and guarantees its occurrence.
7. It argues from the lesser (near) to the greater (far).
8. The prominent mention of DOL in both Testaments refers to the posttribulational event.
9. The establishment of God's kingdom and eternity future promptly follow the last expression of DOL.

The New Testament picked up where the Old concluded. Because the near fulfillments were then history, neither Paul nor Peter mentioned them. They did focus on the far fulfillment which concludes both the Tribulation period and the Millennium. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul added significant new material to that already known about DOL from the Old Testament. Peter's second epistle introduced the final DOL occurrence which ends the Millennium and prepares for eternity future. Therefore no basis exists for beginning DOL with the Rapture nor for extending it through the Millennium. Future expectations involve two fulfillments, each of which will be God's judgment.

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VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 214–25, 482–84, ns. 6–33.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–68.

The blessings that follow in each instance are logical progressions, not inherent features.

Five precursors to DOL are provided by Scripture.

1. Elijah's Coming (Mal 4:5)
2. The Apostasy (2 Thess 2:3)
3. The Revelation of the Man of Lawlessness (2 Thess 2:3–4)
4. The Valley of Jehoshaphat Gathering (Joel 3:14)
5. Stellar Signs (Joel 2:31)

These antecedent activities conclusively demand that DOL in its tribulational expression be limited to the very end of the Tribulation.

DOL has very often been identified with the Pauline use of the Day of Christ (DOC) or its several variations. Context becomes the deciding factor. The context of DOC passages is always blessing expected when believers are held accountable before Christ at the Bema. These two prophetic events are to be distinguished, not equated.<sup>50</sup> Also, "the Lord's day in Revelation 1:10 refers to the first day of the week (Sunday), not to DOL."<sup>51</sup>

### Conclusions

The DOL is a generic Biblical phrase which was used by God's prophets to describe the immediate historical future or the ultimate eschatological consummation. It is not a technical term in the sense that it always refers to only one event in God's plan.

It is clear, however, that God's judgment on Judah and the nations took place more than once in Old Testament times and that there always emerged from it a purified people who embraced his covenant terms of salvation. It is equally true that the judgments and restorations of historical times did not exhaust what the prophets had in view, but that there yet remains a climactic and final encounter between the Lord and all humankind in which judgment and salvation will find ultimate expression.<sup>52</sup>

The DOL is a multiple fulfillment term which is limited in occurrences only by its mention in Biblical revelation. Each appearance of DOL must be interpreted in its context to determine if the prophet expected the immediate act of God in history or Yahweh's ultimate eschatological visitation.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 135–47.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 147–51.

<sup>52</sup> Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 457.

The DOL is not bound to a definite time duration. It could last for hours or it could continue for days. Only context can determine DOL longevity and then only general approximations can be made. Nowhere does Scripture give a DOL time measurement.

The DOL primarily involves judgment either against Israel or upon the rebellious world population individually and collectively. Where blessing is an attendant feature (and it is not always), it is a chronological sequel not an inherent feature. God's judgments can be either providential (Ezek 30:3, 10) or direct (2 Pet 3:10).

The imminent historical occurrences of DOL point to and anticipate the indeterminate eschatological DOL. At times they are included in one passage (Isa 13:6, 9; Zeph 1:7, 14).

Two times of divine judgment, called DOL by Scripture, yet remain for planet earth—the crescendo judgment which climaxes the Tribulation period (2 Thess 2:2) and the consummation judgment which closes the annals of earth's fallen history (2 Pet 3:10).

Dispensational theology is merely a descriptive term applied to the scheme of theology which is inductively systematized from the Bible. Therefore, it should be continually subject to change and sharpening where Scripture warrants. DOL is one such subject that has needed meaningful review and rethinking.

This article has concluded that:

1. DOL involves judgment only, not judgment and blessing.
2. DOL will yet occur twice in God's prophetic plan, not once.
3. DOL occurs at the end of the Tribulation period, not throughout its duration.
4. DOL occurs at the end of the Millennium, not throughout its duration.
5. DOL as defined in this article does not necessarily prove Pretribulationism, but it certainly and easily allows for it.
6. DOL as defined in the article strongly supports "futuristic Premillennialism."

The correct expression and explanation of DOL will not necessarily lead into all eschatological truth or verify a theological system as true, but it will provide a clearer perspective on one primary facet of the prophetic jewel. This article has sought to contribute to a more precise understanding of DOL. Thus, it should exegetically enhance the viability of the dispensational approach to understanding future events in Scripture.

## AS ONE WITH AUTHORITY<sup>1</sup>

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*The preacher's authority, rooted in Scripture and delegated by God in His Word, finds itself AWOL in contemporary pulpits. But it was not so with Christ's preaching, in that people marveled at His authority. This call to restore biblical authority in today's preaching extols six essential features of proclamation that showcase biblical authority just as God intended.*

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We gather because we are united in the conviction that preaching is central to our lives, our ministry, the church, and the gospel. We understand what is at stake. Preaching is not merely about the temporal concerns of the here and now. Preaching is about life, death, and matters of eternity. Preaching constitutes the means whereby God calls persons into His kingdom and shapes His people into conformity with the character of His Son. In sum, the preaching of God's Word saves and sanctifies, preparing believers for eternity.

The Reformers of the 16th century rightly believed and taught that preaching is the “first mark” of the church. That is to say, where there is the right preaching of Scripture, there is a church; where there is no right preaching of God's Word, there is no church. In this sense, although statisticians may report on the number of churches in America, their data is flawed because it is only a measurement of steeples. Where there is no pulpit that is committed to faithful biblical exposition, there is no church.

What is our warrant to preach? What is our authorization? It comes down to this – God has spoken. God has revealed Himself, forfeiting His personal privacy that we might know Him. He is not silent, and He has commissioned us to speak. He calls and equips men to preach His Word. He is not silent, and we are not to be silent. We are to speak, preach, and teach His Word.

Understanding the essence of expository preaching does not require an elaborate equation. The pattern is simple. According to the Word of God itself,

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a sermon originally preached at the 2009 Shepherds' Conference, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California, March 5, 2009.

the pattern of preaching is for the Word to be read and for the Word to be explained. Expository preaching comes down to a man of God who commits himself to reading and explaining the words of Scripture and then trusts God to honor His Word in the people who hear the proclamation. Once accomplished, this man will come back and do it all over again, and he will continue to do so until he dies or Jesus comes again. Faithful preachers read the biblical text, explain it, and then repeat the process all over again.

The stewardship of preaching is unspeakable. There is not one of us who is equipped for this; no one is up to the challenge. There is no one who has the native and inherent skills to accomplish this task. Just as no one is qualified for salvation, so too, no one is qualified for preaching. Both salvation and the call to the ministry of preaching are by grace alone and to the glory of God alone. God chooses earthen vessels to show His glory.

#### THE ABSENCE OF AUTHORITY IN PREACHING

As we examine the current state of preaching and listen to many contemporary preachers describe their view of the task of preaching, the quick diagnosis is that something is missing. Something is *not* there that *ought* to be there, and that something missing is the one thing most essential – authority. A great question mark hangs over so much of today's preaching; a tentativeness and hesitancy characterizes far too many pulpits. There is a trigger that is almost pulled and a point that is almost made.

One Dilbert cartoon illustrates this. Dilbert, the office worker and main character of the comic strip, talks with Dogbert, his little dog-friend. As the two of them are in conversation, Dilbert spins out an elaborate theory of the universe. Dogbert listens patiently all the way to the end, only to say, "That comes so close to being interesting."

We all have been there, hearing a sermon that came strangely close to preaching. Proclamation *almost* happened. The congregation brushed up against exposition, but the preacher swerved at the last moment. Far too many preachers come really close to having a point, except that something is missing and what is missing is the one thing most essential – authority.

Some would see the absence of authority in preaching as a good thing, a fact illustrated by the textbooks sold in the "homiletics" section of liberal seminary bookstores. For example, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, by Lucy Atkinson Rose, defines preaching in terms of a conversation whereby the congregation and preacher raise questions together.<sup>2</sup> Answering questions is not as important as asking them, so we are told, and the preacher has no more authority than the congregation does in terms of the equation.

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<sup>2</sup> Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

Fred Craddock, Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament, Emeritus, in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, authored a book titled *As One Without Authority*.<sup>3</sup> Published in 1971, the book became a symptom of the 1970s, even as its legacy lives on today. Although in past ages the authority of the pulpit and preacher was understood to be central to the task of preaching, the homiletical approach embodied in the title *As One Without Authority* vanquishes this authority. An authoritative pulpit is an unthinkable notion and an antiquarian relic, it is argued, because the present age has already grown accustomed to dispensing with one authority after another.

Craddock wrote these haunting words: “Rarely if ever in the history of the church have so many firm periods slumped into commas and so many triumphant exclamation marks curled into question marks.”<sup>4</sup> Does that not describe the preaching of so many pulpits today? Does it not seem that so many preachers are “curling exclamation marks into question marks” and “slumping into commas where there should be periods?”

Craddock continued:

As a rule, younger ministers are keenly aware of the factor discussed above and their preaching reflects it. Their predecessors ascended the pulpit to speak of the eternal certainties, truths etched forever in the granite of absolute reality, matters framed for proclamation, not for discussion. Where have all the absolutes gone? The old thunderbolts rust in the attic while the minister tries to lead his people through the morass of relativities and approximate possibilities. And the difficulties involved in finding and articulating a faith are not the congregation’s alone; they are the ministers as well. How can she preach with a changing mind?<sup>5</sup>

This is an excellent question. How can a preacher preach with a changing mind? He cannot. Therefore, Craddock was right when he wrote:

How can she, facing new situations by the hour, speak the appropriate word? She wants to speak and yet she needs more time for more certainty before speaking. Hers is often the misery of one who is always pregnant but never ready to give birth.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (1971: repr., St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Craddock describes the situation plaguing so many pulpits today. Authority is the one thing missing from so many preaching ministries. In fact, there is not even an aspiration to authority. Instead, there is resignation in the face of an anti-authoritarian age. We dare not speak with authority, it is argued, because people simply will not accept it. An age of question marks is allergic to the exclamation mark. An age that finds comfort in commas will find resistance to periods.

#### THE PRESENCE OF AUTHORITY IN JESUS' PREACHING

In sharp contrast, Jesus' preaching demonstrated what was missing from the preaching and teaching of his day. Matthew 7:28-29 says, "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." The words, "as one having authority, and not as their scribes" served as an indictment of the absence of authority that characterized the preaching of his time. Sadly, much of the preaching in our own day also fails to be characterized by the phrase, "as one having authority."

The phrase "these words" refers back to all the preceding material of Matthew 5-7, otherwise known as "The Sermon on the Mount," so verses 27-28 conclude both chapter seven and the entire sermon. When Jesus finished preaching this message, the people were amazed because they had heard something quite unfamiliar to their ears – a preacher who spoke with authority.

Consider the power and force of this sermon. Jesus sets forth a vision of life in the kingdom of God that transcends our moral imagination and explodes our theological comforts. He warns of hell and commands that we love our enemies. He speaks against trusting in our earthly bank accounts and directs us to lay up treasures in heaven. Jesus reminds us that we cannot add a day to our life nor an inch to our height by means of worry and anxiety. He assures us that our heavenly Father will clothe us in more glory than the lilies of the field and will care for us with an even deeper care than he extends to the birds of the air. Jesus says to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, with the promise that all these things will be added unto us. We are instructed to judge a tree by its fruit, even as we are told that we too shall be judged. We are told to build our house upon the rock of hearing and obeying God's Word, for anything less than obedience is likened to building our house on shifting sand.

Until they heard this sermon, the crowds who gathered to hear Jesus thought they knew what God demanded of them. They understood the prohibition against murder and adultery, but Jesus now forbade anger and lust too. Jesus said, "You have heard it was said," and then cited Scripture texts containing commands familiar to the crowd. He took the teaching further, however, with the words, "but I say unto you," and His magnification of the force of the commands. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." Jesus rejected rabbinical reasoning and moral casuistry, and He refused to act like an

argumentative theologian or speculative moralist. As a result, Jesus astonished the crowds and turned their moral and theological world upside down.

We can best understand why the authority of Jesus' preaching astonished the crowds if we understand that the scribes had forfeited the authority to speak on their own terms, working instead by a process of citation. Although they read and explained the text, first-century scribes were well known for being able to make the Scripture say anything they wanted it to say. A scribe's normative practice was to explain over, under, and around a text, saying, in effect, "I know what this text *says*, but let me tell you what it *means*." They piled on citations from one rabbi after another, adding up interpretations and multiplying opinions until any sense of an authoritative understanding of the text had been lost. In their thousands upon thousands of words of explanation, the plain meaning of God's Word was lost. By means of their casuistry, they attempted to find ways around the Scripture, beginning with the desired answer and working with the text until they reached that end. Therefore, when the crowds heard Jesus teach "as one with authority," they immediately recognized something they were not hearing from the scribes – those masters of equivocation, spinners of elasticity, and artisans of nuance.

Sadly, many preachers today are also artisans of nuance. They will hint at what a text might be about, but leave a seed of doubt as to whether the text is actually about anything at all. These modern day spinners of elasticity and masters of equivocation speak a dozen possible interpretations of a text without coming to any firm conclusions. Even worse, they label as "dogmatic" anyone who claims to have a sure and certain understanding of a text of Scripture. Further, when the plain understanding of a passage threatens to offend their congregation, these preachers assure the listeners in the pew that there is a way through the trouble, an interpretation that will not bother their modern ears. Just give these preachers twenty minutes to spin and nuance, and the congregation will have forgotten what the text even says.

Some preachers get behind the pulpit and spout the findings of one professor after another. Just like the scribes who piled up rabbinical teaching, these preachers stack up modern-day theological and biblical authorities in order to explain away the clear teaching and moral force of the Word. The sermon becomes an urging of the congregation to "choose ye this day which professor you serve," and the authority of the Scripture is vanquished.

By way of example, in a recent cover story titled, "The Religious Case for Gay Marriage," *Newsweek* magazine cited authorities who argued that the New Testament does not actually forbid homosexuality, if practiced in the context of a committed homosexual relationship.<sup>7</sup> The apostle Paul described homosexuality in these terms: "...men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of

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<sup>7</sup> Lisa Miller, "Our Mutual Joy," *Newsweek* (Dec. 15, 2008): 28-31.

their error” (Rom 1:27). These scholars, however, claim that the “unnatural” act to which Paul referred was for a heterosexual to commit a homosexual act. However, it would be perfectly natural, so their argument goes, for a homosexual to commit a homosexual act. Such hermeneutical sophistry will go to any length possible to find a way around the text.

We should not be surprised when this happens at the hands of those in the world, for this is exactly how we would expect them to mistreat the Word of God. The real tragedy, however, is that there are many who claim the name of Christ and who stand in the pulpit who perform the same sort of sophistry, doing everything they can to get around the text. Of course, some get around the text by simply preaching a sermon without a text at all, or by only choosing texts that are unlikely to cause offense.

If you are actually going to preach the Word of God in your ministry, then hear and heed this promise – you *will* get in trouble because the Word of God will lead you into trouble. The Bible will require you to speak of things that people will say they do not want to hear. But Scripture is the Word of life for those who are dying and in need of the true cure for their soul. Nothing less is at stake than eternal life or death.

Many years ago, Theodor Adorno wrote a book titled *The Authoritarian Personality*, wherein he warned that we should avoid any claims to authority, and that persons who feel a need for authority are revealing their psychological sickness.<sup>8</sup> Adorno’s ideas were based on Freudian concepts of childhood development. He believed that when someone poses as an authority, what he or she is really seeking is the acquisition of power. We should take note of the irony that Adorno, having written an entire book on this subject, probably considered himself a leading authority on these ideas.

Fred Craddock was right. We do live in an age that is militant against authority, but this rebellion did not begin in the 1970s. It began in the Garden of Eden, and we all now live in this Genesis-chapter-three world, rightly defined as being anti-authoritarian. In such a context, there is much at stake for preachers and preaching. The word “authority” is rooted with the word “author,” but an anti-authoritarian hermeneutic even denies that God is the author of Scripture. A mode of preaching that resists an authoritative Word, however, insults the Scripture as the Word of God.

Looking back at Matthew 7:28-29, we read that the crowds were amazed and astonished at Jesus’ teaching. They knew they had never heard anything like this before, and they understood that life and death hung in the balance. As revealed in the Gospels, this radical note of authority resonated throughout Jesus’ entire ministry. In Mark 11:18, the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. When Jesus taught at Capernaum in Luke 4:32, the people were amazed at the authority of his teaching. In John 7:46, officers said, “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.” Further, in Mark 6:2, when

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<sup>8</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950).

Jesus taught in his hometown, the people responded by asking, “Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?” Jesus taught and the hometown crowd was astonished. Take time to ponder the essence of what they are asking about Jesus: “Where does he get this? Where does he come up with this?”

When you are preaching and teaching the inerrant, Spirit-inspired Word of God with authority, the Holy Spirit communicates the Word through your preaching and into the hearts of the congregation. As this happens, many will ask – “Where does he come up with this?” and, “Where is he getting this?” The answer that glorifies God is that this life-giving Word comes from God. This wisdom does not come from any other source; it is the Word of God. The crowds asked of Jesus, “Where does this come from?” because they correctly recognized that His sermons were not abstract, religious discussions – they were life and death.

We must be careful here, for we are not Jesus. When Jesus taught, He spoke as one having inherent authority for He was and is God in human flesh. When Jesus spoke, God spoke. Jesus could pick up the scrolls of the Old Testament and say, “You have heard it said...but I say to you,” because He was the incarnate Word who alone had the authority to define the written Word. He spoke the very words of life. Jesus was able to give authoritative teaching on how to pray, how to trust, and how to live. Jesus alone could say, “The gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it” (Matt 7:13). Jesus alone could warn against false prophets who look like sheep and devour like wolves (Matt 7:15). Jesus alone could say, “There are many who claim my name I do not know” (Matt 7:22–23).

Observe how the inherent authority of Jesus functions within our focal passage of Matthew 7. In verse 24, Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount by saying: “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Take note of that phrase: “these words of mine.” It appears again in verses 26–27: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell – and great was its fall.”

In these verses, Jesus drew specific targeted attention to His own authority. He not only spoke of what God said through the Torah, the Law, and the prophets, but Jesus also said that the one who hears and obeys “these words of mine” is likened to a house built on a rock. That is to say, His words carried the weight of divine authority. Only Jesus could say that obedience to “these words of mine” would determine the standing or falling of a person. Only Jesus could say, “These words of mine” are a matter of life and death.

As preachers, not one of us can get up and say, “If you build your house on my words, then you are building on a rock. Reject my words, and your house is on sand.” Yet, although the preacher’s authority is an entirely different authority than that of Christ, it is a real authority nonetheless. The preacher’s authority is that of one who has been commissioned to teach and preach the

inerrant and infallible Word of God. We are commissioned and called to preach the Word – the inscribed Word inspired by the Holy Spirit. We do say, “Listen to these words and live. Reject these words and die,” but we do so because they are God’s Word, not our own. We are speaking upon God’s authority, not our own.

When a preacher takes even one step backward from the full authority of the Word of God, the pulpit becomes instantly relativized. The one thing missing is the one thing most essential, and that is for the preacher to have full confidence in the Word of God. A preacher must stand up, preach the Word of God, and then let the transformation and renewing of minds happen where and when it happens. This is no tame thing. This is life and death. The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and it is bread to those who are hungry.

#### SIX VITAL ASPECTS OF PREACHING

Our authority is a delegated authority; it is not our own. Our authority is part of our commissioning and our call. God equips those who are incompetent in order that whatever competency shows up in them is to His glory and not to their own. Preachers, we are not given an inherent, guru-like wisdom so that we can get behind the pulpit and share our meditations. Rather, we are given God’s Word to preach, in season and out of season. We are exhorted with imperatives like, instruct, correct, teach, rebuke, but we do not have any authority inherently in us that qualifies us to do that. The authority is God’s alone and the authority is in His Word, but that authority is assigned to us.

We are to “rightly to divide the word of truth,” (2 Tim 2:15) and insofar as we rightly interpret and understand the text, we will rightly teach. We use a hermeneutic of obedience rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion because we believe this is the Word of God. We understand our task as preachers to be that of coming to terms with what the text means in order that we can declare, explain, and apply it. The most important part of our task is to declare the Word, because the Holy Spirit alone can perform the inner application. The Holy Spirit speaks individually to human hearts and does the work that is invisible and unreachable to us. Martin Luther taught preachers that their responsibility was to get biblical truth from their lips to the ears of the congregation, and then they should go home and sleep while God moved the Word from the ears to the hearts. You cannot go there yourself, but the Word of God can and does and will.

We are earthen vessels, chosen by God despite our earthiness and our utter lack of qualification. Preaching is a responsibility and a stewardship. Either we will be effective because of the power of God’s Word, or we will crash and burn and take many with us. The stakes are that high. The one thing missing is the one thing most essential: declarative preaching, expositional preaching, doctrinal preaching, confrontational preaching, corrective preaching, and passionate preaching.

First, we need *declarative* preaching from preachers who will stand up and say, “This is what the text says, and, if that is what the text says then that is what the text means.”

Second, we need *expositional* preaching that preaches through the Bible, not picking and choosing what one thinks the people need. Why did God give us the Bible if we are supposed to go through it and find what we think our people need? Our task is to teach the Word – all of it. There are people who will come to Christ while hearing a sermon on the genealogy of Jesus or the annals of the tribes of Israel. The preacher’s task is to put every text of Scripture within the context of the gospel and the saving purposes of God. By the end of every sermon, people should hear a period, not a question mark.

Third, we need *doctrinal* preaching that instructs the church concerning the truth of the Christian faith and shows how doctrine is to be fleshed out in everyday life.

Fourth, we need *confrontational* preaching. In an age in which both confrontation and authority are hated, we need preachers who are willing to confront unbelief, heresy, false teaching, superficial gospels, and synthetic understandings of the truth.

Fifth, we need *corrective* preaching that helps the church to practice discernment, knowing the difference between truth and error. Corrective preaching leads the church into growth and maturity.

Sixth, we need preaching from men who are *passionate* for God and the gospel. If a man is called by God into a ministry of preaching, and he correctly understands what the Word of God is and what preaching is all about, then how can his preaching lack passion? With life and death hanging in the balance, a preacher should not come out of his study until he is ready to burst the door open, walk into the pulpit, and say, “Open your Bible, because God has a word for you and I get to bring it to your ears.”

## CONCLUSION

The one thing missing is the one thing most essential. There are question marks where there should be exclamation points. There is hesitancy where there should be boldness. There is advice where there should be teaching. There are ideas where there should be doctrine. There are impressions where there should be imperatives.

We are told that when Jesus had finished these words the crowds were amazed at His teaching for He was teaching them as one having authority and not as their scribes. When people hear us preach – especially when lost people hear us preach – they should be amazed at the preaching. They should be astonished. When God’s people are drawn into the act of preaching and begin to understand what is really taking place as God speaks His words of life through his preacher, they are continuously amazed. To move from unbelief to belief is not to lose the amazement – it is to lean into it. For everyone who has come to know the one, true living God and the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, every

opportunity they have to hear the Word of God is another opportunity to be astonished. If calluses ever build on the heart of a believer, so that he hears the Word of God but finds it only mildly interesting, then this is a reason for repentance.

Brothers, as you prepare to preach, pray that your people and anyone else who hears you will say, "He teaches as one having authority and not as the other ones we heard." It is God's authority, not yours. It is God's Word, not yours. Brothers, pray that when you preach, your own congregation asks, "Where did he come up with this?" Then, their question will be answered as they are drawn into the Word of God. The unclear will become clear as the Word of God and the Holy Spirit ministers to the believer's heart. Where there was once confusion, there will be clarity.

There is just not enough amazement going on in too many churches today. There is not enough astonishment, and the one thing missing is authority. The diagnosis of that absence is a lack of confidence in the Word of God, and such an absence indicates that preachers fail to understand what it means to preach. They do not understand the calling. Authority is the one thing absent, and authority is the one thing we must recover.

Preachers must quit trying to establish their own authority because they end up doing it in all the wrong ways. Preachers try to establish their authority as a therapist through relational counseling, or they identify their authority as a manager who knows how to organize religious institutions. If you do this, however, you will turn yourself into a moral casuist, saying to your people, "If you have a problem, then we will find a way to reason it through."

Do not try to establish your own authority. Without apology, stand only on the authority of God Himself, entrusted to us in His Word. Do not lean away from that authority. Never back off and never equivocate. Do not spin elastic and do not share nuance. Do not preach impressions or opinions.

Brothers, as you teach and preach the Word of God, it comes down to this – people are going to be amazed, or not. Astonished, or not. If the Word of God is preached, they will be amazed. If the Word of God is preached, they will be astonished. If the Word of God is preached, they will be saved. If the Word of God is preached, believers will grow to be conformed to the image of Christ. If the Word of God is preached, things visible and invisible will take place. All this can only take place by the ministry of God's Word. People will be astonished and they will walk away saying, "I had better read that passage again." Then, stand back and watch what happens to a church that evidences that kind of amazement and astonishment.

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching for He was teaching as one having authority and not as their scribes. By God's grace and for His glory, may the same thing be said of your preaching ministry.

## **ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE: UNDERSTANDING THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF OUR SALVATION (EPH 2:7)**

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*Ephesians 2:7 teaches that God saves sinners by His great grace in order to put the glory of His marvelous grace on public display. Paul answers five important questions about this grand demonstration: (1) When Is the Exhibition?; (2) What Is the Exhibition?; (3) How Does God Exhibit His Grace?; (4) Who Is the Audience?; and (5) What Are the Implications? Each question and Pauline answer is carefully discussed, concluding with four implications for true believers, which include humility, assurance, privilege, and priority.*

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Our culture is defined by ancient philosophies, and our thoughts are shaped by ancient ideas. No ancient idea more shapes our world than that of the Greek philosopher Protagoras, the father of agnosticism and, consequently, of moral relativism.<sup>1</sup> It was Protagoras who wrote, “Of all things the measure is man, of the things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not.”<sup>2</sup> That is the ultimate statement of human autonomy. Man is the measure of everything. He determines both the reality and the rightness or wrongness of everything. Man is, in fact, at the very center of the universe. The people of Athens, the city from which Protagoras came, were attracted to all kinds of new and strange ideas and different philosophies (Acts 17:21). But even the

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<sup>1</sup>*The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy - Protagoras (c. 490 - c. 420 BCE)*, Accessed: October 22, 2010. “While the pious might wish to look to the gods to provide absolute moral guidance in the relativistic universe of the Sophistic Enlightenment, that certainty also was cast into doubt by philosophic and sophistic thinkers, who pointed out the absurdity and immorality of the conventional epic accounts of the gods. Protagoras’ prose treatise about the gods began ‘Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not or of what sort they may be. Many things prevent knowledge including the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life.’” (DK80b4)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, DK80b1.

Athenians saw the bankruptcy of Protagoras' ideas. They threw him out of their city and burned all his works.<sup>3</sup>

Tragically, the ideas that Protagoras promoted are alive and well in the twenty-first century. The stepchild of his philosophy is humanism, which continues to assure us that man is the measure—that he is the center of the universe. Reduced to its simplest and most individualistic expression, it teaches that the end of all being is the happiness of man. That assertion resonates deeply in the human heart because it is the essence of the fallen human condition. It is a part of who we are as sinners to think that the universe revolves around us. Taken a step further, we can be tempted to think that the universe itself *exists* for us.

When we start with man as the center, we can quickly come to the conclusion that even God exists for us—that God's chief end is to make us happy and to meet all our needs. Instead, Scripture declares that God's chief end is His own glory.

Within the last 150 years under the influence of humanism, Christians have unwittingly adopted the humanistic idea of 'man as the measure' and have concluded that our salvation is primarily about us.<sup>4</sup> Compare that to Paul's threefold affirmation in Ephesians 1: "He predestined us to adoption as sons to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph 1:6); "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory" (Eph 1:12); and "to the praise of His glory" (Eph 1:14). God designed our salvation with the ultimate goal of His own glory. In Ephesians 2, Paul returns to this great theme and develops it further.

The first 3 chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians are entirely about what God has already done for us in Christ. In the first 3 chapters, there is only one command ("remember" in 2:11). Paul does not give his first real imperative until the fourth chapter. And when he finally does get to the imperatives, he builds those commands on the foundation of the knowledge he has taught in the first 3 chapters. So, in this book, we learn that nothing is as important to our spiritual growth and development as growing in our real knowledge of what God has done for us. We need no additional resource beyond what God has already given us in Christ. Instead, our growth in grace will be directly tied to our true understanding of the blessings we already enjoy. For Paul, a Christian is not ready to address the practical issues of chapters 4-6,

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<sup>3</sup>Cicero, *de Natura Deorum*, 1.23.6.

<sup>4</sup> Twentieth-century liberalism was heavily influenced by secular humanism and therefore tended to redefine salvation as the improvement of human conditions and the promotion of man's happiness in this world—what has historically been called "the social gospel." Many in today's Emerging Church have returned not only to tenets of the theology of liberalism, but also to its social gospel under the new, less pejorative name of *social justice*. Tragically, as others have observed, the twentieth-century response of traditional fundamentalism to liberalism was equally tainted by the prevailing philosophy of humanism. Often, therefore, the focus of their evangelism was still on man's happiness—not in this life but in the eschatological future.

unless he has begun to understand the doctrine on which they rest. Chapter 2, then, continues to explain what God has done for us in Christ. Specifically, in the first paragraph Paul explains how we, as individuals, came to enjoy the incredible spiritual blessings outlined in chapter 1—how sinners who deserve only God's wrath, came to be trophies of His grace. It is the spiritual biography of every Christian. We can reduce the powerful, life-changing message of this passage to one simple sentence: Salvation is entirely the work of God from beginning to end.

Verses 1-10 translate what is probably one, long Greek sentence.<sup>5</sup> In this pericope, Paul describes how God rescued us. Paul develops this theme of monumental spiritual change that has occurred in three simple movements. In the first movement, Paul rehearses 1) What we were (2:1-3). The second movement details 2) What God did (2:4-6). In fact, the subject of the sentence comes in verse 4—"God." Three main verbs follow and tell us what God has done.

- a) "Made us alive together with Christ." (v. 5)
- b) "Raised us up with Him." (v. 6)
- c) "Seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus." (v. 6)

Each of those verbs provides rich insight into what God has done for the believer—the change He has accomplished.

Verse 7 begins the third movement in God's great plan: 3) Why God did it (2:7-10). In light of what we were when God found us (1-3) and what God did in rescuing us (4-6), Paul explains why God saved us (7-10). "So that<sup>6</sup> in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."<sup>7</sup>

In those verses God tells us why He acted to rescue us. And His reasons are not primarily about us. Of course, it is true that God loves individuals. He describes us as His sheep that He knows by name. There is an intimacy in each believer's relationship with God. But the apostle explains that

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<sup>5</sup> See Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 306.

<sup>6</sup> ἵνα introducing a purpose-result clause; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 473-74. Wallace writes, "Not only is ἵνα used for result in the NT, but also for purpose-result. That is, it indicates *both the intention and its sure accomplishment*" (author's emphasis). Wallace lists Eph 2:7 as one possible example.

<sup>7</sup> According to Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart, Germany: German Bible Society, 2002) 533-34, there are no significant textual issues to be addressed in these verses.

what really lay behind God's plan was much bigger than any individual. There were cosmic reasons God acted to rescue us from sin. In Ephesians 2:7-10, Paul identifies three reasons that God acted in sovereign grace to rescue sinners: 1) To display the glory of His grace (v. 7); 2) To destroy all human boasting (vv. 8-9); and 3) To guarantee good works (v. 10).

In this article, we will consider only the first of those three reasons because it is the greatest and grandest reason of all. God acted to rescue us in Christ in order to display His own glory. In *As You Like It*, in one of the most famous monologues in English literature, William Shakespeare wrote these words:

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits, and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts.<sup>8</sup>

Shakespeare was right in ways he could not have imagined and in ways he never intended. The world *is* a stage. This planet that we call home--this pale blue dot in the Milky Way galaxy, hurtling through the blackness of endless space, is a stage. It is the greatest stage in the universe, because it is the stage on which the eternal God is putting His character on display.

In verse 7 Paul writes, "so that in the ages to come He might *show*..." The Greek word is ἐνδείκνυμαι. It literally means "to display" or "to give proof." It is to demonstrate something either by argument or act, to make something evident and obvious.<sup>9</sup> God is engaged in a grand demonstration on a cosmic, universal, eternal scale. And He is doing it right here on this planet we call home. Francis Foulkes writes:

The purpose of God for his church, as Paul came to understand it, reaches beyond itself, beyond the salvation, the enlightenment and re-creation of individuals, beyond its unity and fellowship, beyond even its witness to the world. The church is to be the exhibition to the whole creation of the wisdom, and love, and grace of God in Christ.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>"As You Like It," *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974), Act 2, Scene 7, lines 139-42.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 213. Thayer defines ἐνδείκνυμαι as "to show, demonstrate, prove, whether by arguments or by acts."

<sup>10</sup> Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 82.

William Hendricksen states the same great truth: “God’s purpose in saving His people reaches beyond man. His own glory is His chief aim.”<sup>11</sup> God is engaged in a grand demonstration, and it is happening right here on earth.

There are several important questions about this grand demonstration<sup>12</sup> that Paul answers in Ephesians 2:7.

### WHEN IS THE EXHIBITION?

The first and obvious question is when will God make this grand demonstration? Paul identifies the time as “in the ages to come.” What does Paul mean? Commentators are divided between three possible approaches. Some argue that “the ages to come” refers to the ages that occur from the first century when Paul wrote this letter until the return of Christ—the distinct seasons of time between the first century and the Second Coming.<sup>13</sup> And, of course, God is putting Himself on display now. In 3:10, Paul makes it clear that God is *now* putting His character on display *in the church*. A second view argues that Paul is referring to the ages that will take place after Christ returns.<sup>14</sup> It is also true that God will put Himself on display after Christ returns (cf. “the age to come” in 1:21).

But those views are not mutually exclusive. The best approach is most likely a third view which argues that “the ages to come” includes both of the first two views.<sup>15</sup> Paul was living in the first century and looking at time as it unfolds in all the coming ages. Because of the use of the present tense, we could translate his statement as “in the ages, the ones coming and coming and coming.” In this beautiful expression Paul pictures time as a shoreline onto which breaks wave after wave after wave. And the individual waves do not represent days or decades, or even centuries. But each wave as it breaks upon the shoreline represents another age. As another wave comes, another age comes. If you stand on the beach and gaze at the horizon to the vanishing point, all you can see is more waves. That is the picture behind this expression. Age after age breaks upon the shore of time and eternity. When is God going to put Himself on display? He started this exhibition when Christ came, and it will

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<sup>11</sup> William Hendricksen, *Ephesians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 118-19.

<sup>12</sup> Jay Adams uses this phrase as the title of his theodicy, *The Grand Demonstration: A Biblical Study of the So-Called Problem of Evil* (Santa Barbara, CA: EastGate, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 337. See also H. Sasse on “αἰών” in G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 1:197ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 337-38. See also Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 173.

never end.<sup>16</sup> Wave after wave, age after age, God will put His great character on display. F.F. Bruce writes, "...in the limitless future, as age succeeds age, the crowning display of God's grace will ever be His kindness to His redeemed people,..."<sup>17</sup> When is this exhibition? It started with Christ, and it will never end.

#### WHAT IS THE EXHIBITION?

What does God intend this grand demonstration to show about Himself? Paul explains, "So that in the coming ages, He might show *the surpassing riches of His grace*" (emphasis added). God intends to put *His grace* on display. There are times when as a pastor I wish I could explain a truth to my congregation as if they had never heard it before. We easily become so accustomed to great truths that we lose a sense of wonder, of grandeur, of majesty. And no truth suffers more from familiarity than grace. The most popular definition of grace is "unmerited favor." And that is true—as far as it goes. But it is a woefully inadequate definition. A. W. Pink suggests a better one. He writes that grace is "the favor of God to those who not only have no positive deserts of their own, but also who are thoroughly ill-deserving and hell-deserving."<sup>18</sup> A.W. Tozer defines grace as God's "goodness directed toward human debt and demerit. It is by His grace that God imputes merit where none previously existed and declares no debt to be where one had been before."<sup>19</sup> Grace is that reality in God that moves Him because of His own character to do good to those who are not only undeserving, but who deserve exactly the opposite. It is not just unmerited favor; it is favor in spite of demerit. As Tozer wrote, grace is the truth by which God credits merit where there was none, and declares no-debt where before there had been an unpayable debt. His point is that grace is what stands behind the wonderful truth of justification. In an act of grace, God credits my sin to Christ and treats Christ as if He had lived my life. And then He credits Christ's perfect life to me and treats me as if I had lived His life. Justification is the most powerful example of grace. God bestows the best of His goodness on those who deserve the worst of His wrath. G.S. Bishop beautifully describes grace as "a provision for men who are so fallen that they cannot lift the axe of justice, so corrupt that they cannot change their own natures, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so blind that they cannot

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), 111. Lincoln speaks of "the decisive period of God's redemptive activity, which was inaugurated by Christ's resurrection and exaltation, but which is yet to reach its consummation in the coming ages."

<sup>17</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1961), 51.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Nature of God* (n.d. repr., Chicago: Moody, 1999), 79.

<sup>19</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961), 93.

see Him, so deaf that they cannot hear Him, and so dead that He Himself must open their graves and lift them in resurrection.”<sup>20</sup>

Grace is God's character. In Exodus 34:6, when God proclaims His character to Moses, He describes Himself as gracious, or full of grace. By nature, He delights in doing good to those who deserve the opposite. In 1 Peter 5:10, Peter calls Him “the God of all grace.” God the Father is the fountain of grace. Jesus Christ is the channel through which that grace flows to us (1 Cor 1:4), and the Holy Spirit applies it to our hearts (Heb 10:29). Now, we stand in grace (Rom 5:2). We live in an atmosphere of grace, in a kingdom where grace rules. God constantly overwhelms us with goodness that we not only do not deserve, but of which we deserve the opposite.

But Paul does not simply use the word “grace.” Instead, he refers to the “riches of His grace”—and not just the riches or wealth of His grace, but the *surpassing* wealth of His grace. Paul adds term to term in trying to help us comprehend the magnitude of God's grace. The Greek word for “surpassing” is the word ὑπερβάλλω. It literally means “to surpass in throwing; to throw over or beyond any thing.”<sup>21</sup> It is the word from which we get the English word *hyperbole*. When it is used figuratively, as it is here, it expresses the highest or ultimate degree. It describes that which is beyond comparison, beyond comprehension, beyond measurement. Paul uses ὑπερβάλλω several times in Ephesians. He writes that God's power is *surpassing* (1:19). Christ's love for us is *surpassing* (3:19). And here Paul tells us that God's grace is *surpassing*. The wealth of God's grace cannot be compared to anything else. In its fullness, it is incomprehensible to our finite minds. And it cannot be measured. God has put the incomparable, incomprehensible, immeasurable wealth of His grace on display. That brings the careful reader to a third question.

### HOW DOES GOD EXHIBIT HIS GRACE?

“So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace *in kindness toward us*” (emphasis added). That is a remarkable statement, because in verse 3 Paul has just told us that we were by nature the objects of God's eternal wrath. And now, just four verses later, he tells us that we have become the objects of God's eternal kindness. What a remarkable change God's grace has produced!

The Greek word translated *kindness* (χρηστότης) is difficult to define with one English word. When the Greeks used the word χρηστότης to refer to things, it meant “mild or pleasant” as opposed to harsh or hard or sharp or bitter. For example, in Luke 5:39, it is used of wine that had mellowed and softened

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<sup>20</sup> George Sayles Bishop, *The Doctrines of Grace and Kindred Themes* (New York: Gospel Publishing, 1910), 156.

<sup>21</sup> Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 640.

with age. In Matthew 11:30 Jesus describes being His disciple as taking His yoke.<sup>22</sup> He said that His yoke is “easy,” which is the adjectival form of the same Greek word as *kindness* in Ephesians 2. Jesus said, “My yoke is mild or pleasant”—that is, “My yoke is not harsh or severe.”

When χρηστότης is used of people, it means “kind.” In Romans 11:22, for example, Paul contrasts the kindness of God with the severity of God. *Kindness*, then, is the opposite of harsh or severe. It is tender love in action. In the ages to come, God will display His grace by not treating those who deserve His wrath with harshness or severity, but instead by treating them with kindness.

This too is the character of our God. God demonstrated this kindness for all men to see when He sent Jesus. Titus 3:4 refers to the coming of Christ as “when the kindness of God our Savior appeared.” God is kind to the unrepentant and to those who are His enemies for the purpose of leading them to repentance. In Romans 2:4, as Paul indicts all of mankind for its sin, he says, “Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” God is kind to His enemies in order to provide a path for their repentance. What is this kindness to sinners? Paul partly explains to the crowd in Lystra, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:15-17). The temporal blessings and common grace that men enjoy in this life are expressions of the kindness of God. He intends that His kindness bring men to true repentance and faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But God especially shows χρηστότης to the sinners whom He has chosen and set apart for Himself. In Romans 11:22 Paul says that God shows kindness to those He saves. All believers are to show this quality of kindness to each other as well. Galatians 5:22 identifies part of the fruit of the Spirit as *kindness*—the opposite of harshness, heaviness, and severity. Colossians 3:12 says that “as those who have been chosen of God, ...put on a heart of kindness.” We are to treat others the way God has treated us.

But this quality of kindness is not only how God treated us when He sent Jesus, and it is not only how He treated us in the past when we were unbelievers, but it also describes how God plans to treat us throughout eternity!

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<sup>22</sup>Jesus was known as a carpenter (Mark 6:3). It is even possible that He took over His father's business after Joseph's death. Justin Martyr wrote of Christ about AD 150: “when He was among men He made ploughs and yokes and other farm implements” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 88). So the image of yokes may have been a familiar one to Jesus.

Ephesians 2:7 says that He made us alive, raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, “so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” For eternity, God plans to treat us with kindness and not with the harshness and severity our sins deserve. How can a holy God respond to those who have accumulated such guilt, like that? On what basis can God show kindness? The answer is found in the last three words of the verse: “in Christ Jesus.” Every kindness God shows sinners was purchased at the cross. That is true of unregenerate, unbelieving sinners. The fact that God lets a sinner live a moment longer than his first sin is a demonstration of His kindness purchased at the cross (Rom 3:25-26). Every temporal blessing human beings in rebellion against God enjoy, was purchased at the cross. God vindicated His righteousness in letting sinners live, at the cross.

For believers, this is true as well. The only reason we are accepted today is that we are in Christ. The reason we will be accepted for the rest of this earthly life is that we are in Christ. We know that we could never get into heaven on our own. But it is easy to think that once we are there and are made perfect, that somehow from that point on, we partly deserve to be there. But that is the devil's lie. From the moment we came to Christ, throughout this life, and until the endless ages sweep across eternity, the only reason we will ever be accepted in the Father's presence is that we are in Christ—He is permanently our representative, and we are permanently united to Him as the source of our spiritual life. Like the vine and the branches, eternal life will for eternity flow from Him into us. If this relationship were to be severed—and thank God it is not possible for it to be—even if we had lived in perfection for ten thousand years, at the very moment our union with Christ ended, we would immediately be damned. The fact that God will continue throughout eternity to show kindness to us is not because we will ever deserve it. It is because Christ deserves it, and we are connected to Him. We are in Christ.

God's grace is incomparable. It is incomprehensible. It is immeasurable. And by treating us with kindness for all eternity, God puts the riches of His grace on display. William Hendrickson recounts the story of a Roman noblewoman who was asked, “Where are your jewels?” Then, as now, wealthy people delighted in the luxuries of life. But she responded to the question by calling her two sons. She put her arms around them and said, “These are my jewels.” Hendrickson goes on to say:

Throughout eternity, the redeemed will be exhibited as the monuments of the marvelous grace of our loving Lord, who drew us from destruction's pit and raised us to heights of heavenly bliss, and did all this at such a cost to himself that he spared not his own Son, and in

such a manner that not a single one of his attributes, not even his justice, was eclipsed.<sup>23</sup>

#### WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

There is a fourth question raised by this text, but not answered. Whenever there is an exhibition or a display, there is always an intended audience, someone expected to see it and benefit from it. For whom is God making this display, this exhibition? In other places, Scripture gives four answers.

First of all, it is for all humanity. God's acts of redemption always are. In Exodus 9 when God rescued His people Israel from Egypt—that great Old Testament picture of spiritual redemption—what reason did God give? God tells Moses to warn Pharaoh that greater plagues are coming. In verses 15 and 16 He explains: “For *if by* now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.” God told Moses, “I will rescue My people, Israel. I will redeem them from Egypt and slavery. And I will do so, in order to show all humanity Who I am.” Throughout the Old Testament, God continues to put Himself on display to all humanity through the grace He shows the redeemed. For example, in Psalm 67:1-2, the Psalmist writes, “God be gracious to us and bless us, *And* cause His face to shine upon us—That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.” God saves and rescues in order to put His glory on display to all humanity.

But there is a second audience God had in mind—not only all of humanity, but specifically, the redeemed. Paul hints at that in Eph. 2:7: “in kindness *toward us*” (emphasis added). God intended that the redeemed would benefit from this display. In 2 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul says that when Christ returns He will be glorified in His saints, and He will be “marveled at among all who have believed.” We will be overwhelmed at the display of the grace of Christ in us. And we will worship and adore Him forever. In Revelation 4 and 5, the redeemed praise God for His grace that has been displayed in them (4:11; 5:9-10, 12-13). So not only does all humanity see and glorify God and His grace, but we will glorify God because of His grace put on display *through us* and *to us*.

But God also intended this display for a third group—a group we rarely think about, and yet a group of whom the Bible makes much. That is the other intelligent beings God created besides man—the angels. The New Testament often portrays these powerful, intelligent beings as spectators of God's work of redemption in the world (1 Cor 4:9; 11:10; 1 Pet 1:12). In Ephesians 3, the

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<sup>23</sup>Hendricksen, *Ephesians*, 119.

apostle Paul directly states that God intends the angels to be the audience. Ephesians 3:8-10 reads, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church." The church is going to put the wisdom of God on display. To whom? Paul continues: "...to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places...in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Jesus Christ our Lord" (3:10-11). There is an audience to the drama of redemption occurring on planet earth. And that audience is not just all humanity and specifically the redeemed, but also a universe of magnificent angelic beings. Jay Adams writes, "God's grand demonstration has been taking place and still continues to take place before hundreds of thousands of intelligent beings throughout the universe."<sup>24</sup>

There is a fourth audience to this exhibition—and it is by far the most important of all. It is the eternal Son of God! In eternity past, God made a promise to His Son. Titus 1:1-2 alludes to this promise: "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago." Literally, Paul says that God promised "before times of ages" (πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων). Clearly, God made this promise before the creation, when there was nothing but the eternal Triune God. The question is to whom did God the Father make this promise? John MacArthur answers:

The promise that the Father made...He made to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a staggering reality, absolutely staggering. In... the mystery of the Trinity there is an ineffable love, an indescribable and inexplicable love.... That love must find its expression. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. And the Father in a demonstration of this indescribable, supernatural, perfect love... promises to the Son that He will give to Him a redeemed humanity, justified, sanctified and glorified.... Why? Because the Father loves the Son so greatly He wants to grant this redeemed humanity to Him as an expression of His love.<sup>25</sup>

Many New Testament texts allude to this eternal gift of love between Father and Son (John 6:37-39, 44; 17:2, 6, 9, 12, 20, 24; Rom 8:29-30; 2 Tim

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<sup>24</sup>Adams, *The Grand Demonstration: A Biblical Study of the So-Called Problem of Evil*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> John MacArthur, "Why I Love the Church," a sermon preached on March 24, 1996. Transcript accessed at [www.gty.org](http://www.gty.org) on November 2, 2010. Available from [http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/80-157\\_Why-I-Love-the-Church?](http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/80-157_Why-I-Love-the-Church?)

1:9; Heb 13:20). Although there are eternal benefits and blessings for us, God's great plan of redemption is not primarily about us. It is about Christ. The people whom God is rescuing are His love gift to His Son! They are designed to be with His Son and to reflect the glory of His Son for all eternity. The Father intends to present to His Son a redeemed humanity, and those whom He has rescued will bring Him glory forever by loving and praising and adoring Him and by reflecting the beauty of His own moral character forever. God is not only rescuing a people *by* His Son but also *for* His Son.

Of course, the ultimate end of this great eternal plan of redemption is the exaltation of the Father. John MacArthur points out from 1 Corinthians 15:24-27.

When the Son brings the whole redeemed humanity to glory and the Father gives them all to the Son as a love gift, the Son will turn around and give it all, including Himself, back to the Father.... [We are caught up in] an immense, transcendent, incomprehensible expression of love within the Trinity of which we are the gifts exchanged.<sup>26</sup>

The greatest audience for the display of the Father's grace is the eternal Son of His love.

#### WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

What are some of the lessons from this amazing statement in Ephesians 2:7 for us who serve in Christ's church?

##### A Sense of Humility

It should produce in us a sense of humility. Life and eternity are not about us. God is doing something far greater. We are so bound by time that it is hard to think beyond our own lives. We think about our problems and our issues and our sins. But right now, while we are living on planet earth, there are almost seven billion other people experiencing exactly the same thing. And ours is only one generation in thousands of years of human history. If our Lord tarries, there will be hundreds or thousands of years more with the world filled with people just like us. We will all live and die on a tiny cosmic speck of dust hurtling through space on the edge of a small galaxy twirling amidst billions and billions of other galaxies. The universe is not about us. Instead, God has a great cosmic, eternal plan to put His character on display—and to do so before all humanity, before those He redeems, before the entire intelligent creation, and before His Son. He has made us part of that plan by an act of sovereign grace alone. That is very humbling. The Christian life does not begin and end with us. We are only a small part of a great, cosmic, eternal plan.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

### A Sense of Assurance

When we look at ourselves and our failures and those of our flock, it is easy to doubt whether any of us will ever end up perfected in God's presence. If our salvation were up to us, that would be a natural and justified fear. But our salvation is so much bigger than we are. God chose us in eternity past to be part of this grand demonstration. If God were to fail to bring our salvation to its completion, He would undermine the grand demonstration that He Himself has set up. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes:

My assurance is based on this, that God, the infinite, eternal God, is vindicating His own eternal character through me. And if He started saving me and then left the work undone or unfinished, and I duly arrived in hell, the devil would have the greatest joy of eternity. He would say, "There is a being that God began to save, but it all ended up in failure...." It is impossible. His object is not merely to save me, it is to vindicate His own being and nature, and I am being used to that end. The end is absolutely certain....<sup>27</sup>

So we can rest in confidence and assurance that God, who began a good work in us, will be faithful to perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6).

### A Sense of Privilege

Paul is saying that it is as if God will point to us in eternity and say to the angels and to every other intelligent being in the universe, "Look at him, look at her, and see the greatness of My grace!" We will literally be trophies of God's grace. Again, Lloyd-Jones writes:

This is to me the most overwhelming thought that we can ever lay hold of, that the almighty, everlasting, eternal God is vindicating Himself and His holy nature and being, by something that He does in us and with us and through us.... At the consummation, God is going to open His last great exhibition and all these heavenly powers and principalities will be invited to attend. The curtain will draw back and God will say, 'Look at them!' [Through us] God is going to vindicate His own eternal wisdom and His majesty and His glory and all the attributes of His holy person to the principalities and the heavenly powers.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 116.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-13.

The question that follows is, “Why us?” Why would God choose us to be part of such a grand demonstration? Often, art galleries will solicit the collections of a famous painter and feature his work. The gallery will display the paintings carefully with just the right lighting in order to bring out the skill of the painter in light or color or texture or hue. But, in reality, the point is not the paintings. The point is the skill of the painter. Through God’s spiritual rescue of us, we have each become one of God’s masterpieces,<sup>29</sup> displayed for the universe to see, to examine, and to marvel at. We are the exhibition. But neither we nor our salvation are the point, any more than an individual painting on display in an exhibition. The point, in our case, is not only the *skill* of the Artist, but His *character* as well. The incomparable, incomprehensible, immeasurable grace of God! Our salvation is not all about us. It is all about Him. “Throughout time and in eternity the church, this society of pardoned rebels, is designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness.”<sup>30</sup>

#### A Sense of Priority

If God’s ultimate purpose in salvation is the exaltation of His own character, it reminds preachers and teachers that when we handle God’s Word, we should never make our people and their needs the ultimate point. Moreover, we should not even make the great characters of the Bible the main point. The Bible is intentionally theocentric. Everyone else, including the biblical characters and our audience, is merely the supporting cast. We must never shine the brightest spotlight on the supporting actors or the walk-ons. That must be reserved for the Main Character and His story. We must always remember that the grand theme of the Bible is that the one true God is redeeming a people by His Son, for His Son, to His own glory. We must exalt our great God by constantly reminding those we shepherd that He has rescued us “so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

#### A Personal Sense of Gratitude

For twenty-five years it has been my deepest joy and greatest privilege to watch firsthand as John MacArthur has faithfully taught the truths outlined in this text and daily modeled them in his life and ministry. His entire ministry has been spent in defense of the gospel of grace in Christ. He has guarded it at great personal cost against attacks that arose from the extreme positions of both antinomianism and legalism, as well as from evangelical complacency and

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<sup>29</sup> In Eph 2:10, Paul uses the Greek noun ποιήμα, which was used in classical Greek for a work produced by a craftsman. Herodotus uses the word to describe the making of a crown, hence a “masterpiece.” See Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 347 (including footnotes 1 and 2).

<sup>30</sup>F.F. Bruce, “Ephesians,” *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 288.

compromise. And in that fight he has never once wavered in his conviction of the veracity, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture. He has taught and modeled a philosophy of ministry that demands a high view of God in the worship of the church. And he has remained faithful to a deep commitment to the supremacy of God in all things, especially in the preaching of His Word.

May God enable us who stand on his shoulders to be equally faithful!  
*Soli Deo Gloria!*



## THE MAIN THEME AND STRUCTURE OF JAMES

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*The Letter of James has played an important role in the expository and polemical ministry of John MacArthur. In addition to his commentary on James, Dr. MacArthur has utilized James 2 in The Gospel According to the Apostles as a lynchpin in his argument about true saving faith. The theme and structure of James is offered in appreciation for his ministry that has always stressed, like James, the authenticity of saving faith.*

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For over four centuries, discussion about the structure of James' letter could be referred to as commentary on "A German Tale of Two Martins." Those two influential Germans were Martin Luther in the sixteenth century and Martin Dibelius in the twentieth century. Both could see no coherent structure in this book. While there were others who voiced exception to the views of the two Martins, their pervasive influence has certainly dominated the discussion for far too long!

Luther's comment about James being "an epistle of straw," as compared to the theological significance of Paul's writings, is his most well-known comment on the book.<sup>1</sup> His views about the style and structure of James, however, were equally negative. Discounting apostolic authorship, Luther concluded that the author must have been "some good, pious man, who took a few sayings from the disciples of the apostles and thus tossed them off on paper."<sup>2</sup> Even if we discount his anachronistic comment about paper, since that medium was not invented until the late Middle Ages, his stinging indictment of James' style remains. To Luther this letter was not written by James the Lord's brother, and it is totally disorganized in its presentation of the few sayings he did borrow from the apostles.

Furthermore, in his erudite commentary, Martin Dibelius concluded from his form critical analysis that James contained no overall thematic or

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's expression could be more literally rendered "a right strawy epistle" (*eyn rechte stroern Epistel*). *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1972), 35: 362. Hereafter referred to as *LW*.

<sup>2</sup> *LW*, 35: 397.

structural unity.<sup>3</sup> He did acknowledge that three individual treatises (2:1-13; 2:14-26; 3:1-13), which he called “the core of the writing,” were fairly coherent in their diatribal style. But the rest of the book, however, was primarily composed of loosely arranged sayings, sometimes connected by catch words, in the style of what Dibelius referred to as Jewish paraenesis.<sup>4</sup> Dibelius’ influence on later writers is undeniable and pervasive.<sup>5</sup>

Among recent writers who have discerned some measure of coherence in the epistle’s structure, many often stress the key role of chapter one in serving as a sort of “table of contents” for the rest of the book.<sup>6</sup> Others have argued more specifically that 1:19 (“be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger”) comprises a three-point outline of chapters 2-4.<sup>7</sup> Despite this recent trend toward seeing greater coherence, Taylor and Guthrie recently concluded that “no consensus has emerged concerning the details of the book’s organization.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> M. Dibelius, *James*, rev. H. Greeven; trans. M. A. Williams (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 34-38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-10.

<sup>5</sup> For discussions by various writers on the literary structure and genre of James, see L.T. Johnson, *The Letter of James AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 37A:11-25; P. H. Davids, “The Epistle of James in Modern Discussion,” *ANRW II* (25:5): 3621-45; M. E. Taylor, “Recent Scholarship on the Structure of James,” *CBR* 3:1 (2004): 86-115.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *James*, 15; R. Bauckham, *James* (London: Routledge, 1999), 68-73. Bauckham, however, along with Moo observe that the great diversity among the proposed structures for the epistle may indicate that there is no clearly discernible structure to the book. Moo opts for “an overall concern” rather than a structured theme. That concern is James’ desire for spiritual “wholeness.” D. J. Moo, *The Letter of James* in PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 44, 46.

<sup>7</sup> An early advocate of this approach was H. J. Cladder, “Die Anlage des Jakobusbriefes,” *ZTK* 28 (1904): 37-57. More recent advocates are Z. C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Dallas: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994) and R. W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* in NTC (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1997), 35-37.

<sup>8</sup> M. E. Taylor and G. H. Guthrie, “The Structure of James,” *CBQ* 68:4 (2006): 681-705. Taylor and Guthrie’s approach recognizes the role of “organizing principles” such as the double opening section, the presence of inclusios, the use of aphorisms, and the presence of summary expressions. Their conclusions leave an epistle that has a very long introduction and body opening (1:1-2:11) plus an equally long body closing and conclusion (4:13-5:20), enclosing a body proper consisting only of 2:12-4:12. In addition to the book thus having a body shorter than its opening and conclusion, their analysis seems to have so many organizing principles that very little in the book is actually prominent since so many individual elements are supposed to be prominent. I have coined the expression *über analysis* for this tendency to over analyze a text by imagining too many literary characteristics. Furthermore, their lack of discerning one controlling theme in the midst of such an involved analysis is a considerable weakness of their proposal. I have chosen to comment on Taylor and Guthrie’s approach because it illustrates what so many have failed to accomplish in their proposals about the book’s structure: an analysis based on all that the text teaches that enables the reader to form a mental representation of the discourse in as simple a way as the discourse allows. For the most recent scholarly efforts in this area, see the thorough study by L. Cheung, *The Genre, Composition and Hermeneutics of the Epistle of James* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2003) and M. E. Taylor, *A Text-Linguistic Investigation into the Discourse Structure of James* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

With so many differences about the book's structure among scholars past and present, what hope is there that we can ever discern an overarching strategy in its composition? Or, should we just conclude that there is no evident overall strategy and be satisfied with arranging by intuition James' discrete topics in a linear list? I am convinced that an analysis of this book that gives attention both to how authors indicate prominence and to how they group their messages offers fresh hope that we can then uncover the structure of this little book which actually helps to convey its overall message.

### A PROPOSAL ABOUT JAMES 3:13-18

By applying the techniques of *cohesion*, *prominence*, *peak*, and *grouping* to the text of James, I propose that James 3:13-18 is the peak of his discourse. And as the peak, this crucial passage highlights the primary concerns of the author. How does James focus his spotlight on this section and give it the foreground prominence over other sections of his discourse? I have leaned heavily on the insights on prominence developed by Stanley Porter and the insights on peak developed by Robert Longacre. These scholars have pioneered this approach in their formidable works on linguistics and Biblical interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

This section (3:13-18) fits all the expectations for its being *dissimilar* to the rest of James' encyclical letter. In other words it sticks out as a *peak* from the surrounding hills of the letter. It functions as the most prominent section of the book, and is like a "zone of turbulence" compared to the other important but less prominent sections. Longacre's often cited comment about a discourse without prominence is also appropriate here. "The very idea of discourse as a structured entity demands that some parts of discourse be more prominent than others. Otherwise, expression would be impossible. Discourse without prominence would be like pointing to a piece of black cardboard and insisting that it was a picture of black camels crossing black sands at midnight."<sup>10</sup>

Here is the text of James 3:13-18 in Greek and English:

<p>3:13 Τίς σοφός καὶ ἐπιστήμων ἐν ὑμῖν; δεῖξάτω ἐκ τῆς καλῆς ἀναστροφῆς τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἐν πραύτητι σοφίας. 14 εἰ δὲ ζῆλον πικρὸν ἔχετε καὶ ἐριθείαν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν, μὴ κατακαυχᾶσθε καὶ</p>	<p>Jas 3<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? He should demonstrate by his good conduct his actions done with the gentleness that wisdom brings. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter</p>
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<sup>9</sup> For thorough treatments by these two authors, see S. E. Porter, *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming), and *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 298-307; R. E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, 2nd ed. (London: Plenum Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> "Discourse Peak as Zone of Turbulence," in *Beyond the Sentence: Discourse and Sentential Form*, ed. J.R. Wirth (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma, 1985), 83.

ψεύδεσθε κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας. **15** οὐκ ἔστιν αὕτη ἢ σοφία ἄνωθεν κατερχομένη ἀλλὰ ἐπίγειος, ψυχική, δαιμονιώδης. **16** ὅπου γὰρ ζῆλος καὶ ἐριθεία, ἐκεῖ ἀκαταστασία καὶ πᾶν φαῦλον πρᾶγμα. **17** ἡ δὲ ἄνωθεν σοφία πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή ἐστιν, ἔπειτα εἰρηνική, ἐπιεικής, εὐπειθής, μεστή ἐλέους καὶ καρπῶν ἀγαθῶν, ἀδιάκριτος, ἀνυπόκριτος. **18** καρπὸς δὲ δικαιοσύνης ἐν εἰρήνῃ σπείρεται τοῖς ποιῶσιν εἰρήνην.<sup>11</sup>

jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, stop boasting and being false to the truth.<sup>15</sup> This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.<sup>16</sup> For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, it is there that will be disorder and every vile practice.<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.<sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who work for peace.

Consider the following unique linguistic characteristics of this passage that illustrate what Longacre has described as the chief characteristics of “peak.” Stating them, they are: general dissimilarity from the co-text; rhetorical underlining; concentration of participants; heightened vividness; change of pace; and change of vantage point.

**1. The section begins with a question:** Τίς σοφὸς καὶ ἐπιστήμων ἐν ὑμῖν; (“Who is a wise and undersanding person among you?”). As will be noted later, other sections of James begin with the combination of a nominative plural in direct address with an imperative verb. The only other exception to this is 4:1-10, which also begins with a question: Πόθεν πόλεμοι καὶ πόθεν μάχαι ἐν ὑμῖν; (“From where among you do wars and battles come?”). This section is so closely related to 3:13-18 that it illustrates rather than contradicts the unique role of 3:13-18. I argue that 4:7-10 functions as the “hortatory” peak of the discourse while 3:13-18 is its “thematic” peak.

**2. The initial imperative shifts to the third person from the second person pattern of the other sections:** δεῖξάτω ἐκ τῆς καλῆς ἀναστροφῆς τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἐν πραύτητι σοφίας. (“Let him show from his good behavior his good works with meekness of wisdom”). Although there are fifteen third-person imperatives in James, this is the only instance when one appears at the beginning of its section in the

<sup>11</sup> K. Aland, M. Black, C.M. Martini, B.M. Metzger, M. Robinson, & A. Wikgren, eds. *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. with Morphology. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993; 2006).

thematic position of the clause. The others form supportive material by appearing later in the clause or the section in the rhematic position.<sup>12</sup>

**3. There are vice and virtue lists marked by asyndeton.** These lists do not appear elsewhere in James. 3:15 refers to: ἐπίγειος, ψυχική, δαιμονιώδης (“earthly, sensual, devilish”). 3:17 mentions: πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή ἐστίν, ἔπειτα εἰρηνική, ἐπιεικής, εὐπειθής, μεστή ἐλέους καὶ καρπῶν ἀγαθῶν, ἀδιάκριτος, ἀνυπόκριτος (“it is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, sincere”). These lists describe polar opposite behaviors that contrast the kind of “wisdom that does **not** descend from above” (οὐκ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ σοφία ἄνωθεν κατερχομένη) with that behavior that exemplifies “wisdom that is from above” (ἡ δὲ ἄνωθεν σοφία). Again, in the later analysis of how this passage contributes to the structure of James, it will be noted that the polar opposite behaviors it describes provides the overall theme of the discourse which can be mapped onto every separate section.<sup>13</sup>

**4. There is a marked difference in the ratio of adjectives to other words in this section.** The ratio of adjectives to other words in this section is 20%. The ratio of adjectives to other words in the rest of the book is 10%. This is consistent with the author’s purpose in this peak paragraph to describe the behavior that is evidence of the wisdom that he is commending throughout the book. The large number of adjectives describes what the wise person looks like so the readers will seek to emulate the behavior of such a person.

**5. There is a change of vantage point in this section.** In other sections, the readers are directly addressed about their behavior. Here by way of a rhetorical question the readers are asked to consider what the behavior of a wise person is like (and an unwise person as well). In contrast, the other questions in the letter are used in the confrontational diatribes by which James challenges his readers (note the series of questions in 2:4-7 and 2:14, 16, 20, 21). While specific exemplars of behavior are held up to the readers in other sections (Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah), here the readers are asked generally to contemplate the example of a “wise person.” Those other exemplars are living examples

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<sup>12</sup> *Theme* and *rheme* are terms used to describe the initial position in the clause or sentence (the *theme*) and what is later stated about the theme (the *rheme*). For James’ second person imperatives in thematic position, see 1:2; 16, 19; 2:1, 5; 3:1; 4:11, 13; 5:1, 7, 9. For the supportive third person imperatives in rhematic position, see 1:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 19; 4:9; 5:12, 13 (2), 14, 20. For a simple explanation of *theme* and *rheme* in both clause and text, see Geoff Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar* (London: Arnold, 1994), 143, 164-73.

<sup>13</sup> Commentators have recognized that these polar contrasts play a major role in James’ letter. See Johnson, *James*, 83, 84. Other authors who have discerned these bi-polar contrasts will be mentioned later.

from Israel's sacred history of the wise person held up for emulation in this section.

**6. Summary words in this section appear in significant ways elsewhere in James.** The specific examples of the commended and condemned behaviors show up in supportive material in many other sections. No other section of the discourse contributes so much of its vocabulary to the other sections as 3:13-18. While this may appear to contradict the idea of dissimilarity, I remind the reader that while dissimilarity marks the surface features of James, semantic similarity and summary mark this passage.<sup>14</sup> This would be similar to Longacre's "crowded stage" in which all the characters appear at crucial times. Consider a sampling of some of these lexical connections with both the preceding (anaphoric) and succeeding (cataphoric) sections of the discourse. "Wisdom" in 3:13, 15 looks back to 1:5. "Let him show" in 3:13 echoes 2:18b. "Works" in 3:13 summarizes his previous discussion in 2:14-26 (and interestingly does not appear again after its use here). The "meekness" of 3:13 recalls its use in 1:21. The wisdom "from above" in 3:15, 17 echoes the gifts that come from above in 1:17. Not only does this language look back to the previous co-text, it looks forward as well. The bitter "jealousy" of 3:14 anticipates the same problem condemned in 4:2. The warning "not to boast" in 3:14 previews the same problem in 4:16. These lexical connections are only a sample of those that are present in this passage. Furthermore, the many additional semantic parallels have not even been mentioned and can be easily discovered by simple searches on shared theme words. Enough of them have been noted to illustrate the crucial function of this section as a summary of the entire discourse.

These six examples of the uniqueness and *dissimilarity* of 3:13-18 highlight its prominent role in the discourse as a whole. There are abundant illustrations in this section of the above-mentioned characteristics of Longacre's "peak" – the rhetorical underlining, the concentration of participants, the heightened vividness, the change of pace, and the change of vantage point.

These characteristics also convey the "message" that James wants readers to understand, namely, that there are *two ways* that they can follow: the way of heavenly wisdom or the way of earthly wisdom. This thematic peak is what controls our author's approach in the individual paragraphs of his discourse. In each paragraph, a moral behavior is commended and the opposite behavior is condemned. The reader is called to make a choice between these two

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<sup>14</sup> "By their nature, summary statements unite together the information they summarize." Steven Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2000), 277. They can both end and begin sections. Here the lists both look back and look forward in the text.

ways. In the following section (4:1-10), James challenges his readers to become either a friend of God or his enemy in 4:4: μοιχαλίδες, οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ἡ φιλία τοῦ κόσμου ἔχθρα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν; ὃς ἐὰν οὖν βουληθῆ φίλος εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου, ἐχθρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ καθίσταται (“Adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever desires to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”). This paradigm of two opposite behaviors is stamped on every paragraph/section of the discourse.

Recognizing the thematic peak of James and how it provides the overall thrust of his message enables his readers to understand why James wants them to be “perfect” (τέλειοι – 1:4). This important term, echoing our Lord’s statement in Matthew 5:48, is defined by the rest of 1:4 as follows: καὶ ὁλόκληροι ἐν μηδενὶ λειπόμενοι (“and entire, not lacking in anything”). Many writers have noticed the way in which James describes this perfection or “wholeness” that should characterize his readers.<sup>15</sup> If they try to have it both ways, then they will be guilty of “doubleness,” described by the colorful and unique word δίψυχος (1:8; 4:8) – a “double-souled” or “double-minded” person. To James, the wisdom described in 3:13-18 that comes from above to those who ask God for it (1:5) will be displayed in fruitful deeds. This wisdom also will enable his readers to be whole people in their undivided devotion to the one true God who Himself has no “variation or shadow due to change” (1:17).

#### SCHOLARS ON THE ROLE OF 3:13–18 IN THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF JAMES

Previously we have argued that this paragraph has the prominent role in the overall structure of the Letter from James. This is due to its special linguistic features that set it apart from other paragraphs, along with its semantic function of conveying the essential message of the entire discourse. The paragraph has verbal links with both previous and subsequent material, thus serving as a transitional section, but also functioning as a summation of the entire discourse. Therefore, here we will expand on the crucial role of this paragraph which we have called the thematic “peak” of James, and see if other scholars have discerned the important role of this section.

Dibelius thought that 3:13-17 had internal cohesion but had no real connections with what precedes or follows in the letter. He also thought that 3:18 was an isolated saying, belonging neither with the previous group and separate from 4:1ff.<sup>16</sup> It can be shown, however, that Dibelius was simply wrong in this estimation. It is my opinion that he allowed his view that James is

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<sup>15</sup> P. J. Hartin considers this goal as the essence of the book’s teaching on the spiritual life. *A Spirituality of Perfection* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999). Bauckham calls perfection or wholeness “the overarching theme of the entire letter.” R. Bauckham, *James*, 177.

<sup>16</sup> Dibelius, *James*, 207-8.

composed of loosely arranged paranetic material to sometimes negatively influence his critical judgment. A number of writers both before and after Dibelius have affirmed the unity of this paragraph and its vital verbal and semantic connection both to its immediate co-text and also to the distant sections of the discourse.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two other German scholars argued for the central role of 3:13-18. C.F.G. Henrici, in a volume on the literary character of the NT writings, acknowledged that James, like the proverbial writings of the OT, consisted of a large number of discrete sections of familiar wisdom material. There was, however, something that held all the variant sayings together.

Der zusammenhaltende Gedanke ist die Einsharfung der rechten Weisheit, die von oben kommt (3, 13-18). Alle einzelnen Warheiten sind ihre Fruchte.<sup>17</sup> [The connecting thought is the emphasis on the true wisdom, which comes from above (3:13-18). All of the other individual truths are its fruits.]

In an earlier article, Herman Cladder also set forth a strong argument for literary coherence in the book, with 3:13-18 also functioning as both its linguistic and semantic center.<sup>18</sup> Dibelius greatly influenced a succeeding generation of writers, but in the last decades a number not only have found a coherent structure in James, but also have argued for the over-arching structural and semantic role of 3:13-18. James Reese views 3:13-18 as “the heart of the letter” where its “core message” (the teacher’s awesome responsibility) is located and developed.<sup>19</sup> In a number of books and articles, Patrick Hartin has “argued that this (3:13-18) is the central pericope in the epistle, the other pericopes forming an embrace around it.”<sup>20</sup> Luke Cheung has stressed the central function of 3:13-18 as a link passage in the book which many of the previous and subsequent paragraphs echo both linguistically and thematically.<sup>21</sup>

In a published dissertation utilizing a form of discourse analysis, Mark Taylor affirms that this passage summarizes the burden of the letter thus far and prepares the way for the strong rebuke that follows. These anaphoric and cataphoric roles of the passage lead him to the same conclusion as these

<sup>17</sup> C. F. G. Henrici, *Der literarische Charakter der neutestamentliche Schriften* (Leipzig: Durr, 1908), 75.

<sup>18</sup> H. Cladder, “Die Anlage des Jakobusbriefes,” *ZKT* 28 (1904): 37-57.

<sup>19</sup> J.M. Reese, “The Exegete as Sage: Hearing the Message of James,” *BTB* 12 (1982): 83.

<sup>20</sup> P.J. Hartin, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” *SBLSP* (1996): 483. See also *James and the ‘Q’ Sayings of Jesus*, JSNTSup 47 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 29-32; and *A Spirituality of Perfection*, 72-75.

<sup>21</sup> L. L. Cheung, *The Genre*, 75-85, 138-47.

aforementioned writers. Functionally, 3:13-18 gathers key concepts raised in 1:2-3:12 and anticipates the next major movement in the discourse. Contextually, the passage reveals grounding in Jewish concepts of wisdom, emphasizing the practical obedience of a life marked by the possession of wisdom as a gift of God.<sup>22</sup>

In an unpublished thesis, David Hockman views our passage as the discourse “peak” of the book, while Kenneth Tollefson also stresses the key role of the paragraph in the dialectical discourse of James.<sup>23</sup> Suffice it to conclude that a number of scholars have also affirmed that 3:13-18 is the key to pulling the seemingly disparate sections of James together into some coherent structure.

Such a conclusion, however, cannot be based simply on the linguistic features in the structural “peak” of the book, although those indicators must be present as well. The semantic content of the paragraph must also convey the main themes of the book for the paragraph to function clearly in a prominent role as the thematic peak of James. I believe that these semantic indicators are also present in this passage. James conveys here his burden that his readers adopt a lifestyle that is based on the wisdom that comes from God above and that they must reject any anti-wisdom that comes from human viewpoint alone. It is my contention that each individual paragraph of the discourse displays the stamp of that theme. The intensely imperative paragraph that follows (4:1-10), for example, reaches a hortatory peak in calling the reader to accept the friendship of God and reject the friendship of the world. In the words of the previous thematic peak, that means to reject the anti-wisdom of this “below” world and to accept the true wisdom of the “above” world. Or the person who may want it both ways, James reserves the stinging message of not being “double-minded,” but choosing rather the wholeness of a single and pure life marked by a moral integrity rooted in divine wisdom.

#### AN ANALYSIS OF JAMES 3:13–18<sup>24</sup>

This paragraph opens with a rhetorical question addressed to those “among you” (ἐν ὑμῖν) – the first of six occurrences of this expression, all in the latter half of the book. The next paragraph opens with another challenging rhetorical question asked of those “among you” (ἐν ὑμῖν; 4:1). The remaining four times that this expression occurs are in the closing paragraph (5:13, 14, 19, 20). This indicates that James at this point begins to close in on the fallacies and foibles of congregational lives in the Diaspora. The question in 3:13a is

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<sup>22</sup> M.E. Taylor, *A Text-Linguistic Investigation*, 116.

<sup>23</sup> D. J. Hockman, “A Discourse Analysis of James: An Examination of 3:13-18 as the Doctrinal Peak” (Th.M. thesis, Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006); K. J. Tollefson, “The Epistle of James as a Dialectical Discourse,” *BTB* 27:2 (1997): 62-69.

<sup>24</sup> See the earlier chart containing the Greek and English texts of this passage.

answered immediately by an imperative (δειξάτω) clause that echoes an earlier use of this specific imperative (twice in 2:18) and also echoes the same semantic point, namely that his readers must demonstrate by their right behavior their faith (2:18) and also their wisdom (3:13b). More specifically, it is that gentleness that has its origin in wisdom (σοφίας as a genitive of source). Although this is only the second use of this specific noun (see 1:5), it appears twice in 3:15 and 17, and introduces the topic which will be commented on in the rest of the paragraph. The use of σοφός in the opening question also strengthens the point that wisdom is the topic which will be explained. Coupled with σοφός is the added characteristic, “and understanding” (καὶ ἐπιστήμων). This word does not convey the semantic overtones of a “sympathetic understanding,” but is more in the semantic field of its partner, σοφός. Louw and Nida define this field as “pertaining to being able to understand and evaluate – ‘intelligent, insightful, understanding’.”<sup>25</sup> Although this specific combination of words does not appear elsewhere in the NT, the collocation would be familiar to those who honored the wisdom traditions of Israel and the wise men of that tradition. When Moses wondered how he could bear the burden of leading the people, he decided by issuing the following command. “Assign for yourselves men, wise and discerning (σοφούς καὶ ἐπιστήμονας) and prudent for your tribes, and I will appoint them as your leaders” (Deut 1:13). The response of the people was to do just that and such wise and understanding men were so appointed (1:15). In Deuteronomy 4:6 Israel was told that if they kept the statutes, they would be “a wise and understanding (σοφός καὶ ἐπιστήμων) people” – the exact pair of wisdom words found in James 3:13. Daniel was referred to by the same two coupled adjectives (Dan 1:4; 5:11) and *Sirach* also collocates the two words (21:15). Therefore, attending to the intertexture of James suggests that he is asking for one who desires to be a “sage” in ancient Israel. This connects the paragraph to the opening of the previous one where a warning was issued against too many desiring to be teachers (3:1). The teacher was a “rabbi.” The “sage” was one who taught wisdom. The requirement for the rabbi was to be perfect in the use of his tongue (3:2-12). The requirement for the sage is that he demonstrates by his behavior the gentleness that comes from heavenly wisdom (3:13, 17).

The next three verses (3:14-16) introduce a negative tone, because James loves portraying the oppositions of actions in his ethical paranesis. The Jewish “two ways” tradition could also be invoked here, as he describes the characteristics of anti-wisdom by means of a vice list. Many commentators have pointed out that he never calls this behavior a type of wisdom, but he does state that “this is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (3:15). He begins his portrayal of anti-wisdom by a first-class conditional sentence in 3:14: “εἰ δὲ ζῆλον πικρὸν ἔχετε καὶ ἐριθείαν ἐν τῇ

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<sup>25</sup> J.P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), I: 384.

καρδία ὑμῶν, μὴ κατακαυχᾶσθε καὶ ψεύδεσθε κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας.” Too often those trained in traditional grammar settle for a description of the syntax of a first-class conditional clause (εἰ plus the indicative in the protasis) with little recognition for what an author is doing with the conditional clause. Richard Young has framed a rhetorical approach to conditional clauses in light of speech-act theory that focuses on what an author is attempting to do with the clause.<sup>26</sup> Here, for example, James is not making a statement, but is engaging in a strong exhortation. Notice the apodosis: “stop boasting and being false to the truth” (μὴ κατακαυχᾶσθε καὶ ψεύδεσθε κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας). The exhortation is heightened by the adversative δέ that introduces the protasis and contrasts so vividly with “the gentleness that wisdom brings” at the end of the previous clause.

Oftentimes great effort is taken to closely define the nuances of difference in these words. More valuable than seeking to define and contrast each of these negative terms is to see the total disorder and unstable characteristics that emerge from the words in 3:15 and 16. The word “disorder” (ἀκαταστασία) recalls the description of the double-minded man of 1:8 as “unstable” (ἀκατάστατος) and the tongue in 3:8 as “restless” (ἀκατάστατον). Notice also the verbal connections to other sections with the references to “bitter jealousy” (ζῆλον πικρὸν) as in 3:11 and 4:2. This vice list could be summed up as describing confusion and disorder. The vivid contrast of the following virtue list in 3:17 can be seen in the emphasis on peace and harmony conveyed in the words that describe behavior derived from “above.” The English reader cannot appreciate the rhetorical flourishes heard in the original oral reading of the book. There are six consecutive words beginning with epsilon: ἡ δὲ ἄνωθεν σοφία πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή ἐστιν, ἔπειτα εἰρηνική, ἐπιεικής, εὐπειθής, μεστή ἐλέους. Then there are three words initiated by an alpha: ἀγαθῶν, ἀδιάκριτος, ἀνυπόκριτος. This careful alliteration contrasts graphically with the vice list which had no such alliteration. The contrast in the sound also sent a message of the difference between the behavioral disharmony from below and the harmonious order from above.

The final clause in 3:18 is close enough in sense to be properly placed but different enough to indicate its separate origin (note the unnecessary δέ). It is used here as an aphorism which rounds off the effective argument and transitions in thought to the following passage. This can be seen in its reference to peace-making, which is a fruit of the wisdom from above and is in contrast with the “wars” that characterize the admonition in 4:1ff. The participle τοῖς ποιοῦσιν most probably is a dative of agency: “And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace *by those who make (or work for) peace.*” The appropriate

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<sup>26</sup> R.A. Young, “A Classification of Conditional Sentences Based on Speech Act Theory,” *GTJ* 10, n.1 (1989): 29-49.

intertext is undoubtedly the beatitude of Jesus in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

It is unnecessary to explain further how this passage conveys the message of the book. This paragraph is the message of the book.

### JAMES 3:13 AND THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF JAMES

We have previously applied the topics of prominence and grouping and suggested the idea of discourse "peak" in the role of foreground prominence. We then called attention to James 3:13-18 and its appeal to divine and human wisdom as polar contrasts that focuses James' call to his readers to choose the lifestyle of a "friend of God." By recognizing this thematic peak, a reader can also better develop a mental representation of the entire discourse. "By reducing the flow of the texts to polar opposites, dialectical discourse not only clarifies the issues; it also serves as an aid to memory."<sup>27</sup>

How does this overall approach (from top down) view the book in its parts (from bottom up)? I suggest that the combination of imperative commands with nominatives of direct address (most often ἀδελφοί, "brothers") is the grammatical/cohesive tie that James utilizes to group his discourse into sections. This approach involves more than just noticing a repeated lexical device and seizing on it as a key. Each discrete section, introduced in this way, signals a new group of semantically related information as well. The thematic second person imperative in each section serves as the central clause with the following indicative clauses and/or clause complexes providing support for the mainline imperatival command. There may be additional imperatives (often in the third person) that expand further the command of the central clause/sentence and are then further supported by a series of indicative clauses. The main thrust of each section, in accord with the overall theme in the discourse peak in 3:13-18, is an appeal to readers to follow the divine viewpoint ("wisdom from above") by obeying the imperatival command that he has delivered. Consequently, his readers are exhorted to reject any human viewpoint ("wisdom not from above") about the ethical demands in the section.

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<sup>27</sup> Tollefson, "The Epistle of James," 63.

According to this proposal, the main sections of the book can be displayed as follows.

<b>Sections of James</b>		
<b>Section</b>	<b>Nominative of Address</b>	<b>Imperative Command/ Rhetorical Question</b>
1:2-15	ἀδελφοί μου	Πᾶσαν χαρὰν ἡγήσασθε
1:16-18	ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί	Μὴ πλανᾶσθε
1:19-27	ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί	Ἵστε plus ἔστω
2:1-13	ἀδελφοί μου	μὴ ἐν προσωπολημψίαις ἔχετε
2:14-26	ἀδελφοί μου	Τί τὸ ὄφελος
3:1-12	ἀδελφοί μου	Μὴ πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι γίνεσθε
3:13-18	ἐν ὑμῖν THEMATIC PEAK	Τίς σοφὸς καὶ ἐπιστήμων
4:1-10	ἐν ὑμῖν HORTATORY PEAK	Πόθεν πόλεμοι καὶ πόθεν μάχαι 10 imperatives in 4:7-10
4:11-12	ἀδελφοί μου	Μὴ καταλαεῖτε ἀλλήλων
4:13-17	οἱ λέγοντες	Ἄγε νῦν
5:1-6	οἱ πλούσιοι	Ἄγε νῦν . . . κλαύσατε
5:7-11	ἀδελφοί	Μακροθυμήσατε plus 4 imperatives
5:12-18	ἀδελφοί μου	μὴ ὀμνύετε
5:19-20	ἀδελφοί μου	γινωσκέτω

In this analysis, there are fourteen sections of the discourse in addition to the epistolary prescript. Each of these contributes its own unique semantic development of the main theme – namely, demonstrating behavior that accords with divine wisdom. A few comments are necessary about occasional departures from the otherwise uniform language features in each section. Three of the

sections begin with a rhetorical question rather than with an imperative (2:14-26; 3:13-18; 4:1-10). The first passage (2:14-26) could be viewed as a consequential application of the section beginning in 2:1, particularly continuing the theme of partiality as applied to the poor. I discuss these and many other details about the application of peak in James in my discourse commentary on the book.<sup>28</sup>

Section 4:1-10 begins with a question and immediately follows the *thematic* peak of the discourse (3:13-18). Commentators have noted that there are many verbal similarities in these passages and often take them as two sections of the same unit.<sup>29</sup> I suggest that 4:1-10 is a sub-unit of 3:13-4:10 and should also be considered the *hortatory* peak of the discourse. This is evidenced in the “zone of turbulence” created by the concentration of ten imperatives in 4:7-10.

This explanation of the linearization of James pays attention to the special way that he indicates foreground prominence by the use of peak. It also notes the ways that he uses the grammatical resources of his language to group his discourse to most effectively communicate the details of the theme embodied in his peak. With this approach, his readers can better develop a mental representation of the discourse at all levels. Finally, if his readers heed his exhortations, they will then become “whole” persons in their undivided loyalty to God.

Based on the above top down analysis, I suggest the following outline (i.e., macrostructure) of the letter, stressing its hortatory character. Bold points indicate their prominent roles as the thematic and hortatory peaks of the discourse.

Prescript	1:1
1. Be Joyful in Trials	1:2-15
2. Do Not Be Deceived about God's Goodness	1:16-18
3. Become a Good Hearer/Doer of the Word	1:19-27
4. Do Not Show Favoritism	2:1-13
5. Show Your Faith by Your Works	2:14-26
6. Be Consistent in Your Speech	3:1-12
7. <b>Follow the Wisdom of God</b>	3:13-18
8. <b>Become a Friend of God</b>	4:1-10
9. Do Not Speak Against One Another	4:11-12
10. Do Not Plan Presumptuously	4:13-17
11. You Rich Should Treat the Poor Justly	5:1-6
12. Wait Patiently for the Lord's Coming	5:7-11

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<sup>28</sup> William Varner, *James: A New Perspective* (Houston, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *James*, 267-69.

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|--------------------------------|---------|
| 13. Do Not Swear but Pray      | 5:12-18 |
| 14. Convert the Erring Brother | 5:19-20 |

With this type of analysis, the expositor can approach this book with a successful effort to “think James’ thoughts after him.” One of the great joys and challenges of expository preaching is that we do not impose our own pre-conceived structure on a text, but we attempt to draw out our structure and outline of the sermon from the features of the text itself. The type of analysis that we have applied to James is the necessary step to take so we can move from exegesis to exposition – with the accompanying blessings that attend such an effort!



## JOHN MACARTHUR IN MY LIFE AND MINISTRY

Irvin A. Busenitz, Th.D.  
Vice President for Academic Administration  
The Master's Seminary

For more than three decades, I have had the privilege of watching, up close and personal, the life and ministry of John MacArthur. As I reflect on these years of ministry association, there are more than a few things that have significantly impacted my life and ministry. This occasion provides an opportunity not only to express my appreciation to this man but also to give thanks to the Sovereign One who orchestrated it all through His divine providence.

It all began rather quietly. Though I had not met Dr. MacArthur personally, I was introduced to his ministry through my acquaintance with some of the Grace Church pastors during my early teaching days at Talbot Seminary. His commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture was vividly displayed through the lives of his disciples. It was evident that they were students of the Word; they held its Author in highest esteem and embraced its contents. Knowing that “a pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone after he has been fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40), I was eager to meet their mentor.

That opportunity arrived in the summer of 1977, when I was asked to help launch an extension campus for Talbot at Grace Church. I immediately noted (apart from its size, of course—on our first Sunday, my wife exclaimed, “this is like going to a crusade”) the supremacy of the Word. It was a shared perspective, one that I fully embraced. But Dr. MacArthur’s influence infused its foundational centrality with even greater intensity and tenacity. And, of course, a high view of God’s Word naturally leads to a high view of the God who is revealed in it. It was imperative that God’s Word not be compromised, not only in teaching and preaching but also in conduct and example—a commitment we observed soon and often.

While that was the genesis of Dr. MacArthur’s influence in my life, it was not the last. The subsequent years would prove to expand it exponentially. Some principles that were woven into the fabric of ministry were:

*Faithfulness to the Word of God.* There was a willingness to do what is right, regardless of the consequences.

*Commitment to the task.* In other words, “paying the price of preparation.” The fruit of his oft-repeated catchphrase, “take care of the depth and God will take care of the breadth” became a core principle that motivated every ministry effort.

*Humble, generous spirit.* I have repeatedly observed him embrace the little things of ministry, often at the expense of family time or personal pleasure. Whether it was a handwritten note, a phone call to give encouragement, or an early-morning stop by the hospital to pray with a son who had fractured his neck, he graciously gave of himself.

*Entrusting others.* He encouraged people to embrace the ministry opportunities that presented themselves, always eager to provide ministry outlets for others. His expanded ministry continually opened doors of service for others, at home and around the world!

*Positive outlook.* He thought the best about others and stood ready to defend them against rumor or gossip.

*Excellence.* From the quality of his sermons to the upkeep of building and grounds, everything was to declare the glory of God. This, in turn, promoted excellence in everyone's contribution to the ministry.

His influence was not limited to my own life and ministry but also extended into the lives of my wife and children. Every Woman's Grace became a weekly staple for my wife. My sons were faithfully taught the Word, first in the nursery and Sunday School, then in Awana and Discovery Club, and later in high school and college. My family and I are eternally grateful.

## A HUMBLE BROTHER WHOM GOD HAS EXALTED

Robert W. Provost, D.D.  
President  
Slavic Gospel Association – Loves Park, IL

My first contact with John Fullerton MacArthur, Jr. took place in November 1973 at the Laymen's Retreat at the Sawmill Creek Resort on Lake Erie. John was 34 years old and in his fifth year as the pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church. His preaching was phenomenal. Preaching from John 21, he kept saying things like, "Wait until you hear this." We had never heard anyone more excited about the Bible, and John's enthusiasm for God's Word was contagious.

The Moody Bible Institute Pastors' Conference in May 1977 marked my second exposure to John and his zealous exposition of the Scriptures. Then during my years at The Chapel in University Park (Akron, Ohio), John came several times to preach. A friendship developed and led to an invitation to join him for the transition of Los Angeles Baptist College into The Master's College.

Serving closely with him quickly revealed that John MacArthur lives what he preaches. Together we examined the biblical policies of LABC and determined certain adjustments to strengthen them. We worked toward bringing every aspect of TMC to a level of excellence, from student life and chapel to academics, athletics, and facilities. And every student was encouraged to spend a summer overseas on a missions assignment.

We began regular faculty and staff prayer meetings seeking the Lord, His wisdom, and provision for every need. The Lord was faithful to graciously answer our requests, often far beyond our expectations. In 1986 it became essential to establish The Master's Seminary. The Lord again gloriously answered our prayers and sent an outstanding team of humble professors, as well as the funds and students that were necessary to launch The Master's Seminary.

In November of 1989 I traveled to the Soviet Union for a three-week missions trip hosted by Christians who had endured persecution and remained faithful to the Lord. Pastor Yakov Dukhonchenko, following a prison term for preaching the gospel, had become a pastor, a leader of pastors, and then was also serving as the vice president of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the Soviet Union. When I asked if he had heard of John MacArthur, he replied, "Do you mean the brother who wrote the book *The Charismatics?*" I said, "Yes." He pounded his big fist on his desk while exclaiming, "I believe like that

brother.” *The Charismatics* had been “unofficially” translated and printed in Russian and John was already a highly respected author.

Later Pastor Dukhonchenko shared the startling news that the Berlin Wall was being dismantled. He was gravely concerned, saying, “The coming freedom will bring a flood of false teachers and our people are not ready for it. They will trust everyone who comes in the name of Christ. They have never been exposed to false teachers.” I responded, “If the Lord allows me to serve in your country, my highest priority will be to help you maintain a doctrinal fence around your churches.” Before long, Dr. MacArthur would become God’s key instrument to help protect their doctrinal convictions and strengthen their churches.

A few months later, John joined me in Kiev for a conference with more than 600 humble pastors from the eleven time zones of the USSR. It was a glorious event. We had never heard men sing like that, or pray the way that they prayed. Throughout the sessions the pastors were in full agreement with John’s teaching. Their doctrinal traditions had been strongly held, and John’s expositions strengthened their faith through the additional Scriptural support of their convictions.

While Dr. MacArthur’s great knowledge of the Bible was deeply appreciated, the loving acceptance of the pastors stemmed rather from their assessment that John was a fellow, humble servant of Christ. He was their brother. In the extended Q. & A. sessions John graciously answered every question with three or four Scripture verses. Soon thereafter we began to translate John’s commentaries and books into Russian, and he dedicated *Charismatic Chaos* to Pastor Yakov Dukhonchenko.

John then invited Pastor Dukhonchenko and his assistant, Pastor Grigory Komendant, to come to Los Angeles for a visit. We spent a day in the college board room comparing our doctrinal distinctives. After several hours of discussion, Pastor Dukhonchenko joyfully declared, “Finally we have found someone outside of the Soviet Union who believes as we do.”

Later, The Master’s College granted the Doctor of Divinity to Pastor Grigory Komendant and The Master’s Seminary granted its first honorary degree, the Doctor of Divinity, to Pastor Yakov Dukhonchenko. Over the years D.D.s have also been granted to a former president of the UECB of Russia, Piotr Konovalchik; to the founding president of Irpin Biblical Seminary, Alexei Brinza; and to the current president of the UECB of Belarus, Viktor Krutko.

The Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists continued to invite Dr. MacArthur for a total of ten pastors’ conferences in Kiev, Ukraine; Minsk, Belarus; Moscow and Voronezh, Russia; Almaty, Kazakhstan, and Bucharest, Romania. Partnership with the Slavic Gospel Association helped make possible both the conferences and a continuing stream of Russian versions of John’s publications, which has grown to more than 300,000 copies.

Since the Lord granted the evangelicals of the USSR freedom to worship in 1989, Dr. John MacArthur has been their principal theological influence. Evangelical pastors, church planters, and seminary students

throughout the nations of the former Soviet Union are using John's *Study Bible*, commentaries, and other books. Graduates of The Master's Seminary, and their disciples, have been training pastors at Irpin Biblical Seminary, Novosibirsk Biblical Theological Seminary, Samara Theological Seminary, Odessa Theological Seminary, Minsk Theological Seminary, Almaty Bible Institute, Baku Bible Institute, Dushanbe Bible Institute, International Bible Institute of Ukraine, and in the Strategic Bible Institutes and Antioch Initiative programs of SGA.

Underlying all of this tremendous progress of the gospel is Dr. MacArthur's reputation as a humble servant of Christ, who has a special place in his heart for those who have suffered for their faith and remained true to the Lord.....he is their beloved brother.

John is a humble servant of the most high God, and I am blessed to call him my brother and my friend.



## LEADERSHIP AND DEDICATION

Lance Quinn  
Pastor-Teacher  
The Bible Church of Little Rock (AR)

On this occasion, the 25th anniversary of The Master's Seminary, I want to commend you, John, for your leadership and dedication. TMS is a first-class educational institution which is making such a difference in countless lives! With over a thousand graduates, you have truly reproduced yourself in the men who have come in and through the school, and they are now faithfully laboring under your tall shadow. They have imbibed the seminary's theological commitments, as well as its practical philosophy of ministry, which has served to launch them into ministries all over the world! Speaking as just one student, who was an eyewitness to your leadership and perseverance during the initial formation of The Master's Seminary, I express my gratitude to God for your steadfastness in Christ. You and all of the capable professors, administrators, and staff, have done so much in helping to equip the next generation for the global spreading of the gospel, and I am sincerely grateful to God for your dedication and service to so many of us.

During this milestone time of reflection, I would like to acknowledge the impact you've personally made in my life and ministry during these last 25 years. I want to pinpoint your own particular diligence and faithfulness in leading TMS over these years. Your role as President was foundational in helping to shape and mold me into who I am today as the Pastor-Teacher of The Bible Church of Little Rock, in Little Rock, Arkansas. Both your leadership at the seminary and your role as Pastor-Teacher of Grace Community Church, allowed me to see you as an accomplished theologian—leading an institution of young men who were eager, aspiring preachers—as well as a successful local church pastor, expositionally proclaiming the Word of God in a most faithful and God-honoring way. During my time at TMS/GCC, I often saw the clear evidence of God's grace at work through you in leading the seminary and pastoring Grace Church.

I could only slightly envision what the Lord was doing through your starting The Master's Seminary back in the fall of 1986. But now, 25 years later, I can see that your desire for the training of multitudes of young men for pastoral ministry is now having a worldwide impact for the sake of the kingdom of Christ! I am truly thankful and overwhelmed by the goodness of God to you and your personal response to His kindnesses. I can say without hesitation that I was one of those beneficiaries of the Lord's abundant mercy during my time there, and I have you—by the grace of God—to chiefly thank for this wonderful

blessing. For any fruit I've experienced in ministry here in Little Rock, I can trace it back to your powerful influence upon me. I note with praise to God the words of Hebrews 13:7—"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." I could only wish that one day it would be said of me that I imitated your faith.

On a very personal note, I also want to say a word to you about your role as a father-figure in my life. As a young man who did not grow up with a father in the home, you have been used by the Lord in becoming like my own Dad. You and I have always been able to discuss anything and everything, from the latest theological and ministerial issues of the day to current national and international events, as well as to our common lives as husbands and fathers. You have been a model husband and father, even though I know that in these areas of seeking to follow you, I fall woefully short.

I love you and pray that the Lord will bring you much joy as you reflect on the 25th anniversary of The Master's Seminary!

## REFLECTIONS ON JOHN MACARTHUR

Jim Rickard  
Chairman of the Board  
The Master's College and Seminary

As the Board vice-chairman of Los Angeles Baptist College, it was my duty to set up interviews in our search for a new president. Little did I know when I set up a meeting in December 1984 with a nearby pastor that I would be meeting, not only the next president of our college, but also a man who would profoundly change my life. It was the first time I met John MacArthur and I was amazed during the interview to see his commitment to truth, his love of Scripture, and his desire to serve God selflessly. It was an easy decision to ask him to become the President of the college which soon would be called The Master's College. The next year followed with the founding of The Master's Seminary. It is amazing to ponder all that God has done in the last 25 years through the leadership of John MacArthur, a unique servant of the Lord.

Growing up in a Christ-centered home and attending a church faithful to Scripture, I always assumed I had been taught well and knew the Bible. As I joined Grace Community and sat under the teaching and preaching of John, it did not take me long to realize that I was embarking on a journey that would open a whole new level of understanding of Scripture. John had a unique gift of analyzing the Word and then clearly communicating it so that the meaning of Scripture just leapt from its pages. As I have been a member of Grace Community Church and served with John over the past 26 years at The Master's College and The Master's Seminary, I have been able to get an inside view of the man, his family, his leadership style, and his personal integrity. This man of God is real, genuine, humble, and consistent in his faith and walk with Christ.

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of John as the President of The Master's Seminary. The Board of the seminary meets three times a year and this past October Bob Provost dedicated a chapel service to review the past 25 years of the seminary and to recount how God has so incredibly blessed it. The message was not only a cause for celebration in remembering how God had guided us through the years, but it was also a reminder of the serious stewardship responsibility that John has in leading the seminary. Today there are over 1,100 men in ministry around the world who received their training here at The Master's Seminary.

I remember so clearly how John began to talk to me in the summer of 1985 about his desire to start a seminary for men to prepare them for the ministry. I agreed with him that having a seminary focused on expository preaching was greatly needed, but I don't think he needed my encouragement –

he was well on his way in following God's leading to start The Master's Seminary.

What stands out in the history of the seminary is the amazing quality of leadership and godly scholarship God brought here under John's presidency. God led extraordinary men here who were leaders in their own right, yet were humble servants who shared John's passion for Scripture and preaching that focused on verse-by-verse exposition. I have watched these men serve faithfully year after year and they are a credit to the Lord they serve. As I travel in my own ministry, Stewardship Services Foundation, I now meet men in churches all around the world who graduated from The Master's Seminary and speak in glowing terms of the special education they received in this place. Not only were they given the academic training that they needed, but they were impacted by the lives and godliness of the men who taught them. Over and over I hear these pastors say that they owe all that they are to The Master's Seminary.

John's leadership at the seminary has been extraordinary – his love of preaching, his commitment to Scripture both are the driving force that is felt by every man who has ever attended. John gives himself to the students and does all he can to help prepare them for effective ministry. He is the catalyst that provides the burning desire to elevate Scripture above all else. He excites the students with the privilege of preaching the Word, yet reminds them soberly of their duty to be men of integrity and faithfulness in every area of their lives.

My personal friendship with John has placed me in a unique position to see him in the good times and the bad. I have watched him face huge financial challenges with great trust in his Lord, and then watched him rejoice as God miraculously provided. I have watched John when he is relaxed and away from ministry, either traveling, playing golf, or spending time with his family. He is always the same – his mind is always on Scripture and his personal integrity and faithful daily walk with Christ is as real as it gets. I have watched him now for 26 years and never once have been disappointed – his life, his teaching, his faithfulness have impacted my life more than anything else has. What a privilege I have enjoyed!

John MacArthur not only founded The Master's Seminary, but he has also given it life for these past 25 years. It has been my privilege to be along for the ride and I am continually amazed at what God is doing through the work of this ministry. "To God be the glory, great things He has done."

## **THE WRITINGS OF DR. JOHN MACARTHUR: A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY (1973–2011)**

Dennis M. Swanson, D. Min.  
Director  
The Master's Seminary Library

Dr. John MacArthur's first book, *The Church: The Body of Christ* (Zondervan), was published in 1973. Since then he has authored more than 200 books, articles, and essays. *The MacArthur Study Bible* is now available in three English versions (NKJV, NASU, and ESV), has been translated into eight different languages, and, worldwide, has well over one million copies in print. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* series (MNTC) will soon be completed, covering the entire New Testament

This select bibliography of English titles (many of his books have been translated and published in several languages) is broken down into several categories and represents the largest part of his written contribution to the advancement of the Gospel, the refutation of error, and the instruction of God's people.

Works such as study guides, booklets, and titles which were re-issued with simple title changes and no revision to actual content by the same publisher have not been listed, nor have titles duplicated in electronic media, such as *The John MacArthur Bundle* (Logos Software). Articles which were adapted for use in The Master's College publication, *The Current*, and The Master's Seminary newsletter, *The Master's Mantle*, also have not been included in this listing.

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