

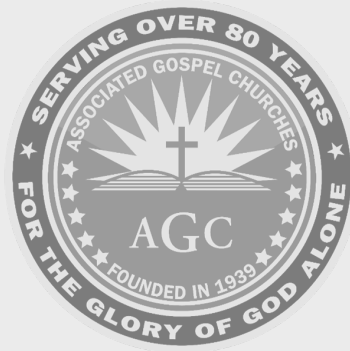
— The AGC —

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Rooted in the Great Commandment (*Matthew 22:36-40*) and the Great Commission (*Matthew 28:18-20*), and recognized by the federal government as an official ecclesiastical endorsing agency, the Associated Gospel Churches (AGC) exists to represent Biblically Christ-centered churches, for the purpose of recruiting, endorsing, educating and supporting ordained men to serve as chaplains—pastors in uniform—in publicly-restricted access institutions.

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## THE AGC JOURNAL

*Published by*

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The views represented in this Journal are not necessarily endorsed by the AGC administration or Chaplains but exists to provide information about the Christian history of our great nation. The main purpose of this Journal is to glorify Christ and honor God as much as is possible. This is done by bringing informative articles of God's grace and mercy to those who are interested in the Gospel ministry of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Whether civilian or serving as a full-time chaplain or pastor, this journal is for you to read, be edified and enjoy.

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## **FOR CHRIST AND COUNTRY**

*υποφέρουν από δυσκολίες μαζί μου, ως καλός  
στρατιώτης του Ιησού Χριστού*

*– II Tim 2:3*

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## **LETTER FROM THE EDITOR**

**G**iven the numerous hats that a chaplain must wear, it's nice to have a toolbox as a source of inspiration and encouragement for Christ ministry. This is the theme for the AGC Journal. This is a place where conservative, Biblical evangelical chaplains can go and read and interact with the issues that face their ministry for the cause of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Journal is an extension of the Associated Gospel Churches, an ecclesiastical endorsing agency for those chaplains serving in a ministry for those who work in the military, fire, police, hospitals, VA and any other service outside of the local church needing spiritual support. AGC chaplains wish to spread the Gospel of Christ in a world which needs the hope of the Christian message where sinners are saved by the grace of God.

The articles in this Journal are for the edification and knowledge of anyone who desires to be challenged by the truth of the Scripture. It is a journal for chaplains, written by chaplains and is provided to get the story of what chaplains do as they serve the men and women of our great nation. It also addresses from a Biblical perspective some of the current thoughts and trends facing chaplains in the military, often giving some insight on how to Scripturally discern the right path to walk down in an otherwise complex and confusing world.

The theme of this issue is: *Keeping the Moral Compass on Target in Ministry*. To accomplish that, we have articles which tackle some difficult subjects and give some perceptions on Scriptural solutions. While the reader may not agree with the author of an article, at least the articles

presented here will offer some ideas and (hopefully) give spiritual nourishment for those seeking wisdom from God's Word.

## **PROFESSIONAL CHAPLAIN ITEMS OF INTEREST**

***The Chaplain's toolbox for truth: "Exegetical Fallacies: Common Mistakes Every Student of the Bible Must Avoid"*** by Dr. Bill Barrick

Dr. Barrick is back by popular demand with an article of the importance of rightly dividing the Word of truth. Taken with his permission, this article was first presented at the Shepherd's Conference in 2006. This piece delves into the importance of how the Chaplain needs to do his due diligence in extracting the accuracy of God's Word for ministry. Written by a friend of AGC and retired seminary professor Dr. Barrick. Dr. Barrick understands the military as the father of sons who have served in the Army and Marines.

***The Chaplains' toolbox for Dealing with the Scourge of Suicide: "Self-Destruction of the Imago Dei: Christianity as a Protective Against Suicidality"*** by Dr. Stephen Kim

In this article written by Chaplain (Dr.) Stephen Kim, he goes through some insights from training as a scholar and active-duty Army chaplain. Some of what he mentions in this article may be controversial, but he balances it out with some good practical advice for the chaplain called to minister to individuals who struggle with suicide. In this work, he shows how Christianity helps in fighting the scourge of suicide. Armed with the knowledge presented in this critique, the Christian chaplain should have confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit over modern psychology.

***Modern Events: The Chaplain's toolbox for the War on Terror in Gaza: "Terrorism, The Church, and Israel"*** by Dr. Kurt Johnson

When tragedy hit Israel last Oct 7th, the response of the western world was tepid at best. Instead of moral outrage from Christians, the event started a series of events in the media and even in many churches which was inconsistent at best and worse yet, downright antisemitic. In this article, Dr. Kurt Johnson makes a Biblical case to show how Christians should respond to the Oct 7th Hamas terror strike and support the nation of Israel and its subsequent war on terrorists. He gives some Scriptural answers as well as background information on America's

traditional support of the modern Jewish nation. His article shows how a Biblically informed chaplain can build a case to explain why we should support the modern state of Israel.

***The Chaplain's Toolbox For Help in Crisis Counseling: "The Gospel Light in the Valley of the Shadow of Death" by Jay Skeens***

Chaplain Jason "Jay" Skeens is an army chaplain serving in the 82nd Parachute Regiment. He is someone who has been there, done that and shares some of his experiences and observations for crisis ministry in the middle of a heavy op schedule. Here is an unvarnished, boots on the ground account of understanding the Scriptural aspects of those who have been traumatized due to their mission as a warfighter. His grasp of the effects of theodicy (the question of evil) plays into not only comprehending the problems of moral injury, but also offers solutions of how to help those suffering from the effects of war and re-adjusting after the last trigger was pulled.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### ***The Chaplain's Toolbox on Current Affairs***

Considering the busy schedules chaplains have, these book reports are here to help the chaplain find and read some of the most current books out there to lend support for ministry. They are here for a quick glance at what is being written in the last year or to whet the appetite for the one who is wanting to read more on the particular subject. Both reviews are excellent and insightful, and we are especially blessed to have our own AGC chaplains give their opinions on these matters. Special thanks to chaplains Stephen Huebscher and Geoff Bischoff.

If you would be interested in doing a book review for the Journal, contact me through the home office.

***"Dispensationalism Revisited: A Twenty-First Century Restatement"***  
*Edited by Kevin Bauder & R. Bruce Compton. Reviewed by Geoff Bischoff*

This book is a series of articles on different aspects of modern 21st century thought on the doctrine of Dispensationalism. While some lean towards Classic Dispensationalism and others are Progressive Dispensationalist, these articles articulate the latest thinking and research in the important doctrine. As a self-admitted non-dispensationalist,

Bischoff offers some excellent thoughts in this review which are very cogent to the understanding of how we should interpret Scripture.

***“A Basic Guide to the Just War Tradition: Christian Foundations and Practices”*** by Eric Patterson. *Book Review by Stephen Huebscher.*

Known for his writings on Christian ethics, Patterson has a simple, yet masterful book on the subject of war from a Christian perspective. Skillfully articulated by Chaplain Huebscher, this is a must for those chaplains who are asked the question, “is it a sin to fight in a war and be a Christian.” A must read!

## OTHER ITEMS

***Informing Chaplains of Other AGC Ministries: Training Zambian Military Chaplains***

For the past three years, AGC has partnered with Central African Baptist University (CABU) to help train active-duty military chaplains in the Zambian Army and Air Force. So far, AGC has sent four retired AGC Chaplains (two of them have gone twice) to go over and hold one week training sessions on topics ranging from spiritual leadership to Biblical counseling to Theology. The program has been well received by not only the Zambian military, but now other African nations are looking at the model that CABU and AGC have put together and have expressed interest in participating in this program. As we say in the Navy, a BZ (Bravo Zulu-Well Done!) to Jay Hartranft, Cliff Jones and Edward Jackson for not only representing the AGC, but to be used of God for a special ministry

If you have a comment or would like more information on something you may have read, feel free to write and contact me through the AGC.

For God’s Glory,

*Bob Freiberg, editor*

*CDR, CHC, USN-ret, M.Div, Th.M, D.D., D. Min.*



## EXEGETICAL FALLACIES: COMMON MISTAKES EVERY STUDENT OF THE BIBLE MUST AVOID

*William D. Barrick*

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*Dr. Barrick is a Professor Emeritus on Old Testament at The Master's Seminary. He has a son who is an active-duty Marine Colonel and has been a supporter of the AGC for years. He has his own web page at [DrBarrick.org](http://DrBarrick.org) and offers free Hebrew lessons to those interested in learning the language of the Hebrew Scriptures.*

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Over twenty years ago, D. A. Carson published his superb volume entitled *Exegetical Fallacies* (Baker, 1984). In it he covers the areas of word-study fallacies, grammatical fallacies, logical fallacies, and presuppositional and historical fallacies. Personally, I think it should be required reading for every seminary student without exception. Since Carson did such a wonderful job of covering the issues, what areas should I cover in this seminar? Repetition is instructive, but it can also be boring, unless there are some new twists to the presentation. Therefore, it is my aim to focus on the subtitle for this session: “Common Mistakes Every Student of the Bible Must Avoid.” Forty-two years of preaching, thirty-eight years of teaching, and over twenty years of Bible translation ministries provide an abundance of personal examples. Lest this session become a litany of *mea culpas*, however, I will not reveal how many of the following mistakes have been my own at one time or another.

## THE EVIDENTIAL FALLACY

In the evidential system of American and British jurisprudence the concept of *prima facie* (literally, “at first view”) evidence is very important. *Prima facie* evidence is evidence that is sufficient to raise a presumption of fact or to establish the fact in question, unless evidence of equal veracity is presented in rebuttal. Included in this evidential system is the presumption of innocence until proven guilty and that witnesses must present facts, not opinions. In the area of biblical studies this evidential methodology stands in opposition to the hermeneutics of doubt (or, the Troelschian principle of skeptical criticism).<sup>1</sup> As Robert Dick Wilson observed, “our text of the Old Testament is presumptively correct...its meaning is on the whole clear and trustworthy.”<sup>2</sup> Whether we are discussing the Old Testament’s historical narratives or the Gospel narratives, evangelicals should approach the biblical text with a presumption of factuality.

One of the greatest fallacies students of Scripture can commit is to fail to adequately recognize the *prima facie* nature of biblical evidence. It is fallacious to condition acceptance of the biblical text upon corroboration by external evidence. When the student comes upon interpretive problems in the biblical text, he must allow the text to speak and must accept the testimony of the text with a presumption of accuracy. Therefore, reading about the Chaldeans in Genesis 11:28-31, for example, should not cause us to doubt the veracity of the text because the extrabiblical Assyrian records do not mention Chaldeans until the 9th century B.C. The Assyrian evidence is not contemporary with Moses (the author of Genesis 11) nor with Babel (the historical setting of Genesis 11). Acceptance of the Assyrian evidence over the biblical evidence denigrates the biblical record and treats it with skepticism rather than as *prima facie* evidence. As Kenneth Kitchen points out, inconsistency dominates the appeal to Assyrian historical texts, since the

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<sup>1</sup> See V. Philips Long, “Historiography of the Old Testament,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. by David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 154, 169.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, rev. by Edward J. Young (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 9.

Egyptian pharaohs of the period from the patriarchs to Moses also do not appear anywhere in the Assyrian records.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, we err when we automatically assume that every major interpretive problem is due to an inaccuracy within the text itself. As we deal with problems in the biblical text, we must assume that it is accurate until proven otherwise by equally accurate, equally authentic, and equally ancient evidence. For example, when we read in the superscription to Psalm 60 that Joab slew 12,000 Edomites, we ought to accept that as *prima facie* evidence. Of equal standing are the records in 2 Samuel 8:13 and 1 Chronicles 18:12. The former reveals that David slew 18,000 Arameans; the latter declares that Abishai slew 18,000 Edomites. Are these three contradictory accounts, or three complementary accounts? Perhaps the differences in the individuals involved reflect the chain of command. David, as king, was commander-in-chief. Joab, being next in command as the chief of the armies, was the field commander and Abishai, a subordinate officer to Joab, was over one contingent of the field army participating in this particular action. Variation in the numbers of enemy casualties might reflect different methods of calculating the casualties at separate levels of the chain of command or different times for certain counts prior to a settled statistic. Possibly, the different casualty counts indicate different engagements within the greater battle or even a series of battles. As for the difference between Edom and Aram, we should keep in mind that both Edomites and Arameans participated in the campaign against David's forces (see 2 Sam 8:5; cp. 1 Kgs 11:17 [the Aramean Hadad with Edomites]). The target area was Edom, but Arameans were present and had also created a diversion in Aramea (Syria) where David had gone to quell the uprising.

Another example from the OT might help illustrate the difference between what current archaeologists and historians are saying about the text as compared to a proper understanding of the text itself. Consider the exodus from Egypt. Grant Osborne mentions the lack of primary physical evidence for the exodus.<sup>4</sup> He then observes that "there is a fair amount of secondary evidence for such a migration and *sufficient data to accept the historicity of the*

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<sup>3</sup> "If Assyrian mentions are the sine qua non (the absolute criterion) for a king's existence, then Egypt and her kings could not have existed before the specific naming of (U)shilkanni, Shapataka, and Ta(ha)rqa in 716-679!" (K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003], 12).

<sup>4</sup> Grant R. Osborne, "Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/4 (Dec 2005): 685.

events.”<sup>5</sup> That kind of thinking is antithetical to the concept of *a priori* evidence and demeans the authority and accuracy of Scripture. The Scripture is itself sufficient evidence to accept the historicity of the events. We ought not to wait for “sufficient data to accept” any declaration of Scripture.

### THE SUPERIOR KNOWLEDGE FALLACY

Exegetical problems most often arise due to our own ignorance rather than any fault in the text itself. It has become customary among evangelical scholars to resort to textual emendation in order to explain some difficult texts. For example, Alfred Hoerth resorts to scribal glosses for the mention of “Chaldeans” in Genesis 11:28<sup>6</sup> and a later “editorial touch” in his treatment of the phrase “in the land of Rameses” in Genesis 47:11.<sup>7</sup> His preference for later textual revision as an explanation makes his accusation against critical scholars (“To accept the biblical account is now said to be naïve”<sup>8</sup>) ring hollow. It also contradicts his own principle that it is not a sound practice to emend “the biblical text to make the identification fit.”<sup>9</sup> Scholars too often pursue many such textual emendations merely because the interpreter has insufficient knowledge to make sense of the text as it stands. Ignorance should never be an excuse to emend the text in order to make it understandable to the modern western mind. Above all else, the evangelical exegete/expositor must accept the biblical text as the inerrant and authoritative Word of God. Adhering consistently to this declaration of faith will require an equal admission of one’s own ignorance and inability to resolve every problem. Our ignorance, however, should never become the excuse for compromising the integrity of the Scriptures. Our first assumption should be that we are in error, rather than applying the hermeneutics of doubt to the text.

According to Francis Andersen, “The notorious difficulties of the book of Job have been largely blamed on a corrupt text; but it is more likely, in my opinion, that much of the incoherence is due to the artistic representation of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.; emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 59.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 156 n. 14, 166 n. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 225.

the turbulent outbursts and hysterical cries of rage and grief.”<sup>10</sup> Due to his work with David Noel Freedman for the *Micah* volume in the Anchor Bible series, they decided that the unusual and sometimes “crazy” character of the text “was exactly that. It is an effective rendition of the sobs and screams of a person who has lost all self-control in paroxysms of rage and grief.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the classical Hebrew authors of both Job and Micah really did know the language better than modern Hebraists.

## THE WORD STUDY FALLACY

Word studies are popular, easily obtained from available resources, and an easy way to procure sermon content. However, word studies are also subject to radical extrapolations and erroneous applications.<sup>12</sup> It is not always possible to strike exegetical gold by extracting a word from the text for close examination. Word studies alone will not suffice. Indeed, over-occupation with word studies is a sign of laziness and ignorance involved in much of what passes for biblical exposition in our times. Nigel Turner, an eminent New Testament Greek scholar, correctly summarized the issue as follows:

Just as a sentence is more revealing than a single word, so the examination of a writer’s syntax and style is that much more important to a biblical commentator. It is not surprising that fewer books have been written on this subject than on vocabulary, because whereas students of vocabulary can quickly look up lists of words in concordances and indices, in the field of syntax the study is more circuitous. There is no help except in a few selective grammars and monographs, so that the worker really must work his way through all the texts in Greek.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Francis I. Andersen, “Linguistic Coherence in Prophetic Discourse,” in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman*, edited by Astrid B. Beck, et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 147. Cp. John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 3: “The many rare words and textual disturbances make the Hebrew text of Job one of the most obscure in the OT. The ancient versions testify to the fact that many passages were unintelligible even to the earliest translators.”

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 148. Cp. Delbert R. Hillers, *Micah*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 10: “But in the more corrupt passages of the book—and Micah is often placed among the worst books in the canon in this respect—so many conjectures have been proposed that it would be impossible to list them all even if it made any sense to do so.”

<sup>12</sup> See Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 25-66 (“Word-Study Fallacies”) for a fuller discussion.

<sup>13</sup> Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965), 2-3.

While we might decry over-emphasis on philology or etymology, we must recognize that the choice of individual words was significant to the writers of Scripture. It is legitimate for the exegete to ask, “Why did the writer choose this term as opposed to one of its synonyms?” Robert Renehan offers the following explanation:

Whether Euripides wrote “δεῖ” / [“ought”] or “χρή” / [“must”] in a given passage is hardly of metaphysical import. But we must assume that he made a choice between them. This is sufficient justification for concerning ourselves with the problem. It made a difference to the poet; it should make a difference to us. This planet, I do not doubt, shall never want for people to despise such problems and those who try to resolve them. Such contempt is founded upon the remarkable premise that one who manifests a concern for minutiae must of necessity be both indifferent to and unequal to profound problems. The Greeks, on the contrary, in their simplicity had contrived a word to express this reverence before even the smallest truth; and that word is “φιλαλήθεια” [“love of truth”].<sup>14</sup>

Study of the words alone will not present us with a consistent interpretation or theology. This is one of the misleading aspects of theological dictionaries/wordbooks. We learn far more about obedience/disobedience or sacrifice and sin from the full statement of a passage like 1 Samuel 15:22-23 than we will from word studies of key terms like “sacrifice,” “obey,” or “sin” in the text. As a matter of fact, as Moisés Silva reminds us, “We learn much more about the doctrine of sin by John’s statement, ‘Sin is the transgression of the law,’ than by a word-study of ἁμαρτία; similarly, tracing the history of the word ἅγιος is relatively unimportant for the doctrine of sanctification once we have examined Romans 6–8 and related passages.”<sup>15</sup>

John Sanders, in *A God Who Risks*, interprets “παραδίδωμι” with one meaning (“hand over”) in every use of the word in John’s Gospel.<sup>16</sup> He uses this argumentation to claim that Jesus merely said that Judas would “hand him over,” not “betray him.” God has only present and past knowledge,

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Renehan, *Greek Textual Criticism: A Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 134.

<sup>15</sup> Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 28.

<sup>16</sup> John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 98.

therefore Jesus could not have known what Judas was really going to do. In other words, God cannot know the future. In addition, by applying the meaning “strengthen” to all three Hebrew words employed to describe God’s “hardening” of Pharaoh’s heart (*hāzaq*, *kābēd*, and *qāšāh*), Sanders has glossed over the clear contextual meaning of these words in their individual occurrences to purge any deterministic sense from the wording of the text.<sup>17</sup> In this way he proposes that “God strengthened Pharaoh’s heart in his rebellion in the hopes that it would help him come to his senses and repent.”<sup>18</sup> Sander’s problem is that he depends too heavily upon word studies, which he skewed to his presuppositions rather than listening to Scripture as a whole or to the individual statements in context. In order to pursue proper word studies, the student must emphasize current usage in each context (*usus loquendi*). Any linguistic aids are virtually useless apart from the author’s context.

### THE FALLACY OF READING BETWEEN THE LINES

As I grow older and (hopefully) wiser, I have less and less interest about the white spaces in the Word. We have enough to occupy us in understanding and applying what the Word says. What the Bible student must do is to focus on what the Scriptures say, not on what he thinks the Scriptures imply. One example of this fallacy is the trinitarian interpretation of the four living creatures’ crying out “Holy, holy, holy” in Revelation 4:8.<sup>19</sup> The multiple adjectival declaration is an emphatic Semitic triplet. Other such triplets include “a ruin, a ruin, a ruin” (Eze 21:27) or “land, land, land” (Jer 22:29). What kind of threefold existence might the creative interpreter dream up for these occurrences?

This fallacy falls into the category of logical fallacies that Carson discusses in *Exegetical Fallacies*.<sup>20</sup> The unwarranted associative fallacy “occurs when a word or phrase triggers off an associated idea, concept, or experience that

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 121. See, also, A. B. Caneday, “Putting God at Risk: A Critique of John Sander’s View of Providence,” *Trinity Journal* 20/2 (Fall 1999): 156.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Edward Hindson, *Approaching Armageddon* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 88.

<sup>20</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 117 (perhaps an “unwarranted associative jump”).

bears no close relation to the text at hand, yet is used to interpret the text.”<sup>21</sup> Seminarians applying Philippians 4:13 (“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”) to taking an exam in New Testament Introduction are stretching the text. In the context Paul speaks of contentment in the midst of poverty, hunger, and suffering. Someone who appeals to Paul’s statement in the expectation of turning water to wine, healing a sick person, or smuggling Bibles into China are doing more than stretching the application—they are abusing the text.

### THE HEBREW VERB FALLACY

One of the most misunderstood and debated areas of biblical (or, classical) Hebrew grammar involves the Hebrew verb system. “Perfect” and “imperfect” are unfortunate names for the two major Hebrew verb forms. Therefore, many Hebraists prefer to employ the transliterations *qatal* and *yiqtol* or the names “suffix conjugation” and “prefix conjugation.” Deciding what to call these two categories of verbs, however, is but a small matter compared to defining their distinctive usages or meanings. How one defines the distinctions has a great deal to do with how these verbs affect one’s translation and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible’s text. Gary A. Long, in *Grammatical Concepts 101 for Biblical Hebrew*, comments that the “perfective aspect” (= the suffix conjugation or *qatal*) “views a situation from the *outside*, as whole and complete.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore he describes the perfective by explaining that it expresses the *totality* of the situation, without dividing up its internal temporal structure. The *whole* situation is presented as an undivided whole. The beginning, middle, and end are rolled up into one...it makes no attempt to divide the situation into various phases.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Gary A. Long, *Grammatical Concepts 101 for Biblical Hebrew: Learning Biblical Hebrew Grammatical Concepts through English Grammar* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 92 (emphasis is Long’s own).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 93 (emphasis is Long’s). Waltke and O’Connor emphasize that “the perfective does not emphasize the completeness of a situation. Earlier researchers commonly erred in characterizing the suffix conjugation as indicating completed action, instead of indicating a *complete* situation” — Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §30.1d (emphasis is theirs). It behooves the careful exegete to be equally distinct and accurate when it comes to the terms “completed” and “complete.” They are not identical in meaning when discussing the grammar of Hebrew verbs.



For the “imperfective aspect” (= the prefix conjugation or *yiqtol*) Long observes that the “imperfective aspect...views a situation from the *inside*. It considers the internal temporal structure of a situation.”<sup>24</sup> Examples of what imperfectivity might involve in any given context include such things as repeated or habitual actions, actions in progress, and completed actions without a view to result.<sup>25</sup> In other words, in contrast to the suffix conjugation, the prefix conjugation does attempt to divide a situation into various phases (beginning, middle, or end), rather than looking at it as a totality.

Long’s distinctions are in general agreement with the more technical discussions of Joüon and Muraoka. They indicate that one of the primary characteristics of the suffix conjugation is that its aspect refers to action that is “unique or instantaneous.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, they remind us that “The *unity* of the action can, and sometimes must, be emphasized in our languages.”<sup>27</sup> It is instructive to consider some of their examples:

Judges 19:30 — “Nothing like this has *ever* happened [perfect/*qatal*]” (NAU) = “such a thing has *never* (*not even once*) been done”

Isaiah 66:8 — “Who has heard [perfect/*qatal*] such a thing?” = “who has *ever* heard?”

One must be aware, however, that Joüon and Muraoka point out several exceptions to this simplified view of the suffix conjugation.<sup>28</sup> As with any element of biblical Hebrew grammar, there is the potential for exceptions.

For the *yiqtol* (prefix conjugation) Joüon and Muraoka state that the aspect may be “unique or repeated, instantaneous or durative.”<sup>29</sup> It is in their discussion of stative verbs, however, that they come closest to the kind of values attributed to *qatal* and *yiqtol* that were observed by Long. The suffix conjugation stative verb appears to merit a translation employing a form of

<sup>24</sup> Long, *Grammatical Concepts* 101, 94 (emphasis is Long’s).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. and rev. by T. Muraoka, Subsidia Biblica 14/I-II (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1996), §112*d*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis is Joüon and Muraoka’s).

<sup>28</sup> Joüon and Muraoka tend to categorize *qatal* as a past tense and *yiqtol* as a future tense (§§112*f, h*, 113*a*). This tense definition of the Hebrew verb forms is unconvincing and weak.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, §113*b*.

the verb *be* while Joüon and Muraoka present the prefix conjugation overwhelmingly with a translation employing a form of the verb *become*.<sup>30</sup> In other words, a stative verb represents a state of *being* in the suffix conjugation, but a state of *becoming* in the prefix conjugation. This grammatical observation is significant for the interpretation of Genesis 1:2 (the verb is the suffix conjugation: “was”—not “became”). Recognizing this distinction provides a major argument against the so-called Gap Theory (which proposes that the condition of the earth *became* chaotic as the result of God’s judgment of Satan prior to the six days of creation).

Obviously, context is the 500-pound gorilla in exegeting the Hebrew text. Context will consistently be the defining and refining factor when the exegete works for as objective an interpretation as possible. In each situation the exegete must first identify the grammar and then ask, “So what? What is the exegetical significance of this form in this passage?” The task of exegesis can easily fall victim to either the extreme of over-simplification or the extreme of over complexification, but the exercise must be pursued nonetheless.

How does all of this affect exegesis? Take Genesis 1:5 as an example: “God called [*wayyiqtol* = consecutive imperfect] the light day, and the darkness He called [*perfect/qatal*] night” (NAU). What is the difference between the *wayyiqtol* (which is still an imperfect, note the *yiqtol* in its name) and the perfect? The *wayyiqtol* views the act of naming as that which is either initiated, progressing, completed (without a view to the result), or some other factor internal to the action—and, even more importantly, as one event in a sequence of events. “Then God named the light ‘Day’” is an accurate translation. Interpretively, however, the exegete must know Moses was not making an overall descriptive statement representing the totality of the situation. However, the latter verb, being a perfect, does look at the totality of the situation without regard to any internal progress of action.

What does this mean? How does it affect the exegete? Moses employed the perfect to distinguish the action from the sequential narrative framework of *wayyiqtol* verbs. So that he might interrupt the chain smoothly, Moses placed the object (“the darkness”) first (a nonemphatic use since it is merely interrupting the chain). By looking at the totality of the situation, the second act of naming the darkness is not a separate sequential act following the naming of the light. It is a common Hebrew way of making certain that the reader does not think that there were two sequential acts. It does not matter which was named first or even if the two were named separately. Therefore,

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, §113p.

any expositor attempting to make some preaching point of the order of the naming here is in direct conflict with the actual grammar of the text.

One more example (from Psalm 1:1-2) should help to make these points more lucid:

“How blessed is the man who does not walk [perfect] in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand [perfect] in the path of sinners,  
Nor sit [perfect] in the seat of scoffers!  
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates [imperfect] day and night.”

Why did the psalmist choose to employ the perfect for the three negated verbs in verse 1 while employing the imperfect for the verb in verse 2? The psalmist intended the perfects of verse 1 to direct the reader to view the situation as a totality without regard to any phases. On the other hand, the imperfect in verse 2 draws the reader’s attention to the internal nature of the action rather than looking at it from the outside as a whole. Confirmation comes in the adverbs that follow and modify “meditates.” This action is viewed as either habitual, repetitive, or continual: the godly individual will “habitually (*or* repeatedly *or* continually) meditate day and night.” Note how the context supports the verb usage. Biblical Hebrew writers and speakers selected their verb forms on the basis of the context in which each verb form was employed. To do otherwise would create a dissonance for the reader or hearer. In some cases, biblical authors utilized such dissonance to indicate emphasis or some other literary effect.

A final illustration might help to clarify the basic differences between the two Hebrew verb forms. In Judges 5:26 we read, “She reached out [imperfect] her hand for the tent peg, And her right hand for the workmen's hammer. Then she struck [perfect] Sisera, she smashed [perfect] his head; And she shattered [perfect] and pierced [perfect] his temple” (NASB). Film makers have two options when it comes to depicting such violence. They might employ close-up shots of the peg and skull as blood splatters and brain tissue is exposed (as in CBS’s “CSI” special effects) or they might show only Jael’s hands and the hammer (allowing the viewer’s imagination to take over when they hear the peg sink into the skull). Hollywood’s preference for the overly explicit and gory does not match the Scripture’s treatment. Filming with a view to the Hebrew verbs opens the scene with a close-up shot showing Jael’s left hand reaching for the tent peg. Next, the camera zooms in on her right hand grasping the hammer. The camera stays on the hammer as

it arcs and descends, then strikes the head of the peg. The biblical writer uses the imperfect verb to represent these actions in progress. As the sounds of the blow and the cracking skull are heard, the camera moves to Jael's grim face or to the death throws of Sisera's feet—the camera never shows the striking of Sisera directly nor the smashing of his head or piercing of his temple. The Hebrew writer uses the perfect to simply state the fact of their occurrence, without focusing on their actual process.

## THE FALLACY OF IGNORING PARTICLES

No word is too small or lacking in significance. Turning our attention to the New Testament for a change, let's take a close look at Acts 13:2. In this text the Holy Spirit's command appears as "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (NASB; cf. KJV, NKJV, ESV, NRSV, NIV). All of these translations ignore the little word *δή*, that follows the imperative "set apart" in the Greek text. Translators have often treated that word as though it were nothing more than a marker of "relatively weak emphasis—'then, indeed' or frequently not translated but possibly reflected in the word order."<sup>31</sup> Nida and Louw suggest the translation, "set apart for me, then, Barnabas and Saul to do the work for which I have called them."<sup>32</sup> However, A. T. Robertson, the venerable Greek scholar, indicated that, although this Greek particle was difficult to translate, it is strongly emphatic.<sup>32</sup> Combined with an imperative (as in Acts 13:2), it has a "note of urgency."<sup>34</sup> The nature of the particle is such that it should not be omitted from the translation of the verse.<sup>33</sup> Expositors need to represent the Holy Spirit's command so that they convey the concept of urgency ("do it immediately").<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 811 (\$91.6). <sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1934), 1149. Cf., also, Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 673. <sup>34</sup> Robertson, *Grammar*, 1149.

<sup>33</sup> "It ought to be preserved in the translation"—Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1930), 3:178.

<sup>34</sup> When an imperative indicates that something is "to be carried into effect at once" the particle "dh, strengthens the injunction" (George Benedict Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, 7th ed., rev. by Gottlieb Lünemann (Andover, Mass.: Warren F. Draper, 1870), 313.

Unfortunately, there will be some texts like Acts 13:2 which virtually all available English translations translate poorly.<sup>35</sup> No Bible interpreter or translator has the right to select certain elements of biblical propositions for preservation and to excise the remainder from the text. An accurate translation must be full and complete, not selective and partial. Omission of any portion of the text hinders full understanding or, at its worse, creates misunderstanding.

## THE FALLACY OF REDUCTION

A repetitive text like Numbers 7:12-83 provides an extreme example of reduction of the biblical text. The passage describes each tribe's offerings at the dedication of the Tabernacle. Tribal leaders presented those offerings on each of twelve consecutive days, one tribe per day. The Good News Bible<sup>36</sup> (also known as Today's English Version) abridges the text instead of providing the full wording of the Hebrew text. Why refuse to abbreviate such a repetitive text? First, there are minor variations in the Hebrew wording—all the verses are not exact repetitions. Second, the wordiness is unusual for this kind of text—it has a purpose. “The repetition of the description of the offerings...may serve to denote the special regard which God has to the offerings of His people.”<sup>37</sup> Ronald Allen asks, “Is it not possible that in this daily listing we catch a glimpse of the magnificent pomp and ceremony attending these gifts?”<sup>38</sup> He goes on to state, “This chapter has a stately charm, a leisurely pace, and a studied sense of magnificence as each tribe in its turn was able to make gifts to God that he received with pleasure.”<sup>41</sup> Dennis Olson in the less than evangelical *Harper's Bible Commentary* writes, “The careful repetition underscores the unanimous and strong support for the

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<sup>35</sup> The matter of this particle should not be taken as a claim that all particles should be translated. As Carson points out, “precisely because particles are subtle things, one can always find instances where any particular translation has it wrong”—D. A. Carson, “The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation—and Other Limits, Too,” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*, ed. by Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 73.

<sup>36</sup> *Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1976).

<sup>37</sup> Charles John Ellicott, *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers*, 5 vols. (London: Cassell & Co., 1897), 1:503. Cf., also, Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-varsity Press, 1981), 93.

<sup>38</sup> Ronald B. Allen, “Numbers,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Regency Reference Library, Zondervan, 1990), 2:762.

tabernacle and its priesthood. Every tribe has an equal and strong commitment to the worship of God.”<sup>42</sup> Reducing the text would be the equivalent of asking a class of graduating seminarians to stand en masse as the dean intones, “Ladies and gentlemen, the graduating class of 2006 is hereby awarded sixty Master of Divinity degrees and five Master of Theology degrees”—without reading each person’s name, without having them walk across the platform, without hooding them, and without placing the diploma in their hands. It makes for a brief and perhaps comfortable ceremony but is empty of celebration and individual recognition.<sup>43</sup> We should preserve the entire text of Numbers 7:12-83 without abridgement—and the class of 2006 will receive their due individual recognition at graduation.

## CONCLUSION

Every student of the Bible must attempt to interpret the text as objectively as possible. In order to maintain accuracy, the student must avoid taking shortcuts that result in committing the fallacies described in this session. Correct interpretation is the result of careful attention to details, to context, and to what the text says. Above all, the attitude of the interpreter is extremely important. We must not approach the text with academic swagger, a feeling of superiority to the ancient writers, or an unteachable spirit. Hubris can have no home in the heart of the hermeneut. We dare not make the Word “lordless” (ἄκυρω) by our human understanding (Matt 15:6).

# **SELF-DESTRUCTION OF THE IMAGO DEI: CHRISTIANITY AS A PROTECTIVE AGAINST SUICIDALITY**

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## **A NATION OF SUICIDALITY**

**S**uicide is ravaging image-bearers of God from all ethnicities and of all ages. The past two decades saw suicide rates rise dramatically by approximately 36% in the American population—and there is no slowdown in sight. The majority of people who take their lives are healthy working-aged people. The workers with higher-than-average rates of suicide are military veterans, workers who live in rural areas, and occupations like mining and construction.<sup>1</sup> Of note, both societal prestige and wealth are not preventing physicians from committing suicide. Medical doctors have one of the highest rates of suicide of any profession (there are 300-400 physician suicides per year); and the suicide rate for male physicians is up to 40% higher and for female physicians up to 130% higher than the general

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson C, Sussell A, Li J, Schumacher P, Yeoman K, Stone D. (2020) Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation — National Violent Death Reporting System, 32 States, 2016. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*; 69: 57–62.

population.<sup>2</sup> Observing by ethnicity, the two groups currently with the highest suicide rates in America are non-Hispanic Indian/Alaska Native people and non-Hispanic White people.<sup>3</sup>

In 2021, suicide was the cause of 48,183 deaths in the United States (this translates to one death every eleven minutes).<sup>4</sup> In the same year, roughly 12.3 million American adults contemplated suicide, 3.5 million planned a suicide attempt, and 1.7 million went ahead and actually attempted suicide.<sup>5</sup> Suicide is now the second leading cause of death for Americans ages 20-34 and it leaves behind grief, shock, guilt, depression, and often creates novel suicidal thoughts for the surviving family members (even after adjusting for psychiatric symptomatology).<sup>6</sup> Suicide is also placing a heavy financial burden upon American society. In 2020, suicide and nonfatal self-harm cost the United States over \$500 billion in medical costs, work loss costs, quality of life costs, and statistical life costs.<sup>7</sup>

## RELIGIONS AND SUICIDE

In the midst of this national problem, many now believe that religion is greatly helping in America's suicide crisis. Studies have shown Christianity to have a protective effect against suicidality. Specialized research concluded that church attendance has a very strong protective effect against suicidality and concluding that, "In this cohort of US women, frequent religious service

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<sup>2</sup> Stewart, Heather. "Physician Suicide: Contributing Factors and how to Prevent it" (March 29, 2023). <https://chghhealthcare.com/blog/physician-suicide-prevention/>.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. *National Vital Statistics System*, Mortality 2018-2021 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released in 2023. Data are from the Multiple Cause of Death Files, 2018-2021, as compiled from data provided by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program.

<sup>4</sup> "Facts About Suicide." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (accessed May 4, 2023). <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Hamdan, S., Berkman, N., Lavi, N., Levy, S., & Brent, D. (2020). The effect of sudden death bereavement on the risk for suicide: The role of suicide bereavement. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 41(3), 214–224. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000635>

<sup>7</sup> "Number of Injuries and Associated Costs." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/cost/>.



attendance was associated with a significantly lower rate of suicide.”<sup>8</sup> This paper examines the power of religion to block suicidality during the prevention stage via its theological and moral prohibitions. The data appear to show that if suicides are taught as wrong to God by religious communities, then those prohibitions serve to create mental “moral objections to suicide” and thereby help to prevent suicides at a “community protective” level.<sup>9</sup>

A strong sense of community is vital for human flourishing. Émile Durkheim, in his classic *Le suicide* (1897, published in English in 1951), used multivariate aggregate statistics while considering variables such as religion, education level, marital status, and nationality to explain wide variations in suicide rates.<sup>10</sup> Durkheim discovered that Protestants (who he noted were generally more highly educated) had a higher rate of suicide than Catholics. However, he also discovered that Jews fell outside of this pattern: they had a very low rate of suicide—although they were highly educated. The explanation provided by Durkheim was that the end state of each respective group’s education differed: the education of Protestants led them to greater individuality, whereas the education of the Jewish people was intended to integrate them into stronger Jewish communities. Throughout *Le suicide*, Durkheim determines various typologies of suicide and categorizes them into: altruistic, egoistic, anomic, and fatalistic. He concluded that communal social cohesion is the main reason why Catholicism appears to have a stronger protective effect against suicide. (Indeed, there are aggregate indicators demonstrating merit to the observation. For example, it is true that Protestant countries today still tend to have substantially higher suicide rates—a fact which demonstrates that the impact of religion upon suicidality is still a vitally needed research area.)

As important as strong communities are, they do not seem to be the primary cause for suicide prevention in macro-level studies. Instead, the teachings of the religion seem to serve as the strongest deterrent. Islam, for example, teaches that suicide (as the murder of oneself) is a grave wrong. (The Quran explicitly reads, “And kill not yourselves. Surely, Allah is Merciful to you” (chapter 4, verse 30)). Conversely, Hinduism is vague on its teaching

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<sup>8</sup> VanderWeele, Tyler J; Li, Shanshan; Tsai, Alexander C.; Kawachi, Ichiro. Association Between Religious Service Attendance and Lower Suicide Rates Among US Women. *JAMA Psychiatry* (August 1, 2016). 73(8):845-51.

<sup>9</sup> “Many Factors Protect Against Suicide Risk.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023). <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/factors/>.

<sup>10</sup> Durkheim, Emile. (1951). *Suicide*. Translated by JA Spaulding and G. Simpson. *Gencoe, IL: Free Press* (originally published 1897).

regarding suicide. (This is largely because Hinduism believes in reincarnation—the belief that the soul, after biological death, begins a new life in a different body that may be human, animal or spiritual depending on the moral quality of a person’s previous life.) In the Hindu religion, bodily death is simply a gateway to a restart in a different body. As a result of this belief in the cycle of births and deaths (reincarnation), Hindus view suicide as meaningless and thus, they have higher suicide rates than their Muslim counterparts.<sup>11</sup> Muslims generally have a lower suicide rate than Hindus.<sup>12</sup> Hinduism has over 1.1 billion adherents comprising about 15% of the global population—most dense in the region of India. People who follow Hinduism have a high suicide rate of about 21 per 100,000 population compared to the global average of 11.4. Despite being highly communal people, Hindu countries have higher rates of suicide compared to both Islamic and Christian countries.<sup>13</sup> The fact that religious teaching is the cause for this difference is further manifested by statistics among immigrants living abroad in places like Fiji, the Caribbean, Malaysia and the United Kingdom, all indicating that suicide is disproportionately high among those of Indian descent.<sup>14</sup> Considering the fact that Hindus are community-rooted people, it appears that the Muslim teaching banning suicide is the primary reason for Islam’s lower suicide rate.

### MECHANISMS: COMMUNITY OR THEOLOGY?

One empirical analysis “reveals that...Catholics are still less likely than Protestants to commit or accept suicide.”<sup>15</sup> Two classes of mechanisms are often used to study suicide rates: 1) the social mechanism and, 2) the theological mechanism. In the social, Protestants and Catholics often differ in their organizational set-up. Researchers have viewed Protestantism to be a

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<sup>11</sup> Lakshmi, Vijayakumar; Sujit, John. Is Hinduism ambivalent about suicide? *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* (Aug 2018). 64(5):443-449.

<sup>12</sup> Ineichen, B. The influence of religion on the suicide rate: Islam and Hinduism compared. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* (1998). 1(1), 31–36.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Lakshmi, Vijayakumar; Sujit, John. Is Hinduism ambivalent about suicide? *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* (Aug 2018). 64(5): 443-449.

<sup>15</sup> Schaltegger, Christopher; Torgler, Benno. Suicide and Religion: New Evidence on the Differences Between Protestantism and Catholicism. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Jun 2014). Vol 53, No 2: 316-340.

more individualistic religion as it focuses on the salvation of the individual soul rather than a global Church. This has caused many to infer that it is the communal aspect of Catholicism is what serves as the key protective factor against suicide. Using this conjecture, many have argued that suicides are preventable by simply incorporating suicidal persons into even *non-religious* social communities (e.g., weaving communities, art communities, sports communities, motorcycle riding communities, etc.). Additionally, psychotherapists have extrapolated that by causing suicidal patients to think of their family members during interventions will result in them choosing life instead of death. As important as loved ones and social communities are for well-being, both approaches have seen little success in abating the rise in national suicide numbers.

The second mechanism is the theological. Protestant doctrine teaches the importance of salvation by faith alone through God's grace alone, and not by any merit of a person's works. Conversely, Catholic doctrine teaches salvation to be affected by one's deeds. As a result, committing suicide (a mortal sin for Catholics) entails the disutility of going to Hell. This theological/moral regulation from Catholicism powerfully steers its adherents toward other responses during times of utmost desperation. As a result of what they have been taught, suicide is not an option for practicing Roman Catholics. This observation regarding the impact of doctrine on suicide rates was even noted by the *Los Angeles Times*: "Among the 6,999 Catholic women who said they attended mass more than once a week, there was not a single suicide. The Catholic Church teaches that suicide is a mortal sin. It has long warned that those who killed themselves would go to hell, and denied those who killed themselves a Catholic burial."<sup>16</sup> The official teaching of the Catholic Church stands as:

Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of. Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for

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<sup>16</sup> Healy, Melissa. Church attendance linked with reduced suicide risk, especially for Catholics, study says. *Los Angeles Times* (June 29, 2016). <https://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-church-attendance-suicide-20160629-snap-story>.

the living God. If suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal. Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law.<sup>17</sup>

While a sense of community does contribute to the flourishing of human mental health, when it comes to suicide prevention however, it is the moral pedagogical objections of a religion that provides the strongest consistent cause for its adherents choosing life over death:

Religious affiliation is associated with less suicidal behavior in depressed inpatients. After other factors were controlled, it was found that greater moral objections to suicide and lower aggression level in religiously affiliated subjects may function as protective factors against suicide attempts. Further study about the influence of religious affiliation on aggressive behavior and how moral objections can reduce the probability of acting on suicidal thoughts may offer new therapeutic strategies in suicide prevention.<sup>18</sup>

This sort of strategy in suicide prevention is powerfully effective at the community-wide level. Religious teaching is powerful and could be used for great good—or great evil. Nefariously, religious teachings have demonstrated their power to send entire groups of Shinto Japanese Kamikaze pilots to their deaths for the sake of their god (the Japanese emperor). During World War 2, for every Kamikaze pilot who committed suicide, 10 American lives were killed. Doctrine also proved sufficient to send numerous ISIS-K suicide bombers to their deaths for Allah in jihad.

### **TEACHING AS THE KEY PROTECTIVE FACTOR AGAINST SUICIDE**

Nothing comes markedly close to biblical doctrinal prohibitions, taught on the community-wide level, in effectively keeping persons from attempting suicide. Christendom, from the sixth through the late twentieth century, did not bury anyone who committed suicide because suicide (death by murder of

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<sup>17</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ll. 2280-2282. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/).

<sup>18</sup> Kanita Dervic, M.D., Maria A. Oquendo, M.D., Michael F. Grunebaum, M.D., Steve Ellis, Ph.D., Ainsley K. Burke, Ph.D., and J. John Mann, M.D. Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*. Published Online: 1 Dec 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.161.12.2303>.

self) was the manifestation of an unbelieving soul. Many Protestants hold to the doctrine of perseverance. “Perseverance of the saints” is the teaching that saving faith manifests itself as believers persevere through life’s difficulties because they fear God more than their present difficult circumstances.

Blaise Pascal observed, “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”<sup>19</sup> Pascal noted that suicide is a choice of utility. More specifically, Pascal stated that happiness is the ultimate utility. The decision to commit suicide is a choice where the utility of staying alive or ending life are weighed against each other. If the utility of staying alive falls below the utility of ending life, suicide is erroneously seen as the choice of greater utility.

There are two wrong ways a suicidal person could wager upon Pascal’s proposal: 1) via atheism, or 2) via presumptuous salvation. If a person is absolutely convinced of God’s nonexistence and death is biological life simply decomposing without the existence of an eternal soul, then the suicidal individual believes that happiness is attained by simply ending the misery of this present life. Non-existence, they surmise, is happier and less painful than present existence. There is no fear of death because there is no fear of God. Thus, this route often ends with suicide.

Second, is presumptuous salvation. This occurs when a person is taught that “saved” people can commit suicide and subsequently enter eternal life. Under this belief structure, a suicidal individual believes that happiness is attained by simply ending the misery of this present life. The individual also presumes that he is saved. Heaven, they surmise, is happier and less painful than present existence. Thus, this route also often ends with suicide. Martin Luther was acutely aware of this form of human reasoning and hence (even though he was personally not certain that individuals who killed themselves went Hell), he warned:

I don’t share the opinion that suicides are certainly to be damned. My reason is that they do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the power of the devil. They are like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber. However, this ought not be taught to the common people, lest Satan be given an opportunity to cause slaughter, and I recommend that the popular custom be strictly adhered to according to which it [the

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<sup>19</sup> (Pensées, Loc. 2049).

suicide's corpse] is not carried over the threshold, etc. Such persons do not die by free choice or by law, but our Lord God will dispatch them as he executes a person through a robber. Magistrates should treat them quite strictly, although it is not plain that their souls are damned. However, they are examples by which our Lord God wishes to show that the devil is powerful and also that we should be diligent in prayer. But for these examples, we would not fear God. Hence he must teach us in this way.<sup>20</sup>

“Hence he must teach us in this way,” said Luther. Preventative teaching (especially—according to Luther—to “the common people”) was necessary due to his fear that wrong teaching would enable Satan to “cause slaughter.” Luther knew the power of doctrine to either prevent suicide, or its power to incentivize an unhappy person to kill himself. He observed that the absence of the fear of death was conjoined to the fact that “we would not fear God”—a fear that is a powerful preventative against suicide.

In the field of cognitive behavioral therapy, there is a current theory that suicide is caused by three factors: “First, they perceive themselves as burdensome to others. They also feel no sense of belongingness. And the third component is that they have learned to not be afraid of harming themselves.”<sup>21</sup> If true, then the preventative effect of religion lies in a healthy restoration of the fear of death and in the restoration of the fear of God. Where there exists no fear of God, there exists no fear of suicide. It is vital to speak of God’s existence to the suicidal. The appeal of suicide and the fear of God are inversely related: a rise in one will diminish the other.<sup>22</sup>

Many, perhaps most, people contemplate suicide at some juncture in life. However, virtually all choose instead to live—some because of their fear of divine damnation. Prevented from killing themselves due to this fear of God,

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<sup>20</sup> Entry 222 (April 7, 1532), in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 54. Ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Emanuel Maidenberg, the clinical professor of psychiatry at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. “Parents’ spirituality or religion tied to lower suicide risk in kids.” *Physician's Weekly* (August 9, 2018). <https://www.physiciansweekly.com/parents-spirituality-or-religion/>.

<sup>22</sup> The apostle Paul knew this, as seen in 2 Corinthians 5:9-11: “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” Jesus inimitably said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

the near-fatal moment passes and they discover that the suicidal impulse was a transitory experience, or they seek others for help. Either way, suicide was prevented. Mankind innately knows of God's existence—they often just need a reminder.<sup>23</sup> Once the existence of God is acknowledged, then the eternal ramifications of suicide are usually far beyond the gambling scope of most rational humans. Throughout history, Christians have been dismayed to the point where they have “despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8). Yet, through difficulties, Christian faith has been manifested through perseverance: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Legislators—irrespective of personal religion—have made suicide illegal because of their own internal moral compasses. Although it is impossible to prosecute a person who has already committed suicide, most American states make it a felony to even assist a suicide.<sup>24</sup> Such human legislative bans model for citizens a right path. In similar manner, when ministers teach divine proscriptions against suicide, such moral and theological “objections can reduce the probability of acting on suicidal thoughts.”<sup>25</sup>

This teaching service is unique to the “subject matter expert” of the Army Chaplain.

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<sup>23</sup> Romans 1:19 exudes that God has revealed Himself to every human being alive. There are few (if any) true atheists in existence. In working with countless Army soldiers, I have discovered this to be true.

<sup>24</sup> In my current state of Washington: “(1) A person is guilty of promoting a suicide attempt when he or she knowingly causes or aids another person to attempt suicide. (2) Promoting a suicide attempt is a class C felony.” [2011 c 336 § 360; 1975 1st ex.s. c 260 § 9A.36.060.

<sup>25</sup> Kanita Dervic, M.D., Maria A. Oquendo, M.D., Michael F. Grunebaum, M.D., Steve Ellis, Ph.D., Ainsley K. Burke, Ph.D., and J. John Mann, M.D. Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*. Published Online: 1 Dec 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.161.12.2303>.

## **TERRORISM, THE CHURCH, AND ISRAEL**

*Kurt Johnson*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

“**N**ever forget!” was a familiar worldwide mantra in the wake of Nazi Germany’s slaughter of more than six million Jews during World War II. But has the world forgotten so quickly? On October 7, 2023, Iran-backed Hamas terrorists leveled the most horrific attack on Jews since the Holocaust. Some 1,200 Israelis – men, women, and children -- were killed with unspeakable brutality and torture and another estimated 240 were taken hostage. A nearly unified worldwide outcry in support of Israel appears to have fractured within mere days of the carnage and, at the time of this writing, voices of support for Hamas are increasingly drowning out those supporting Israel’s military response to this existential threat.

Even more disturbingly and, with some notable exceptions, the Christian Church response has been variously muted, tepid, and confused. Many, if not most, Christians are quick to repeat the common phrase, “We stand with Israel,” without a clear understanding of what they intend by those words. While the phrase rolls off the tongue easily, it raises more questions than it answers, such as: By “Israel” do they mean the physical landmass recognized by the United Nations as a nation in 1948? The human occupants of that nation, whether or not Jewish? “God’s chosen people” (Deut 7:6)? And what



do Christians mean when they pledge to “stand” with Israel? Prayer and supplication only? Military support to the Israeli Defense Force (IDF)? Diplomatic and economic pressure in support of the nation of Israel? And are there conditions and limits to any type of support?

The purpose of this essay is to provide an overview of answers to these questions from a biblical perspective, and urge a unified Church response to the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks as well as any future military or terrorist attacks on Israel.

### **“BE OF ONE MIND”: SUPERSESSIONISM VS. DISPENSATIONALISM**

The Apostle Paul admonished Christians to be “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (Phil 2:2). And yet the Church response to the October 7 massacre appears to be far from one-minded. What can account for this phenomenon in the modern Church? A review of Church history strongly suggests that it is deeply rooted in a longstanding debate among theologians about the relationship between the Church and Israel. Beginning with God’s covenant with Abraham, Israel is known throughout the Old Testament as God’s chosen people. With the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the establishment of his Church, a question arises as to whether the Church and Israel coexist in God’s plans, or the Church has replaced Israel as the object of God’s affection and plans.

Replacement theology, also known as supersessionism, asserts that “the Church is the new Israel...the blessings promised to the Jewish nation in the Old Testament have been entirely transferred to the Church.”<sup>1</sup> God made a covenant with Abraham to make him and all of his descendants into “a great nation” (Gen 12:2) through which all the nations and the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). Replacement theology holds that, because of Israel’s continued disobedience and wholesale rejection of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Christian Church has “replaced or superseded the Jewish people as the object of God’s covenant with Abraham, and thus as the elect people of God.”<sup>2</sup> God has, in a sense, “given up” on Israel as his chosen people and turned instead to the redeemed in Jesus Christ who make up the Church. As Keith Mathison writes, “Jews may still be saved on an individual

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, ed., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 747.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

basis by coming to Christ, but the nation of Israel and the Jews as a people no longer have any part to play in redemptive history.”<sup>3</sup> The Church has replaced the nation of Israel in God’s redemptive plans, but not individual Israelis who come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Dispensationalism, by contrast, is based on the belief that, as Ben Witherington observes, “biblical history is made up of a series of ‘dispensations,’ or specific temporal periods within the divine economy.”<sup>4</sup> Craig Blaising notes the two broadly defined dispensations common to Christian thought: “The Jewish, Mosaic, or Old Testament dispensation on the one hand and the Christian, New Covenant, or New Testament dispensation on the other.”<sup>5</sup> Traditional or normative dispensationalism rejects the notion that God has replaced Israel with the Church. Rather, “God has two programs in history, one for the Church and one for Israel.”<sup>6</sup> Israel of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament—as “successive institutions in biblical history,”<sup>7</sup>—share a single purpose: “the establishment of the kingdom of God—in which Israel and the Church will both share.”<sup>8</sup> God’s plan of redemption remains constant and unbroken from Old Testament to New Testament. As Charles Ryrie observes, “the redeemed in the body of Christ, the Church of this dispensation, are the continuation of the line of redeemed from other ages,”<sup>9</sup> including the Old Testament age of Israel.

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<sup>3</sup> Keith Mathison, “The Church and Israel in the New Testament,” *Tabletalk Magazine* (October 1, 2012), <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-church-and-israel-in-the-new-testament/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Witherington, “Dispensationalism,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, et. al. (Cambridge University Press, 2011), ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. Witherington notes that most dispensationalists believe in seven dispensations: “These comprise the dispensations of innocence, prior to Adam’s fall (Gen. 1:1–3:7); of conscience, from Adam to Noah (Gen. 3:8–8:22); of government, from Noah to Abraham (Gen. 9:1–11:32); of patriarchal rule, from Abraham to Moses (Gen. 12:1–Exod. 19:25); of the Mosaic LAW, from Moses to Christ (Exod. 20:1–Acts 2:4); of grace, from Pentecost to the rapture (Acts 2:4–Rev. 20:3); and of an earthly, millennial kingdom yet to come (Rev. 20:4–6).”

<sup>5</sup> C. Blaising, “Dispensation, Dispensationalism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>6</sup> Mathison.

<sup>7</sup> Blaising, “Dispensation, Dispensationalism.”

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 860.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Rev. and Expanded ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2007), 126.

Ian McFarland notes the “near universal repudiation”<sup>10</sup> of replacement theology or supersessionism. The establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 is an important event among many signaling that God has not “given up” on Israel nor replaced her in his grand plans to redeem sinners. Paul writes that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29) and those gifts and calling include God’s covenant with his chosen people, Israel. Paul also writes that it was revealed to him by God that “Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body” (Eph 3:6), indicating that both members of the Israeli nation and Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus Christ are to partake in God’s eternal kingdom. John MacArthur cautions that God’s work with the Church today should not be read as a rejection of Israel:

Because the New Testament distinguishes between the Church and Israel, it is necessary for believers to maintain that same distinction...Though God is working through the international Church in this present age... and though the Church shares in the blessings of the new covenant...in the future God will again turn his attention to the nation of Israel in fulfillment of his promises to them.<sup>11</sup>

God has always had, and continues to have, plans for Israel in his plan of redemption for fallen humankind. “Israel’s role in leading and serving other nations awaits fulfillment...The picture of Israel that the prophets offered as a prominent nation in an earthly reign of the Messiah is yet future.”<sup>12</sup> To suggest otherwise—that God has abandoned Israel and “changed his mind” as expressed in the Old Testament—runs counter to Scripture’s clear description of God’s immutability and faithfulness to his promises. The difficulty, however, is in properly understanding the term “Israel” as it is used in the Bible, generally, and in eschatological prophecy in particular.

## DEFINING “ISRAEL”

Peter Craigie notes three different meanings of the term: “Israel in the OT sense (the nation of the chosen people) or in some future nationalistic sense (a restored Israel), or...the reference is to the church, which may

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<sup>10</sup> Ian A. McFarland, “Supersessionism,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, et. al. (Cambridge University Press, 2011), ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>11</sup> MacArthur, 749.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 859.

perhaps be referred to as the New Israel.”<sup>13</sup> The best approach is to understand the term “Israel” as encompassing elements of all three possibilities. Paul writes that “those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed” (Rom 6:8). That is, those who are direct descendants of Abraham are not, by definition, God’s chosen people; rather, those who have put their faith in Christ. This includes some, but not all, Israelites (a “remnant” according to Isaiah)<sup>14</sup> and some, but not all, Gentiles. As Wayne Grudem notes, “those who truly believe in Christ are now the ones who have the privilege of being called ‘my people’ by the Lord.”<sup>15</sup> Those who will inherit the blessings promised to Abraham’s descendants in the Old Testament include everyone, both Jew and Gentile, who has a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Ed Jarrett also wrestles with the meaning of “Israel” and proposes at least five formulations, depending on the context in which the term is used:

It could refer to an individual, Abraham’s grandson. It could mean the descendants of Israel, the children of Israel. Frequently it refers to the nation of Israel, either the united kingdom or the northern kingdom. Probably the most common usage is to refer to God’s people, those that he established a covenant with at Sinai and their descendants. And, finally, we see it pointing toward the new humanity created in Christ, citizens of the kingdom of God.<sup>16</sup>

The common thread woven through each of these formulations is ultimately God and his redemptive plans for mankind. “Those identified with that name are God’s people, chosen for a purpose. And that is what Israel ultimately means: God’s people.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> P. C. Craigie, “Israel and Prophecy,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>14</sup> Paul quotes Isaiah in Romans 9:27–28: “Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.’”

<sup>15</sup> Grudem, 861.

<sup>16</sup> Ed Jarret, “What is the Meaning of Israel in the Bible?” Christianity.com, June 20, 2019, <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-is-the-meaning-of-israel-in-the-bible.html>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE PHYSICAL LANDMASS OF ISRAEL

Immutable God first described the promised land of Israel to Abram as “from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates” (Gen 15:18-19) – essentially from the Nile River to the Euphrates River. God provided Moses with more precise detail of the borders of the Promised Land in Numbers Chapter 34. And just prior to his death, Moses was shown the entire Promised Land by God from the top of Mount Nebo and God said to Moses, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it” (Deu 34:4). All three of these descriptions are larger than the current landmass of the nation of Israel since it declared itself an independent state in 1948, and as modified following conflicts in 1949, 1967, and 1973, the Israel-Egypt peace treaty of 1982, and the Oslo Agreement of 1993.

Whether or not God’s precise borders of Israel are understood today, Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the landmass of Israel is holy and precious in God’s eyes. It is the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. It is the place where most of the Bible was inspired and written by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the physical region of Jesus Christ’s birth, ministry, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. It is the birthplace of the Church. It is the land to which Jesus will return in the Second Coming: “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south” (Zech 14:4). And, perhaps most importantly, it is the physical place from which Jesus will one day rule and reign for eternity: “[T]he Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders—with great glory” (Isa 24:23).

As God led Abram out of his country to a new land, he promised Abram “I will make you a great nation” (Gen 12:2). God further promised Abram “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” (Gen 12:3). In view of God’s well documented love for not only the people of Israel but the landmass of Israel, his promises to “bless” and “curse” Israel’s friends and foes logically apply not only to the people but the land of Israel – the nation-state of Israel.

John Piper suggests that the Jewish people currently have no *divine* claim to the promised land: “A non-covenant-keeping people—Jewish or Arab—does not have a divine right to hold the land of promise while they are living

in rebellion against the God who promised it to an obedient people.”<sup>18</sup> Piper bases his position on his reading of the apparent conditional promise to the Israelis at Mount Sinai: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people” (Exodus 19:5). Nevertheless, Piper acknowledges that Israel has “human rights among nations”<sup>19</sup> that allow it to exist unmolested.

Piper’s view appears to violate the fundamental Christian doctrine that God is immutable: “For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob” (Mal 3:6); “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom) 11:29); “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). God’s promise to Abram is as valid and true today as the day it was made nearly four thousand years ago. God has not and never will abandon his covenant with Israel.

John Hagee takes a more practical approach to the consequences of blessing or cursing Israel: “All who have stood against Israel find themselves on the ash heap of history, and all who have blessed Israel are remembered for their good deeds, on earth and in Heaven.”<sup>20</sup> For those who neither believe in or trust God’s word, as Hagee notes, “even for the secular humanist, or the purely self-interested national security hawk, standing with Israel is right for our country.”<sup>21</sup> The Psalmist speaks clearly and strongly to those who might question or doubt God’s promise to Israel:

He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: *‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit’*” (Psa 105:8-11) (emphasis added).

Scripture even describes Israel as the “apple of God’s eye” (Zech 2:8). But whether Israel’s right to exist as a nation-state rests entirely on human rights claims or is cloaked in God’s protective promise, it is beyond any serious debate that it has a right to exist.

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<sup>18</sup> John Piper, “Israel, Arabs, and the Family of God,” *Desiring God*, March 4, 2011, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/israel-arabs-and-the-family-of-god>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> John Hagee, “Why Every American Should Stand with Israel,” *American Strength: Conservative Solutions Worth Fighting For*, 2021, <https://americanstrength.standforamerica.com/foreign/why-every-american-should-stand-with-israel/>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

## TOWARD A UNIFIED CHURCH RESPONSE TO ATTACKS ON ISRAEL

The Apostle Paul opens Romans Chapter 11 with this: “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not!” Paul goes on to explain that Israel’s stumbling and blindness to the truth of the Gospel is temporary, lasting only until “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25). Israel’s current hardening (other than the existing “remnant” (Rom 11:5)) will lead to her regrafting into the olive tree through faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah (Rom 11:19-24). As God’s divine plan for Israel continues to unfold, the Church should discipline itself to be Christ-minded (1 Cor 2:16) in its attitude and behavior towards Israel. Specifically:

***Recognize and Emphasize that Israel—Both Nation and People—is Very Special to God.***

As Israel came out of bondage in Egypt and prepared to enter the Promised Land, the people were reminded: “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). And once again God emphasized his motivation for saving Israel and delivering them to the Promised Land: “because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers” (Deut 7:8). God’s continuing, unchanging purpose is to bless the world through Israel (Gen 12:3). As Jesus himself declared, “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

***Recognize and Emphasize that God’s Promises to Israel are Unconditional and Irrevocable.***

In Genesis Chapter 15, Abram asked God how he could know that he would take possession of the promised land. God instructed Abram to prepare an animal sacrifice with the animals cut in two and the halves arranged opposite each other. In Abram’s day, each party to a covenant would walk between the pieces of animal parts to demonstrate their promise to or covenant with the other party. In this case, however, Abram fell into a deep sleep before the covenant was made, and God himself, in the form of a smoking firepot with a blazing torch, passed between the pieces. God was signaling to Abram and his descendants that even when they reject God and the Messiah, even when they kill the Messiah, he will nevertheless keep the covenant he made that day.

Bob Russell correctly notes, “standing with Israel” does *not* mean condoning everything Israel does:

While Christians are right in siding with Israel in the current conflict, that does not mean everything the Jewish nation does is right, and Israel should never be opposed. In Old Testament days, God often chastised the Hebrews for their sin and warned that, in the future, they would be chastened for their unbelief. While God promises to bless those who bless the descendants of Abraham, that does not mean we should automatically approve every decision made by the Israeli government. We need to measure every government’s actions according to the plumb line of God’s Word. Jesus is the standard of truth, not the nation of Israel.<sup>22</sup>

As the Apostle Paul writes about Israel, “Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are *irrevocable* (Rom 11:28-29) (emphasis added). The Church must stand with Israel unconditionally in the same way God does and look at Israel with a biblical worldview.

### ***Honor God’s command to bless Israel.***

God promised, “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). Blessing Israel does *not* mean automatic agreement with every action of the Israeli government, nor automatic disagreement with every action of those who oppose Israel. Rather, blessing Israel means honoring God’s love for his chosen people and supporting his everlasting promises to them. It means defending Israel’s right to exist and defend herself against her enemies.

Blessing Israel further means praying for the peace and welfare of both the nation-state of Israel and the Jewish people. Pastor David Jeremiah’s “A Prayer for Israel” provides an excellent prayer model:

Heavenly Father, the psalmist tells us to ‘pray for the peace of Jerusalem.’ So I pray for peace for Your chosen people, Israel, and their beloved city today. You have planned for Israel, provided for Israel, and protected Israel for thousands of years.

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<sup>22</sup> Bob Russell, “Are Christians to Stand with Israel?” Bob Russell Ministries, October 15, 2023, <https://bobrussell.org/are-christians-to-stand-with-israel/>

#:-:text=While%20Christians%20are%20right%20in,be%20chastened%20for%20their%20unbelief.



But as in days of old, there are those today who seek to harm, even destroy, Your people. So I ask you to keep Israel in Your loving care. Put a spiritual hedge of protection around Your people and their land. Watch over this nation as a Good Shepherd watches over His flock, and may Your chosen people find their ultimate safety and security in You.

While You watch over Your people, may Your Spirit awaken in them a hunger to embrace their Messiah—the One who died for them—until they see Him face to face.

We pray this in His name, Amen.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> David Jeremiah, “A Prayer for the Promised Land,” PR Newswire, October 10, 2023,. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/a-prayer-for-the-promised-land-301952876.html#:~:text=You%20have%20planned%20for%20Israel,Your%20people%20and%20their%20land>.

## **GOSPEL LIGHT IN THE SHADOW OF MORAL INJURY**

*Jason “Jay” Skeens*

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*Chaplain Skeens currently serves as the Battalion Chaplain for 2nd Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment "Geronimo," 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. He comes to us as a battle-hardened chaplain who has served two combat tours in Afghanistan with SOF forces as an enlisted Soldier serving. As such, he has some insights and experience to help those suffering from PTS.*

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### **INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**T**his article contains true stories and discussions that may be difficult for some readers. They are included to illuminate the reality and impact of moral injury. The stories and names are used with permission from Paratroopers in the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division, headquartered in Fort Liberty, North Carolina, where I serve as their chaplain. I extend my gratitude to SGM Sutton and the unnamed Paratroopers whose stories are referenced in this article. They have been invaluable teachers in helping me better comprehend the challenges faced by those grappling with this invisible wound.

Many of the stories and references in this article come from Army sources. Terms like “Soldier” are used frequently. However, the material presented here applies to all service members from every branch. Indeed, moral injury is a concern DOD wide and can impact anyone, even chaplains.

## THE FACES OF MORAL INJURY

Initially, his face was hardened and focused—the expression of an experienced Airborne Infantryman with numerous combat deployments. As he spoke, his expression softened. He struggled to hold back tears, saying, “I’ve seen so many terrible things, but the worst experience of my life was telling a mother cradling the tiny body of her daughter that she couldn’t bring her on the plane. We’re not authorized to transport the deceased, only the living. You have to leave her behind.” A tear rolled down his cheek. He quickly wiped it away and focused again. “Yes, that was the worst moment of my life. While I know I was doing what I was supposed to, I don’t think I can ever forgive myself.”

Years earlier, another paratrooper discarded the last remnants of his service in Afghanistan. He threw his awards, coins, uniforms, and plaques into a dumpster. Bitter tears accompanied him. Standing there, he felt no relief. Throwing out those items couldn’t erase his past or heal his heart. He felt stuck. It wasn’t long before he held the barrel of a loaded M&P 15 in his mouth at three in the morning. In a tequila-induced haze, a mind disengaged, his finger started to squeeze the trigger.

Another paratrooper, hesitant to talk at first, finally opened up to me. He recounted a harrowing experience, his voice softening as he remembered, “We watched them toss their babies over the C-wire, hoping we could catch them and take care of them. Not every baby made it.” He stared off and quietly repeated, “They didn’t all make it.” He looked down again. “We couldn’t do anything...” He took a deep breath and added, “We were there to help, but we felt helpless.” His voice shook as he concluded, “I still feel helpless.”

## TWO GOALS

The stories you just read illustrate the impact of moral injury. Psychology Today defines moral injury as “the social, psychological, and spiritual harm that arises from a betrayal of one’s core values” and notes it can result from actions such as “failing to protect others, through error or inaction, and failure to be protected by leaders, especially in combat”<sup>1</sup>. This betrayal “wounds a person’s conscience, leading to lasting anger, guilt, and shame, and

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<sup>1</sup> Psychology Today, “Moral Injury: What It Is and How to Heal,” accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/moral-injury?amp>.

can fundamentally alter one's worldview and impair the ability to trust others".<sup>2</sup>

What you just read partially fulfills one of this article's two goals. The first goal is to raise awareness of moral injury in order to encourage faithful ministry to those affected. The second goal is to equip chaplains to minister faithfully by briefly exploring how "Gospel light," or "Gospel grace," provides the essential means of healing. "Gospel grace" underscores the transformative power of the Gospel, while "Gospel light" emphasizes its role in bringing sin, shame, guilt, and resentment into the open for healing. Light reveals. Grace heals, and healing moral injury requires jettisoning superficial psychological interventions as it involves reconciling the emptiness inside of a person's soul, where spiritual values are central.

### A SOUL SCHISM

I had just finished morning PT. I stretched after a five-mile run that was slower than usual because my knee was bothering me. While stretching, I thought about the needs of my unit and how out of my depth I am. I prayed for God to give me the strength I needed for the day. As I ended my prayer, I saw an incoming call from one of our senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs). I answered, "Good morning, Sir. Would you please meet me at Womack as soon as possible?" I quickly changed and when I walked into the hospital room, I saw a heavily tattooed and muscled man asleep in a bed. The room was dimly lit, and the air smelled of antiseptic. He was resting after days of heavy drinking.

He rolled over, and as the haze lifted, he noticed the company commander, first sergeant, and unit chaplain standing over his bed. He quickly sat up and said, "All the way, gentlemen. Good morning, 1SG." After a brief conversation, the two left me alone with the man. He would soon become our operations sergeant major, not only for our unit but eventually for the first brigade combat team of the 82nd Airborne Division. More importantly, he would become my friend and help me understand moral injury in a new way.

"Sir, what you're looking at is the aftermath of years engaged in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and my struggle to reconcile two seemingly contradictory aspects of my soul," SGM Sutton said. He had spent years serving in direct combat, hunting terrorists, and had a passion for training

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

leaders and Rangers. As a former Ranger instructor, he was fully committed to the Ranger creed as a way of life. How, then, could serving in this capacity create such a soul schism? He continued, “Before I enlisted, I was a firefighter paramedic. I was passionate about it. I viewed myself as a helper and healer.” He took a deep breath and continued. “Years of fighting terrorists...” He paused. “It was absolute carnage.” I gently nodded, showing I was listening and encouraging him to go on. “I have struggled to reconcile being a helper and healer with being a breaker and destroyer.”

That morning, SGM Sutton, without realizing it, gave me a new vocabulary to describe the core impact of moral injury. “A soul schism:” *Namely, the crippling inability to reconcile a division in one’s soul, whether that divide results from one’s actions, experiences, or a combination of both.* The schism is more than a mere internal conflict. It’s soul shattering. In fact, sometimes I refer to moral injury as moral trauma because it describes the impact more accurately than merely calling it an injury. As we’ll see next, the impact is often a matter of life and death.

## MORAL INJURY’S DEVASTATING IMPACT

DA PAM 165-19, the Army’s primary publication on moral leadership, provides valuable information despite its brevity. It defines and explains moral injury and its impact on individuals, stating that “moral injury is a form of psychological, mental, or spiritual trauma, distinct from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but often accompanied by PTSD, whereby an individual’s observation of, or participation in, runs counter to deeply held moral beliefs.”<sup>3</sup>

While many accept this definition, the publication also highlights an often-overlooked aspect of moral injury that affects many individuals. It notes that “moral injury can also relate to mental stress or discomfort from holding two or more opposing beliefs or values.”<sup>4</sup> This aligns with the idea of moral injury as a soul schism. Remember, SGM Sutton’s difficulty in reconciling being a healer and helper with being a breaker and destroyer? This aspect underscores the internal conflict that arises when one’s actions or experiences starkly contrast with their core ethical beliefs.

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<sup>3</sup> Department of the Army, Pamphlet 165-19: Chaplain Corps Activities: Moral Leadership (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2020), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The publication further emphasizes the potentially devastating impact of this schism: ‘Moral injury can cause severe emotional, psychological, behavioral, spiritual, and social consequences if left untreated and unresolved. Moral injury, often compounded by PTSD, may contribute to high suicide rates among military personnel who have deployed to combat.’<sup>5</sup> Given the serious impact of moral injury, it is essential for us and our formations to keep moral injury and the necessity of care for it as our priority. Indeed, given the seriousness it is not only an individual concern but also a concern for commanders and their units.

### **MORAL TRAUMA’S IMPACT ON UNITS**

Moral trauma is inevitable in a fallen world and within the moral and spiritual hazardous environments our service members face. CH (MAJ) Krog notes, “The risk of moral injury cannot be avoided when conducting military operations in a morally complex operational environment. U.S. Army leaders constantly assess and underwrite risk throughout military training and real-world operations. They are taught that risk is when a leader knowingly exposes someone or something they value to danger, harm, or loss in a military operation. If military leaders lack the means to identify and address the potential risk of moral injury within their organizations, then their formations may experience the consequences identified in moral injury research.”<sup>6</sup>

Given that moral trauma is unavoidable, commanders and chaplains must prioritize their service members understanding its reality and the risk of neglecting care. The greatest risk to our units is the widespread lack of awareness of moral injury among service members at all levels. Even worse, many who are aware either do not believe in its existence or dismiss its significance. Despite ongoing educational efforts, the lack of focus within the DOD on moral injury indicates either a lack of shared understanding or an outright dismissal of its importance. With that, military chaplains must prepare to address this invisible wound amid the complexity and uncertainties of future operational environments. Moral injury will persist, so we must prepare to confront it and commit to helping those affected. This commitment is the central concern of this article.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Krog, “Military Leadership and Moral Injury: A Case Study of 82nd Airborne Division Paratroopers and the Moral Cost of HKIA, Afghanistan,” White Paper, July 21, 2022, 3.

## **COMMITMENT TO COUNSEL**

So far, we have defined moral injury, explained its impact, and illustrated that impact through real-life stories. Now, we shift to how to help those struggling with moral injury by applying what Scripture teaches to their hearts. We cannot cover everything needed to counsel those grappling with this soul schism comprehensively, however, I will address what I consider critical: Christ centered hope, the tension of truth and grace, discerning the heart of the problem, identity in light of the Gospel, and healing through community. These subjects are applicable to good biblical counseling in general, but I will focus on moral injury. My aim is to touch the surface, encouraging readers to engage with and further develop these ideas for their counseling ministry. Ideally, some will build upon what I have written here. Before delving into the details, let me provide some encouragement—and, frankly, some admonishment to implement what follows.

## **A GENTLE ADMONISHMENT**

This article aims not only to equip but also to encourage. Why do chaplains and pastoral counselors need encouragement? When I attended the Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course, the Chief of Chaplains at the time prioritized two things. First, our chaplains should be excellent preachers who actively preach. Second, they should be excellent counselors who actively counsel. He expressed concern that too many chaplains quickly refer out instead of taking the time to counsel their Soldiers.

Many chaplains lack formal counseling training and need to develop their skills. But the issue goes deeper. Many chaplains, even those who believe in the Bible, do not consider pastoral counseling relevant to the challenges their Soldiers face. They often prioritize behavioral health as more relevant. I am not asserting superiority over behavioral health, but we have an important resource that behavioral health cannot provide. The Army even recognizes the unique importance of chaplain counseling. DA PAM 165-19 notes: “As part of a multidisciplinary team approach, chaplains offer unqualified confidentiality uniquely addressing issues in pastoral counseling beyond the confidentiality behavioral health professionals may offer, even extending to illegal misconduct. Chaplains, as religious leaders, are best situated to provide sensitive counsel regarding personal spiritual issues and belief systems to help moral injury counselees seek resolution, deeper understanding, forgiveness for

self or others, and peace to sustain a counselee's self-identification as a moral individual and leader."<sup>7</sup>

This not only exemplifies a rare instance of the Army getting something right, but also serves as a reminder and encouragement to chaplains to fulfill their unique calling. To commit to faithfully counsel the hard spiritual cases such as moral injury with care and confidence. Indeed, for the chaplains reading this article. **Please remember that we carry light of the Gospel. There is nothing more important for us to do than shine that light for those wandering in darkness. And in this case, wandering in the shadow of moral injury.**

## GOSPEL LIGHT IN THE SHADOW

As we confront the raw difficulties of moral injury in our counsees and formations, the question arises: How then do we best support these individuals? Do we offer them a couple of Bible verses and send them on their way? That is like saying: "Take two verses and call me in the morning." Ask them the miracle question? Refer them to someone supposedly better equipped to counsel them? Many well-meaning chaplains might choose one of these options. However, we, as pastoral counselors and chaplains, are (as previously noted) uniquely equipped to journey with these warriors as they rediscover hope (Gal. 6:2; 1 Thess. 5:14). For those experiencing this type of injury, hope often feels like a distant city whose lights shine in the dark but are so far away they can barely be seen. Pastoral counselors and chaplains play a vital role, bringing the distant lights of hope to shine in the present light of the Gospel (Matt. 5:14-16). My prayer is that the following brief discussion will equip and encourage you to continue providing the vital Christ-centered counseling that will help our service members see with the light of hope revealed in the Gospel even in the shadow of moral trauma (Ps. 23:4; John 8:12).

## GOSPEL LIGHT AND CHRIST CENTERED HOPE

Without hope, a soul makes little progress on its journey to heal from moral injury. A soul remains stuck. Yet, Christ's love today assures us of acceptance, forgiveness, and security in Him despite our flaws and failures (Romans 8:1; Ephesians 2:8-9). Leaning hard into Him allows our souls to

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<sup>7</sup> Department of the Army, Pamphlet 165-19: Chaplain Corps Activities: Moral Leadership (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2020), 8.



rest in His peace (John 14:27). Even the most battered soul can rest in the unshakeable hope that all pain will one day be erased in His embrace (Revelation 21:4). On that day, in His embrace, the shame of a million sins will evaporate (Psalm 103:12), the bitterness of a thousand betrayals will melt away, and doubts about being deeply loved will become distant memories (Zephaniah 3:17). His love will permanently wipe away our deepest regrets (Isaiah 43:25), heal our hearts, and bring peace that never departs. Only God can provide that type of healing.

Even on our worst days, we eagerly anticipate that one day we will not only be with Him but be like Him (1 John 3:2). Actively believing and trusting in Him makes hope inevitable (Romans 15:13). This is the Christ-centered hope we must bring to our counselees wrestling with moral injury. I recognize that many of our counselees have not placed their hope in Christ. Unlike local church pastors, we cannot evangelize without restriction in a counseling session. However, we must share the only source of true hope as we have the opportunity (1 Peter 3:15), being wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). We must affirm clearly that Christ is the only source of true hope and spiritual healing (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Some may not trust in Christ or want to hear from Scripture (Romans 10:17). However, I always ask my counselees if they are willing to hear what my faith teaches about their struggles, and I've never had anyone say no. We should always seize the opportunity with prayer and sensitivity to share the Gospel with every counselee, whether they come to faith or not (Colossians 4:5-6). This, in my mind, is the first and most important step we take with any counselee, whether they are experiencing moral injury or not.

There's much to be said about imparting hope, but we must move on. Before we do, perhaps the most important and overlooked aspect is the hope of the counselor. Those stuck in hopelessness need not only the hope of Christ; they need to see that hope in us so that they might grasp even just a taste of it. Wayne Mack wisely observes, "Many people who seek counsel need to see hope modeled before they can experience it themselves, and what better person to model hope for them than the counselor? The counselor's biblically based attitude of hope will inspire hopefulness in the counselee."<sup>8</sup>

While we know that some of our counselees have not placed their hope in Christ, we can model hope to them, ready to give an answer for where our hope comes from. While we may not move past helping them lament and process their grief and shame, they will nonetheless walk away having met at

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<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur and The Master's College Faculty, *\*How to Counsel Biblically\** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2005), 129.

least one person who modeled genuine hope to them and loved them with the tenderness of Christ. That may be enough to give them hope in the near term and lead them eventually to fix their hope on the Jesus they saw reflected in their counselor.

To give them hope, we must study about the spiritual roots of moral injury.

## **GOSPEL LIGHT AND THE HEART OF THE SCHISM**

### **Recognizing the Limitations of Problem-Solving.**

When I began counseling, my initial approach focused on addressing presenting problems—identifying discomfort and friction in the counselee’s life and seeking their resolution through Scripture. While this approach holds merit, I soon recognized its limitations in meeting deeper spiritual needs, particularly among those grappling with moral injury. Those with moral injury require more than mere problem-solving strategies; they need healing and transformation. This brings us to the heart of the matter regarding moral injury—the schism of the soul, or as I might phrase it, the schism of the heart.

### **The Multifaceted Capacities of the Heart.**

The Bible describes the heart as having a multitude of capacities, encompassing thinking, believing, trusting, feeling, valuing, desiring, committing, and obeying. The heart is central to our thoughts and intentions (Proverbs 23:7; Proverbs 4:23). Belief and trust also reside in the heart (Romans 10:10; Proverbs 3:5). The heart experiences a range of emotions and desires (John 14:27; Psalm 37:4). Moreover, our values come from the heart: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). Additionally, the heart is where we commit and obey God’s commands (Proverbs 16:3; Romans 6:17). The heart is the multifaceted core of our being that shapes our relationship with God and practically everything about us (Jeremiah 24:7; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Hebrews 4:12).

### **The Heart’s Misalignment and the Need for Transformation.**

The Bible indicates that the capacities of the heart—thinking, believing, trusting, feeling, valuing, desiring, committing, and obeying—can be out of alignment both in general and specifically with God’s heart. Our thoughts

can be flawed and self-centered (Proverbs 21:2). Beliefs can become misguided and corrupt (Jeremiah 17:9). Trust is often misplaced when not rooted in God (Proverbs 28:26). Emotions such as fear and anxiety can dominate when not aligned with Christ's peace (John 14:27). Misaligned values prioritize worldly treasures over spiritual ones (Matthew 6:21). Given these realities, it is no wonder that genuine obedience requires a heart transformed by God and delivered from the corrupting power of sin (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

### **The Insidious Incongruencies of the Heart.**

For those with eyes to see, the last sentence is evident. What is not so evident are the insidious incongruencies that burrow in the heart. Apart from the ongoing work of God's Spirit, the human heart is an incongruent mess. Schisms are present in our hearts to some degree whether one has moral injury or not. For example, what one claims to believe becomes divorced from what one truly values and desires. What one claims to desire isn't what one pursues. What one commits to saying yes to is betrayed by their actual commitments and behaviors. The fallen nature of the human heart and the impact of sin render the core of one's being divided against itself, others, and ultimately the Lord.

### **The Army's Perspective on Inner Conflict.**

The idea we just examined is vaguely and pluralistically affirmed by the Army. FM 7-22 notes, "When their actions deviate from their stated values, then they may experience inner conflict. Those struggling for integrity and congruity often only find inner peace after overcoming this struggle. They develop spiritual readiness by studying, connecting with, and understanding the value systems that mold their personal qualities."<sup>9</sup> While the general concept of inner conflict arising from incongruence with one's values is applicable to all, we must acknowledge the spirituality the Army is referring to here is not a biblical one but rather an ethical and philosophical definition that loosely tacks on the term spiritual, if only to distinguish it from other aspects of the human experience such as physical, mental, and emotional.

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 7-22: Holistic Health and Fitness* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2020), 10-1.

## **The Biblical Path to Heart Integration and Peace**

For those who submit to the authority of Scripture, it must be affirmed that apart from divine intervention, true integration of the disparate pieces of the heart is unattainable, and as a result, genuine peace of heart is unattainable. This peace of heart, brought through the congruency and alignment of the heart in Christ, is the true remedy for the soul schism of moral injury. This concept is crucial: internalize it and remember it. If nothing else, walk away with this: Peace of heart for a morally injured soul will come when the disparate and fractured aspects of one's heart come into alignment with the heart of Christ. In general, we are not so much trying to solve the counselee's problems as we are helping them become more like Christ as they navigate their problems. In the case of moral injury, helping the counselee have an integrated heart like Christ's is the solution to the problem. Exploring how this integration occurs warrants a separate paper, but it can be succinctly summarized as follows: Faith. Faith in Christ aligns the various facets of the heart. As one grows in faith and dedication to Him, the trusting, valuing, and committing aspects of the heart converge on Christ. When Christ is the focal point and exemplar of the heart's unity, these inherently disparate dimensions of the heart find their true north alignment. This ongoing process of integration is illustrated through SGM Sutton's struggle and journey.

### **The Case of SGM Sutton: A Heart in Tension.**

When SGM Sutton and I first met at the hospital, he quickly identified his heart schism—the seeming inability to reconcile being both a healer and a breaker and destroyer. At one point, I directly asked, “Does faith play a role in your life?” Without hesitation, he indicated that Jesus is his Lord and Savior and central to his life. To understand his internal conflict better, I asked some open-ended questions about how these two aspects of himself existed in tension. Then I asked him, “What if instead of existing in conflict they existed in tension, like they do with Jesus?” I continued, “The Jesus who saved and healed us from our sins is the same Jesus who broke the rule of Satan and sin over our lives. The same Jesus who healed the sick is returning to bring destruction on His enemies and turn them metaphorically into His footstool. The same hands that bandage the wounds of His sheep just as readily snap the neck of the wolf threatening to devour His flock. Both actions flow from the same righteous, loving, and undivided heart of Jesus.” What pastoral animal best exemplifies the protector of its flock?

SGM Sutton responded, “The concept of the sheepdog.”

“Precisely,” I replied. “Jesus is the ultimate sheepdog. He is as ruthless toward the wolves as He is tender toward the sheep. His love perfectly balances being a breaker and destroyer with being a healer.” For SGM Sutton and anyone experiencing heart incongruence, healing comes through finding harmony in Christ through faith, where internal conflicts caused by sin are forgiven, and inconsistencies are reconciled. Regardless of how fractured one’s heart is by moral injury, every moment is an opportunity to realign and set a new azimuth on Christ, and through Him.

### **Christ is the azimuth.**

Jeremy Pierre summarizes the primary point of this discussion well. He writes, “The unification of the heart is the unification of faith; the heart’s functions work in step with another as faith in Christ has greater influence over their mutual operation. A divided heart moves toward becoming an undivided one. This leads to greater peace and consistency in one’s experience.”<sup>10</sup> When the heart is not functioning as God has designed each capacity (believing, valuing, and committing) it shoots off like a separate azimuth in multiple directions that leads one to wander in self-destruction. However, Christ is the azimuth that brings alignment and the faith-filled forward focused direction the heart needs. However, this alignment and restoration of the disparate pieces of the heart will not happen without spiritual heart surgery. A surgery requires the intentional harmony of light of truth to see clearly and grace to heal fully.

## **GOSPEL LIGHT AND THE HARMONY OF TRUTH AND GRACE**

Jesus perfectly embodies both truth and grace (John 1:14). To counsel those struggling with moral trauma in a Christ-centered way, we must embrace these elements that Jesus embodies. Grace, God’s unmerited favor, includes His strengthening, enabling, and transforming power, all of which operate through Scripture, the embodiment of truth (John 17:17). Scripture reveals truth that sanctifies us (John 17:17) and grace that empowers us to live transformed lives (Titus 2:11-12). Abiding in God’s word allows us to know the truth, which sets us free (John 8:31-32). Moreover, Scripture teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains us in righteousness (2 Timothy

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<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (New Growth Press, 2016), 28.

3:16-17), fostering growth in both grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). Thus, truth and grace work harmoniously and should be integral in counseling those grappling with moral injury.

### **Balancing Truth and Grace in Counseling.**

When truth and grace are not harmonized, counseling solely through grace may comfort but risks fostering destructive behaviors by neglecting underlying issues and sin. Conversely, counseling solely with truth might overwhelm with shame, lacking the empathy needed for healing emotional wounds (Psalm 147:3). Truth alone may not offer the comfort needed to address deep-seated guilt and shame, potentially overlooking the healing power of grace. Emphasizing truth without grace can lead to a legalistic focus on rules rather than nurturing the individual's heart and their relationship with God (Matthew 23:23-24). Which leads to a crucial question: What are some counseling considerations to ensure one is harmonizing truth and grace? What skills are needed to employ both in tandem? The following is not exhaustive, but they are crucial.

### **Counseling Skills That Employ Grace.**

Counseling skills that employ grace include empathy and compassion (Matthew 23:23-24), ensuring understanding and care for counsees' struggles and emotions without condemnation. Active listening, attending behaviors, paraphrasing, and concreteness give full attention to the counselee and assure the counselee that they have truly been heard. Providing acceptance of the counselee wholly without conditions or criticism, affirming their inherent worth and dignity without affirming sin or destructive behaviors. When appropriate, using a non-directive approach allows a counselee to explore their thoughts and feelings without interruption or judgment. All of these are counseling skills that emphasize the spirit of grace.

### **Counseling Skills That Emphasize Truth:**

Equally important are skills centered on truth. Counselors must maintain openness and honesty in communication with the counselee, ensuring mutual understanding through clarifying questions and summarizing key points. They help the counselee face and accept reality, even when it is difficult or painful. Counselors gently challenge distorted thinking or behavior patterns inconsistent with biblical truth (Ephesians 4:15). They

provide accurate information and relevant biblical teachings (2 Timothy 3:16), encouraging the counselee to take responsibility for their actions and decisions guided by biblical principles and values (James 1:22).

### **Integrating Truth and Grace in Counseling.**

Harmonizing truth and grace is crucial. For moral injury, the counselor doesn't simply focus on fixing problems or providing solutions. They concentrate on spiritual heart surgery. Tim Chester articulates well what's needed for this delicate surgery: "Love without truth is like doing heart surgery with a wet fish. But truth without love is like doing heart surgery with a hammer."<sup>11</sup> We are called to speak truth with grace and love that brings the Holy Spirit guided scalpel of Scripture to bear on the heart. This is especially important when addressing what is often seemingly damaged beyond repair by moral injury: the counselee's sense of self-worth and identity, which we will discuss next.

### **GOSPEL LIGHT AND TRUE VS. FALSE IDENTITY**

Believing every thought that appears in one's mind leads to psychological and spiritual ruin (Proverbs 21:2). Confusing these thoughts with one's core identity results in mental stress and existential battles over self-worth. This struggle intensifies for those with a morally injured mind, filled with spiraling thoughts and distorted self-perception. However, one's core identity in Christ is defined by Scripture, not by these thoughts. Discerning between the thought and the thinker, the feeling and the feeler, holds promise for change. Recognizing the internal voice proclaiming falsehoods—such as 'I am a burden. No one cares about me. I should just end it. It is important to understand this voice is as deceptive and in doing so, can be a life saver.

Self-talk is popular with secular psychology, which offers certain benefits but falls short of a fuller biblical view. Jerry Bridges wisely counseled, "Don't believe everything you think. You cannot be trusted to tell yourself the truth. Instead, get into God's word."<sup>12</sup> Only God perceives reality and sees us as we truly are. (1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 21:2). Everyone else views the world and

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<sup>11</sup> Tim Chester, *\*You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions\** (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 158.

<sup>12</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 48.

themselves through a distorted interpretive lens shaped by misshapen beliefs and values.

This lens requires continual renewal and transformation through God’s word (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:5). Thus, transformation—whether confronting moral injury or not—demands stepping out of one’s mind and into God’s word, His truth, His reality, His sanity. Therefore, it is crucial to provide space for the morally injured to expose the destructive thoughts and beliefs fracturing their identity. Allowing the opportunity for them to bring their thoughts into the open without condemnation and reminding them of their true identity in Christ (Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17). This vulnerable transparency in the light of Gospel grace facilitates healing, as truth unpacks the distortions created by sin (John 8:32), while grace empowers them (2 Corinthians 12:9). Through this transformative work, their identity in Christ becomes a more experienced reality (Galatians 2:20). This work is not merely an individual endeavor between counselor and counselee; it necessitates community. Indeed, the community of faith, not the counselor’s office, is God’s method for spiritual growth and healing (Hebrews 10:24-25).

## **GOSPEL LIGHT AND MOVING FROM FACADE TO FELLOWSHIP**

Moral injury, the profound soul wound resulting from actions that betray one’s moral beliefs, thrives in darkness and isolation. Bringing these wounds into the light within a trusted community is crucial for healing. Individuals often hide their sin, pain, and guilt, fearing judgment and further alienation. However, 1 John 1:9 assures us that if we “confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This confession isn’t merely vertical, between us and God, but also horizontal, within the body of Christ.

Have you ever heard the phrase “fake it until you make it”? Many of us have likely pretended at some point—assuming a role we weren’t prepared for or feigning knowledge to save face. We wear superficial masks to avoid embarrassment, shame, or simply to advance in life. Unfortunately, these masks often persist, hindering true healing and growth in our relationships and fellowship within the body of Christ. For those grappling with moral injury, these masks become barriers, shielding raw wounds that, if exposed, could begin to heal.

Healing requires fellowship—with God and with others. The “others” is the church. Some may scoff at such an assertion, as the local church is not often associated with healing and transformation. However, Jeremy Lelek



wisely asserts the correct Scriptural perspective: “One cannot read the Bible without coming away absolutely convinced that the church is the preeminent context for rich, personal, even psychological transformation. One participant in my dissertation study reflected upon the church’s role in counseling, saying, ‘The church is about what counseling is about. Ephesians 4 describes all that we have said above. Human flourishing is the goal of what the church is, with the church is to become, and how the church gets there. Wise counseling is not an individual self-improvement but builds the community of faith and love.’”<sup>13</sup>

In a church where I served, we identified as “broken pieces brought together by God’s skillful and gracious hands to make something beautiful” (Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:6). Through God’s grace, we confront our brokenness, guilt, and shame as a united community. We wrestle with the accusatory voices tormenting our souls (Revelation 12:10) and remind each other of the righteousness granted through Jesus (Romans 8:1; 1 John 1:9). As R.C. Sproul noted, “We find in Christ not a mask that conceals our face, but an entire wardrobe of clothing, which is His righteousness.”<sup>14</sup> For the morally injured soul, the collective forgiveness and righteousness we have in Christ enables one to experience the freedom from the facade one blankets their shame and guilt in. The facade is to come down, not merely in a counseling office but in the community of faith. In fact, one of the most spiritually damaging actions a counselee can do is keep their sin and shame a secret solely between them and their counselor. To do so is profoundly unbiblical as Jeremy Lelek notes. “Confidentiality, as understood in therapy, is a secular construct profoundly influenced by a person-centered philosophy. It has a capacity to promote a context of isolation when believers face their darkest secrets of struggle. At times, it may even promote a context where sin can flourish in secrecy between counselor and client.”<sup>15</sup> The Gospel calls us to bring our deepest sins into the light in the community of faith (John 3:19-21) while being clothed in Christ’s glory (2 Corinthians 4:6). This grace—not judgment—transforms broken pieces into something beautiful (Romans 5:20-21; 2 Corinthians 5:17). This transformation necessitates a

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<sup>13</sup> Jeremy Lelek, *\*Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future\** (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 168.

<sup>14</sup> R. C. Sproul, "A Church Full of Hypocrites," *\*Ligonier Ministries\**, accessed July 21, 2024, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/church-full-hypocrites#:~:text=We%20have%20to%20find%20in,standing%20before%20a%20holy%20God.>

<sup>15</sup> Jeremy Lelek, *\*Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future\** (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 168.

community, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14. For those wrestling with moral injury, communalizing it is essential (Galatians 6:2). 1 John 1:1-10 reminds us that genuine fellowship requires walking in the light, as God does. This means being transparent about our sins and not hiding behind facades (1 John 1:5-7). If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and hinder our fellowship with God and one another (1 John 1:8-10). True fellowship thrives on confessing our sins, trusting that God is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Sin erects barriers, but confession and walking in the light bring healing and unity (1 John 1:7).

Masks obstruct genuine fellowship with God and others. Yet, by confessing our sins and stepping into the light, we dismantle these barriers. As Bonhoeffer wisely noted, “He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone.”<sup>16</sup> Only by facing our sin and struggles together can we experience the depth of the peace fellowship with God and others brings through the cleansing power Christ’s blood has afforded (1 John 1:7).

Transitioning from facade to fellowship demands embracing godly transparency and authenticity—a painful yet necessary step. For those with moral trauma, this involves sharing burdens with others who can offer empathy, understanding, and support. It necessitates a safe, compassionate environment where individuals can reveal their deepest wounds without fear of rejection. In heaven, masks will be unnecessary, as we will fully know and be known in perfect transparency. Until then, we strive to grow in openness, shedding facades and embracing Christ’s light in our relationships. This honors God and strengthens His body, uniting us in support through His transformative grace. For those suffering from moral injury, this journey of communalizing our pain and embracing Gospel grace is essential for true healing.

## **CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD**

We have explored the profound impact of moral injury on service members and highlighted the crucial role chaplains play in offering Christ-centered support. By understanding moral injury and the resulting soul schism, we can better extend hope and healing by illuminating the Gospel's transformative light on the discord within one's heart, identity, and journey toward healing within the faith community. While this discussion provides a

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<sup>16</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (HarperOne, 1978), 110.

foundation for further exploration among biblically minded counselors, it is not exhaustive. Christ-centered chaplains must recognize that ministering to individuals with soul wounds falls within their purview and are positioned as frontline resources to address this challenge. Subsequently, they must resist the reflex to automatically refer out. Behavioral health specialists often express frustration at the frequent referrals made by chaplains. Behavioral health services typically operate well below capacity, with an average five-week wait for a full therapy session, even for individuals grappling with suicidal thoughts. Immediate referrals only exacerbate the strain on our behavioral health colleagues. The military chaplain is embedded with the troops and provides a better resource for immediate help for the military member. We must stay true to our calling and faithfully execute our duties to the Lord. While appropriate referrals are warranted in certain cases, chaplains should confidently embrace their role in delivering pastoral care and counseling. As chaplains, we carry the honor and obligation of being beacons of hope. Through compassionate presence and steadfast ministry, we can guide our service members toward healing, even in their darkest hours.

**Moving forward, let us commit to:**

- Deepening our comprehension of moral injury and its spiritual dimensions through continuous study and dialogue within our community.
- Resisting the urge to reflexively refer out and instead, leveraging our unique position to offer immediate, Christ-centered pastoral care.
- Collaborating closely with behavioral health specialists to complement their services and alleviate their burdens, ensuring that service members receive timely and comprehensive support.

In doing so, we embody Christ's directive to be salt and light in a world often overshadowed by trauma and desolation. Let us embrace this calling with humility and faith, trusting in the transformative power of the Christ to bring healing and restoration to those under our care. In the years to come, let us remain steadfast to shine the light of the Gospel to those wandering in the shadow of moral injury.

***Book Review:***

**DISPENSATIONALISM REVISITED: A  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY RESTATEMENT**

***Edited by Kevin T. Bauder and R. Bruce Compton***

*Review by Geoff Bischoff*

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*Chaplain Bischoff currently serves the 743d Military Intelligence Battalion as the only active-duty Army chaplain on Buckley Space Force Base in Aurora, Colorado. He's been with the Army for 26 years (15 Active) and has just finished his fourth year as a chaplain.*

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*\*To simplify, I will refer to the work as DR21.*

**T**he book takes the form of a *festschrift* in honor of the recently departed Charles A. Hauser, Jr., a luminary within dispensational Christianity. The structure breaks into ten main topics, one from each of ten contributors, two of those being the book editors. Compiling such a book is not without challenge, as there is a great likelihood that a multi-author project on a unified topic will cover and re-cover the same ground to paint the same wall with many coats of paint. Thankfully, through the diligence of the editors, or the focused discipline of the contributors, or both, DR21 avoids this pitfall, delivering one solid coat of paint to the entire dispensational structure. Wherever previous ground is revisited, it is done

such that the revisitation leads swiftly and cleanly to the next major doctrine. This makes *DR21* a smooth read.

## ON CHARITY AND INTEGRITY

Before a brief survey of the topics offered in *DR21*, please allow some background discussion on the tone of the book, especially as it interacts with opposing views. I received my undergraduate theological instruction at a self-consciously dispensational school. I didn't learn dispensationalism from Tim LaHaye and Hal Lindsey. I learned it from Schofield and Ryrie and Vlach and McCune and other solid men, including (for three semesters, by my records) from *DR21* contributor Andrew Hudson. Later, in seminary but especially after, I moved out of dispensationalism entirely. I am now covenantal, postmillennial, confessional, and Reformed.

During that journey, I discovered a peculiar trick of our Adamic fallenness on both sides of that theological divide. First, as I was moving out of dispensationalism and reading other works, I found myself frustrated and even angry to learn that postmillennialism had not been charitably or even accurately described to me from the pulpit or the podium. And now that I have landed at the far end, I often see the same thing in the other direction: Straw men and caricatures of dispensationalism rather than charitable and accurate disagreement.

Reading *DR21*, however, was refreshing. Since arriving all the way on the far side of the dispensational/covenantal divide, this is the first work I have read on the topic that accurately reflects my understanding of *my own position*. Additionally, *DR21* recognizes many of the key differences within covenantalism, rather than brushing them all the same shade of taupe. For this integrity and honesty, *DR21* is worth choosing as your first reach for quick research of dispensational distinctives, with argumentation aimed at what the opposition *actually believes*.

## SURVEY OF CHAPTERS

The **first essay**, by Douglas Brown of Faith Baptist in Ankeny, discusses the doxological nature of the universe under the dispensational system. This chapter is helpful in placing the locus of God's glory in the unfolding story of redemption, culminating in the supreme glory of the Millennium. It is also helpful in its charitable recognition that many covenantal systems also view

the telos of the universe as doxological, but with a differently understood locus.

The **second essay**, by Roy Beacham of Central Baptist of Plymouth, Minnesota, makes a cogent case for a unified hermeneutic, especially with respect to predictive prophecy. As a short essay from within dispensationalism, it is difficult to find better material than Beacham here. To receive a deeper explanation of the Mosaic test of a prophet, and how that directly relates to dispensational hermeneutics regarding predictive prophecy, one would need one of the available book-length treatments of the topic.

The same applies to the **third essay**, by Kevin Bauder, also of Central, who discusses the difference in dispensational understanding between Israel and the Church: To get more than Bauder offers, one would have to go to Vlach's or another book-length discussion on the same matter. His concise treatment of the continuity versus discontinuity between Israel and Church beginning at page 89 states plainly a truth of dispensationalism that stands against the abiding canard that dispensationalists believe in different soteriology for Jew and Gentile: "At all times and in all places, sinners have been justified by grace through faith." A helpful discussion of the progressive content of saving revelation follows.

William Barrick of Master's in Los Angeles writes the **fourth essay**, this one on the various covenants in the Bible. Barrick discusses similarities and differences between the several covenants, in part as a prophylactic against flattening biblical redemptive-history into a Works-Grace covenantal dichotomy. This essay marks the only use in *DR21* of visual aides in the form of helpful charts with scripture references aligned by covenant.

The **fifth essay** is a hermeneutical-theological study of the Kingdom of Heaven/God, provided by R. Bruce Compton of Detroit Baptist in Allen Park. I noted with pleasure that within the first section, at page 119, Compton laid to rest the older dispensational distinction between the Kingdom of Heaven versus the Kingdom of God: "The problem with this distinction is that it runs counter to the evidence" provided especially in the Synoptics. He goes on from there to make arguments in favor of a future, earthly (millennial) kingdom and to contrast them against opposing arguments in favor of a present, spiritual kingdom. If a deficiency can be found in this chapter, I think it is the absence of argumentation for and against a third option that is growing quite quickly amongst popular Christianity right now, namely the postmillennial conceptualization of the Kingdom that is spiritual *and also physical*, and present in both ways (inaugurated and growing) right now.

Larry Pettegrew of Shepherds in Cary, North Carolina writes the **sixth essay** in the *festschrift*. His topic: Israel in the Church Fathers. An excellent quote occurs on page 146: “The role of Israel in eschatology is a foundational issue...unless the Scriptures teach that Israel as a nation will have the central place in the future tribulation...[then] pretribulationism is wrong and posttribulationism is right.” Whenever a systematizer exposes a specific and testable *sine qua non* of a system, the reader profits, and here is an example. The remainder of the essay provides as much of an apologetic as is possible to achieve in a survey of patristics of such concise length.

The **seventh essay** comes from Andrew Hudson, pastor of Westside Baptist Church in Janesville, Wisconsin. This essay is a micro-commentary on the entire book of Acts, followed by an examination of apostolic Old Testament usage, and concluding with a discussion of what is and is not normative in Acts for today’s Church. In the section on Old Testament usage, a helpful section begins at page 185, where Hudson begins a more protracted examination of a particularly controversial prophecy, that of Joel 2 cited in Acts 2. This discussion begins with a substantive paragraph stating the broad thrust of each of the three major views. I hold the first view and can attest that it is herein presented charitably and accurately, to the extent such is possible in a single paragraph. Hudson’s analysis and argumentation as to why he holds the third view is valuable in providing insight into a dispensational hermeneutic as applied in real time.

Pastor Ryan Martin of Columbiaville Baptist Church in Columbiaville, Michigan, writes the **eighth essay**. This essay argues against supersessionism via a summary of Pauline argumentation in the first eight chapters of Romans, followed by a point-by-point explanation of Paul’s argumentation in Romans 9-11.

The **ninth essay** comes from W Edward Glenny of University of Northwestern, St. Paul. Glenny briefly surveys the twentieth chapter of Revelation to answer the question, “Will Jesus come before the millennium?” He concludes in the affirmative.

**Closing out the doctrinal essays** is Jonathan Pratt of Central Baptist of Plymouth, Minnesota, argues the case for a pretribulational rapture. He argues exegetically, from John 14, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 12. He argues theologically, using imminency doctrine and the principle that wrath is not for the Church.

Following the doctrinal discussions and apologetic essays, the book closes with a section of remembrances of past students and associates of the late Dr. Hauser in whose honor this *festschrift* was undertaken. The examples given are

touching and encouraging, in the highest tradition of the Fifth Commandment, as they honor a faithful keeper of the First Commandment.

## CONCLUSION

It is doubtful a reader could find a clearer exposition of the core doctrines of dispensationalism in a single short volume than presents itself in *DR21*. Additionally, the irenic and accurate description of detractor and opponent positions makes *DR21* valuable as an apologetic tool: Detractors may remain in disagreement, but in this book they ought to at least be able to say “Yes, actually, that does describe my position.” This book will be worth the shelf space to any seminarian, pastor, or layman who desires an understanding of dispensational Christianity.



***Book Review:***

**A BASIC GUIDE TO THE JUST WAR  
TRADITION: CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONS  
AND PRACTICES**

***by Eric Patterson***

*Review by LT Stephen L. Huebscher, CHC, USN (active duty)*

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*Dr. Huebscher is an active-duty Navy Chaplain (LT.) serving as the command chaplain for the USS Princeton, home ported in San Diego, CA. He is new to the Navy but has an extensive academic background before starting his Navy career.*

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**I**t was with great interest that I responded to an invitation by the Journal editor to review Eric Patterson's recent volume, *A Basic Guide to the Just War Tradition: Christian Foundations and Practices*. I had recently read Paul Copan's four views book to which Patterson contributed, and I was eager to see what Patterson might say if he had more room to develop his own views. I was not disappointed. Patterson, a former academic and past president of Religious Freedom International, became the President and CEO of Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in 2024. A prior Air Force Reservist and State Department official, Patterson has authored or co-authored several substantial books on aspects of just war theory and has written pieces for major news outlets.

This book is different from many of his earlier works, instead of writing to fellow academics and professionals, Patterson invites interested readers (especially Christians) to an introduction to the vast and complex subject

known as the “Just War” tradition. He draws on a wide variety of stories to pique readers’ curiosity and illustrate the points he makes throughout each of the book’s six chapters. There are no footnotes, but a few endnotes follow a list of suggested books, and a modest index rounds out the volume.

Like a good teacher, Patterson introduces his topic in chapter 1, and outlines his plan for covering the main points. Each of the chapter subtitles identifies the primary focus or argument of its respective chapter. In chapter 1, Patterson highlights the fundamental concern of just statecraft as a quest for peace. Given that he is writing for an orthodox Christian audience, it makes sense that chapter 2 addresses the theological foundations of just war statecraft. Patterson identifies three primary theological foundations as governance/right authority, calling/vocation, and stewardship. Patterson identifies the role of government as fundamentally different from that of the individual. Governments are tasked with promoting good behavior and limiting bad behavior, including punishing those who do wrong within a state (via law enforcement) and those from outside the state (military protection). Nevertheless, individuals have a multitude of God-given roles to play in this important task, something that Patterson returns to at the close of the book. He sees the last of these three, stewardship, as the basis for many of the limits that show up in Rules of Engagement in warfare doctrine.

Having introduced his readers to the key theological and biblical points, Patterson then deals in chapter 3 with the question: How did this understanding come into being? Is it something new? Patterson draws on examples from church history. He first addresses the related claim that the early Christians held to a pacifist, anti-military position, especially before Constantine officially recognized Christianity. Patterson critiques that understanding, not only with the teachings of Jesus, but also with Tertullian and Origen. Patterson then touches on other major figures in church history, such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin. He also covered a Roman Catholic priest named Vitoria (1486-1546) who responded to the attacks on Eastern European Christians by the Ottoman Turks, feuds within medieval Christendom, and the wars in the New World. Patterson also responds to the important critique of Anabaptist pacifism and points out crucial weaknesses in what could otherwise be plausible objections to just war statecraft. He brings the survey up to the present, mentioning Paul Ramsey and other more recent writers.

Looking at theory and history is fine, but the difficulty is always in applying truth in the present. In chapter 4, Patterson turns from questions of the past to work through moral issues of contemporary warfare. Here, he

draws a strong distinction between moral resistance and violent rebellion. I have heard it said that “One man’s freedom fighter is another man’s terrorist.” Patterson does not quote this relativistic platitude, but he does deal with the issues of proper fighting and what distinguishes terrorism and other illegitimate forms of fighting as violence. It is within this context that Patterson deals with the American War for Independence, sometimes unfortunately called the American Revolution. While there certainly were occasions of mob violence among the American colonists, the overall approach of the leaders and most of the colonists was one of restrained force for the purpose of restoring their rights, government, and way of life. This was in stark contrast to the blood lust of vengeful mobs seen in the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions, where the purpose was to throw off authority and tradition. Patterson also points out the significant role of pastoral sermons, some more than 20 years before the colonists’ break with Great Britain. (This issue was also covered in 2024 Vol 4 spring issue of this journal.)

Having outlined and illustrated approaches to key contemporary issues, the reader may be wondering what can be done to help warfighters develop the tools to be able to implement these ideals and best practices into their own lives. Here, Patterson turns to the interior life of the warrior, their character, and what the Bible calls their “heart”—the seat of their thinking and feeling. Patterson spotlights the roles of love, anger, and virtue, especially the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude.

Patterson’s final chapter deals with the thorny issue of ending wars well. Crucial to this endeavor is first re-establishing order in society, followed by implementing justice, and using both to work towards conciliation. He concludes with an appeal to all Christians to be involved at some level in this significant work, beginning with prayer and pastoral leadership in churches for education, as well as in the full spectrum of professional involvement ranging from poverty alleviation to diplomacy to military intervention to medical and psychological treatment for both combatants and civilians.

This book admirably fulfills the mission presented by its title: it provides an informative account of its topic within a historic Christian framework that enables readers to construct a biblically informed and logically coherent understanding of how this topic relates to their Christian faith in the world. In this sense, the book can be seen as a subset of apologetics. Patterson does all this with engaging and inspiring prose, touching the hearts of his readers as well as their heads, and showing them ways to put their hands into action as well.

My only quibbles with Patterson reflect more a desire to add nuance to the historical discussion, since history is often messy, and people are often complex. For instance, I am more skeptical about whether Wilson's fourteen points after World War One were successful, a point that Patterson himself acknowledges is not unanimously accepted. More significant would be the hermeneutical questions of moving from Biblical truth to public policy in a pluralistic state. But these wishes of mine would change the nature and length of the book, and it would no longer be an approachable text of just the right length.

In short, I am happy to recommend this book to all interested readers, beginning with my own kids in junior high school through college, and including fellow chaplains and ministry professionals and other thoughtful Christians. Given the right circumstances, I can also envision adapting parts of the material into a training or Bible study for some of my Sailors and Marines. Take and read!

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*The AGC*

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JOURNAL

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*Ministry Update:*

**TRAINING ZAMBIAN  
MILITARY CHAPLAINS**

*By Bob Freiberg, Editor*

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*Dr. Freiberg is a retired Navy Chaplain of 27 years. He has taught Bible courses from the high school to the post-doctrinal levels, and is instrumental in helping write curriculum for those institutions interested in Chaplain ministries.*

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**F**or the past three years, retired AGC chaplains have gone to Central African Baptist University (CABU) in Kitwe, Zambia to teach courses on military chaplaincy to those nationals interested in chaplaincy ministry. CABU has an agreement with the Zambian military to help teach their active-duty chaplains Theology and how to use Biblical truth to minister to service members. While CABU is a Bible college and is actively training national pastors for local church ministry, they also have an agreement to teach Chaplaincy skills and theology to those who are Zambian military chaplains serving in the armed services there. To enhance their program, the Leadership at CABU asked for the help of the AGC to send experienced American military chaplains to integrate their experience and theological expertise in teaching and training Zambian chaplains. This partnership has been blessed by the Lord by having many positive things happen.

In this partnership, AGC supports the CABU program by holding a one-week course for teaching the cardinal doctrines of the faith and how to apply this into chaplain ministry for those serving in the Zambian Army and Air Force. Our chaplains have been diligent in teaching about Biblical counseling, as well as explaining the differences between Church ministry and

one of helping those who serve their nation in a military capacity through spiritual leadership. This program has been so successful that there is discussion going on about expanding this program for other interested nations. This is only possible by the grace of God and the excellent teaching of those retired chaplains who have volunteered to go over and give of their time and experience.

Last April, Edward Jackson (ret-Air Force) went over and held a conference on Spiritual Leadership and how it affects the Military Chaplain's ministry. Edward has been instrumental in building bridges between Zambian chaplains and the AGC. Then in July, Cliff Jones and Jay Hartranft did a team teach conference on Biblical Counseling. Jay and Cliff did over 30 sessions which covered topics such as Crisis counseling, family issues and PTSD. Both sessions in April and July were well received and helpful for the attendees according to the reviews. There are plans to do more in the future and for those AGC chaplains who are interested in helping with this program, AGC leadership is always willing to help those individuals make this happen.

One of the success and big draw for this program is that we have been able to send over chaplains who are retired and have war/combat experience, as well as advanced theological degrees. This way, we have been able to send those over who can share their Theological and Biblical knowledge, but also their thoughts about combat and leadership in crisis situations. Not to mention being in senior leadership positions to help those who are learning to work in a spiritual/military situation. In short, the Scriptures tell us to have older men teach younger ones and we have been able to send our best and brightest experienced chaplains, and it is making a difference for those they help train.

The latest development is the Zambian chaplain leadership has asked those in CABU to add more courses to the program. It is the AGC's mission to make that happen and support not only our partners at CABU, but to give God the glory in every opportunity He opens for our experienced chaplains to go and teach those who teach and minister to Zambian service men and women. So if you are an AGC retired chaplain and are led to serve God in this new ministry, let us know and as the Lord opens things up, we can proceed from there.

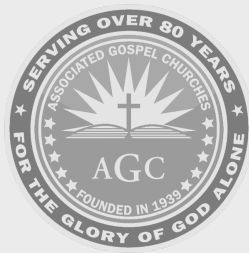
***NOTE:** Presently, we are trying to work out details where those on active duty can participate in this program, but certain current details prevent active-duty chaplains from being able to help at this time.*



— *The AGC* —

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