Q&A

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ANNA'S AGE

QUESTION: *What was Anna's Age (Lk. 2:37)?*

ANSWER: Admittedly, the Greek is a bit ambiguous. It reads:

...αὕτη προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ἡμέραις πολλαῖς, ζήσασα μετὰ ἀνδρὸς ἔτη ἑπτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς

καὶ αὐτὴ χήρα ἕως ἐτῶν ὀγδοήκοντα τεσσάρων...

Literally, this says, "…this [woman] being advanced in many days, having lived with a husband seven [years] from her virginity, and she [was] a widow until eighty-four…"

Normally, I think this probably indicates that she was 84 years old at the time of the presentation of Jesus at the temple. Most English Versions also take it in this way (so RSV, NRSV, ESV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NIB, NJB). Indeed, the NJB offers the most unambiguous English rendering: "Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old…"

However, the Greek text is not quite so specific, and some English Versions have her as a widow for 84 years, which when added to the seven years of marriage plus her age at the time of marriage (perhaps as a teenager, assuming a fairly typical age for the home-taking), would put her well over the century mark (so ERV, NET). Here, the ERV offers the most unambiguous rendering: "…she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and she had been a widow even for fourscore and four years…" While the ESV follows the earlier reckoning, it offers this second possible reckoning as a footnote to the text.*back*

APOCRYPHA

QUESTION: *Does Dan have any commentary on the orthodox Old Testament and catholic Old Testament and why we don't use them?*

ANSWER: Yes, I do have a brief introduction to each of the Apocrypha books. Go to the Diakonos website, and you'll find them under: "Literature." Scroll down to "Old Testament Section 2 of 2," and near the end you'll find a commentary called "Apocrypha."

By the way, I DO use the Apocrypha, and while I agree with the Reformers that these works are not to be used for establishing church doctrine, they are nonetheless valuable as spiritual helps and ought to be read by Christians. They were certainly read by Christians in the long history of the church, since they were part of the Septuagint, which was the basic Bible for most Christians in the early centuries of Christianity. In my opinion, the low value given to the Apocrypha by many Protestants is both short-sighted and against the flow of the larger history of the Christian church. *back*

BIBLE AUTHORITY

QUESTION: *Hello, I have a question about the authority of the Bible. What gives the Bible authority over other texts of the ancient Near East, or other religious beliefs from over the ages? What gives the Bible authority at all? Christians speak of the "authoritative word of God", but where does that authority come from exactly?*

ANSWER: This is a fair question. The authority of any religious text is given to it by those who believe it to be divinely inspired. Hence, authority is always a matter of religious faith. To be sure, there may be supporting arguments concerning a text's veracity, accuracy, wisdom, and so forth, but nonetheless, a text is authoritative only for those who acclaim it to be so, which is to say, it is a matter of faith. Similar to faith in the belief in God, where God's existence and character are held to be fundamentally real, the authority of the Bible is also part of the Christian belief system.

It is interesting that you reference other ancient Near Eastern texts, of which there are many. Some of these texts were certainly known to the writers in the Bible, and on occasion, they reference them also (e.g., Num. 21:26-30). Other texts, such as the Mesopotamian creation texts or the flood texts, may well have been known to them, though this is not entirely clear since they are not cited directly. Still, the biblical accounts of creation and flood seem to reflect on them in the form of correctives. Paul, in the New Testament, references more than one Greek poet in his letters, and these texts were held in high religious esteem among the Greeks--and apparently, Paul believed they contained some true sentiments which he was willing to repeat.

The same can be said of the many other religious texts, ranging from the Indian Vedas and Upanishads (earlier than biblical texts) to the Quran (later than biblical texts). No doubt, these respective religious communities held and hold their texts to be authoritative, and equally on the basis of faith.

Hence, when we speak of the "authority" of the Bible, we are user insider vocabulary. The Bible is authoritative for those who are Christians, not for those who are not. They believe (and I am a Christian, so I also believe) that the Bible is God's Word in human words. Can I demonstrate this conclusion beyond reasonable doubt to an outsider or an agnostic or an atheist? Certainly not. I think there is reason to believe, but if the Christian faith was provable beyond all reasonable doubt, faith would be altogether unnecessary (and the greatest evangelist would simply be a logician). If one should ask from where such authority comes, the answer is ultimately from God, whom Christians believe has spoken to Moses, and to the prophets, and to the apostles, etc. Of course, Christians also believe that the Scriptures which Jesus revered support their authority. But again, this is an insider's viewpoint and cannot be held over the outsider. *back*

CALEB AND LAND INHERITANCE

QUESTION: *Why wasn't Caleb given land with the other tribes, but rather had to claim it. I know Caleb was a Kenizzite; Genesis 15:19 mentions the Kenizzites as part of the Canaanites. Do we have any idea when Caleb became part of the people? Why do you think it was possible for him to be a prince representing Judah? Why did he have to demand his land?*

ANSWER: In the first place, it should be remembered that Joshua, while he was very successful in the Canaanite invasion, did not vanquish the entire population of Canaan (cf. Jos. 13:1. While the land was divided and assigned to the various tribes, this did not

mean that it was empty land for the taking. Rather, each tribe was responsible to overcome the various Canaanite clans who lived there.

As to Caleb himself, there are a couple of Calebs within the Israelite families. One was descended from the tribe of Judah via Perez and Hezron (1 Chr. 2:3, 9). The other, as you indicated, was a Kenizzite (Nu. 13:6; 32:12). Originally an Edomite clan (Ge. 36:15), Kenaz had settled in southern Canaan and his family, along with a number of other clans, was to be dispossessed by Abraham's descendants (Ge. 15:19). (We later run into another Kenizzite family in southern Judah, Nabal, a sheep rancher who snubbed David, cf. 1 Sa. 25:5.) Many scholars suggest that the Calebites may have been absorbed into the tribe of Judah during the reign of David, but this is a guess. Be that as it may, Caleb was apparently closely associated with the tribe of Judah much earlier, which is why he was selected to represent Judah in the selection of the 12 spies (Nu. 13:3, 6). At this early period, he must have been recognized as a leader in the Judah tribe. When Moses later chose representatives to parcel out the land of Canaan, Caleb was selected to represented Judah (Nu. 34:16-19). Hence, when each tribe engaged in combat with the Canaanites in their assigned areas, they had some successes and some failures, and this was true for Judah as well (Jg. 1:1-20).

As to when or how Caleb's family was absorbed into the tribe of Judah, we have no direct information, but apparently it was quite early. *back*

CANNABIS IN THE BIBLE

QUESTION: *I recently read an article where someone claimed that calamus in the Bible refers to Cannabis? Is this valid?*

ANSWER: Attempting to make links between an ancient Hebrew word and a modern English word on the basis of phonetic similarity is, to put it bluntly, absolutely the wrong way to do things. It's right up there with the British Israelite theory that since "Brit" sounds like the Hebrew "berit," the English and the Americans are the lost 10-tribes of Israel. Its validity is right up there with the flat earth society.

However, the author of this article, who obviously does not know Hebrew and is depending entirely on secondary sources, offers some further arguments, all of which are specious.

First, the Hebrew word קָנֶה is translated in more than one way, even in something as traditional as the KJV. Yes, it is rendered as a plant used in the recipe for anointing oil (Ex. 30:23), where it is in Hebrew construct form as וְקַנֵּה־בֹשֶׂם (= the stalk of balsam trees), but to make a case that the sound of this form, which is *qanah bosem*, should be related to the modern plant cannabis on the basis of phonetics, is sheer absurdity. The word also is used to refer to a tubular-shaped measuring reed (Eze. 40:3-5), which suggests the instrument is made from a long, straight stalk (which is quite unlike the stems of the cannabis plant). It is used to refer to the beam on a balance



scale for weighing out gold and silver (Isa. 46:6), which suggests that it is structurally substantial (a quality very unlike the cannabis plant). Metaphorically, it can refer to the bone of the upper arm (Job 31:22), again an image that suggest something long, tubular, and straight. Metaphorically, it also is used to refer to a candlestick shaft (Ex. 25:31), again suggesting a long, tubular shape. Scholars conclude that this Hebrew word refers to *arundo donax*, a giant reed with long, tubular stalks, common in the Mediterranean, Egypt, and many other places in the world. Here is a photo of the plant (left). Its dried grass stems were used in ancient Egypt to wrap mummies, and it was used in the Roman Period to make arrows and pipe instruments (and is still used to produce high quality bassoons). The young shoots and leaves are edible by humans. It can be roasted or boiled or ground to make bread, though it does have some amount of alkaloid with medical properties. It is readily by browsed cattle, at least before it becomes too large.

All the blather about monetary value in Ex. 30:23 is so much nonsense. The passage has nothing whatsoever to do with monetary value, but rather, the weight of the various raw materials for producing a large amount of anointing oil.

In the end, the article to which you refer is a transparent and flimsy attempt to justify the modern use of cannabis by someone who simply does not know what he/she is talking about (or else is intentionally deceptive). It's a crock!. *back*

CANNABIS AND JESUS

QUESTION: *I need some help. How would you respond to this comment?*

"Jesus probably smoked marijuana. Ha! Ha! They had all kinds of the wacko tobacco back then and nothing about it was frowned upon at the time. Jesus used a plant numerous times called kaneh-bosm in the old translations, and that is the cannabis plant. Marijuana. Weed. The devil's lettuce. Hemp is mentioned several times. By Moses. John the Baptist. Jesus. Disciples. It helps to look at theologians who are not American, since it's not really criminalized, or frowned upon, anywhere but here. So, it wouldn't be scandalous to a European or middle eastern person to see it mentioned by name. If that makes sense.'

ANSWER: I read the comment, and I'll off some biting comments.

Let's start first of all with קנה בשם (*qaneh bosem*). I've run into this wild idea previously, so it is familiar to me. These two words each have a specific meaning. The first, קנה, refers to any sort of plant that has a stalk, such as, a reed, a long grass blade, or a shaft. Indeed, it can be used of one's upper arm or the beam on a set of scales or the shaft of a candlestick. The second word, בשם, means balsam shrub or balsam oil or perfume. It is a sap from a resinous tree or shrub in the ancient Middle East, and from this sap we get the famous "balm of Gilead." Combined, the two words refer to a group of various plants that secrete sap, such as, sweet cane, oil grass, a giant reed, etc.

The notion that it refers to marijuana specifically is extremely tenuous, based on the similarity of the sound of *qaneh bosem* and the sound of cannibas. This is hardly serious exegesis. It's the sort of stuff that floats on the internet and Facebook, written by unaccredited people who have hardly a clue about linguistics. I suppose the best that can be said of them is that they may be sincere, even if ignorant. Could these Hebrew and

English expressions be related to each other? Theoretically it is possible, but in terms of probability, highly unlikely. The happy confidence with which this connection is proposed with certainty as the result of serious scholarship is bull excrement. Their assertions are about as scholarly as the average toad. Actually, the word cannibas (Latin) is derived from a Greek word (not Hebrew), the word καννιβας, which in turn was derived from Old Persian. Herodotus (about 440 BC) use the word to refer to hemp seeds or flowers with a velvet surface. None of this has any connection whatsoever with biblical Hebrew.

To say that Jesus and the disciples probably smoked Mary Jane is ludicrous. This assertion comes from people who are not seeking historical truth, but rather, permission and self-justification. There is not one scintilla of evidence in any Greek text of the New Testament that even hints that Jesus was a smoker of any kind, let alone, this specific kind. And to say that John the Baptist mentions it several times (along with Jesus and the disciples) is so far beyond the pale it is nearly unimaginable. This is right up there with the people who think the moon is made of cheese because it has circular depressions.

I realize I sound a bit harsh, but these claims are absolute nonsense. No living scholar would countenance such idiocy. I suspect the person you've quoted has gained her "perspective" on the internet, where any nonsense by any idiot can be published with alacrity and no outside accountability. As a biblical scholar, I have no hesitation in saying this is NOT scholarship. *back*

CANONICAL AND APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS

QUESTION: *Why are the canonical gospels considered by Christians to be valid, while the writers of other early gospels from the 2nd century were rejected?*

ANSWER: The real question is, "Who gets to tell the authentic story of Jesus?" The firm contention of the earliest Christians is that the story of Jesus must come from eyewitnesses, those who actually knew and saw and listened to Jesus. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all fall within that framework. All the other gospels that came later (mostly Gnostic) do not. What most people don't realize is that historical accounts within the actual period of eyewitnesses are exceedingly rare in ancient history.

Take Alexander the Great, for instance... None of the records about his life come from anyone near his actual life-time. Because the first-generation sources have not survived, all analyses of the historical Alexander depend on ancient sources from later generations. Among these, the most important are Diodorus Siculus, who wrote in Sicily in the first century BC.; Strabo, the Greek geographer and contemporary of Augustus; Quintus Curtius Rufus, who composed his *History of Alexander the Great* in Latin during the first century AD.; Plutarch of Charonea, who composed his Greek *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* in the early second century AD.; Lucius Flavius Arrianus, better known as Arrian who, a generation after Plutarch, wrote his *Anabasis of Alexander*; and Marcus Junianus Justinus (Justin), who wrote his *Epitome* sometime between the second and fourth centuries AD.

Anyone who wishes to analyze the life of the historical Alexander must depend primarily on sources that date anywhere from 300 to 600 years after Alexander's death.

What an incredible difference in the writing of the canonical gospels, all of which date within the lifetimes of those who knew Jesus personally. They serve as a level of

corroboration that is virtually unprecedented. back

CHRISTOLOGY

QUESTION: *I was just reading your commentary on John chapter one. It has been so helpful and given me so much to think about as I begin my Christmas reading. I thought I would begin this year with John 1:1-18 and then move on to Matthew and Luke and use your narratives on His birth and infancy. When I got to John 1:14, I got confused about your Christology definition. You write about Christ adopting a preexisting body.*

ANSWER: From what you wrote, I want to emphatically say that I do NOT believe that Christ adopted a preexisting body. There were those in the early centuries who held this view (which is called adoptionism), but **I am not one of them**. In my commentary on John 1:10-14, I wrote (and I will put the most important words in bold):

*The statement of incarnation in 1:14 is perhaps the most explicit in the New Testament. It describes **NOT** a dwelling Christology, that is, a Christology in which God adopts a human being already existing in which to live, **but it describes the Logos who became flesh**.*

Those who embrace adoptionism, the idea that Christ adopted a preexisting body, do not believe in the Holy Trinity, at least in the classical sense. I DO believe in the Holy Trinity in its classical sense. In classical Trinitarianism (and also affirmed in the Chalcedonian Confession), the Son of God **became** flesh, which is to say, the incarnation is both divine and human. Incarnation is not a dwelling Christology. A dwelling Christology is God adopting a human body, but that is not what John describes. Rather, Christ is fully God, and he is fully human. He is not merely God in a shell or a human filled with the Holy Spirit. Such a view is more akin to the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons or the ancient Gnostics. **Rather, Christ is fully God and fully human, a true incarnation.** This is what the early church fathers believed, what the Nicene Creed states, and what all classical Christians have continue to affirm through the long history of the church.

Hopefully this explanation may help. If I worded things in my commentary in a way causing confusion, I apologize, but I want to stress that I do not believe that the Son of God adopted a preexisting body. This, for me, would be a heresy back

CRIMSON WORM

QUESTION: *During the past Easter Week the Christian radio waves have repeated the story of the crimson worm as being the intended reference from Psalm 22. When I look it up with my limited skills/tools, the only thing I find about the word worm is a reference to Issachar's son. Add to that the Psalm 22 reference is one of scorn and not anything about a worm that saves its young. I have no problem with anything in creation being connected to God or Christ's redemptive work. I am just wondering whether this particular worm was the intent of the author in Psalms in such a way that it was what the Israelite people would have read it as such.*

ANSWER: I confess don't listen much to radio, so I am unaware of the so-called "crimson worm" interpretation of Ps. 22:6. I'm not sure what they are saying about this, but from your brief comments, it sounds like they are trying to make a connection between the worm and the sacrifice of Christ focusing on the idea of something "crimson" as linked to the blood of Christ To be sure, I think the suffering depicted by the

poet in Psalm 22, which likely was a real incident of suffering in the ancient world, prefigures the suffering of Christ, which is why Jesus quoted its opening passages on the cross. However, the Hebrew word תולעה (*tole'ah*) is a term generally used for larvae and worms (or in the case of infested manna, maggots, Ex. 16:20). It is used in Dt. 28:39 to refer to worms infesting a vineyard. It is the same word used of the creature that chewed down Jonah's vine (Jon. 4:7). Another Hebrew word with this same spelling is used for scarlet dye (cf. Is. 1:18; La. 4:5 and the many references in the materials of the Tabernacle that are described as "scarlet"), so the two words seem to be homonyms. Hebrew, like most languages, has homonyms, and while the spelling (especially in the consonants) might be identical, they still are two separate words. A good example of homonyms in English might be "bat" (as in a flying rodent) and "bat" (as in a baseball bat). Context, not spelling, decides which is the proper meaning.

Given this, a translator theoretically might render the word in Ps. 22:6 as either "I am scarlet [material]" or "I am a worm." However, in this passage the word in question is NOT used as a modifier, so a translation like "I am a scarlet worm" is not a grammatical option. This would be like using the English homonym "bat" and saying, "I am a baseball bat flying rodent." So far as I can see, not a single English Version nor a single Hebrew scholar translates this as "scarlet [material]." The context would make such a rendering highly unlikely if not impossible. All simply translate this as "worm" (and NOT "crimson worm").

So, while I would agree that Psalm 22 foreshadows the sufferings of Christ, I can find no justification in Hebrew grammar to warrant reading this passage as referring to a "crimson" worm. It is an inappropriate mixing of homonyms. It sounds to me like someone who does not know Hebrew is trying to appeal to Hebrew to make a point. *back*

DATING OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

QUESTION: *Recently I heard and read some of the work by George van Kooten, professor of divinity at Cambridge. He raises the idea that John is actually earlier, before 70AD, based on John 5:2 that speaks of the pool of Bethesda with five covered porches. He brings up that the Greek verb is used in present tense, which would not make sense if it was written after AD 70 because of the destruction of Jerusalem. According to him this sentence structure was only used if the place in question still exists and it is not just a use of historic present. He also suggests that if John was an early Gospel, there would also be no need for the unknown source Q to be used, because early access Gospel of John would solve this issue. I am very curious what you think about this theory and how scholars generally think about this? Do you think it is possible that John would be an earlier Gospel or is it more realistic to hold on to a later date?*

ANSWER: At the very least, the precise dating of the canonical gospels is and has been a moving target. It was popular a few decades ago, especially by scholars like Rudolf Bultmann, to make John's Gospel very late (mid-2nd century), but the discovery of p52, the John Rylands Fragment (a copy which dates to about AD 125), pretty much gutted this very late date theory. Most scholars continue to opt for some time in the 90s for John, which still is somewhat later. However, and this is the salient point, all these dates are, more-or-less, educated guesses. Typically, Luke and Matthew are dated in the 80s, but here again, there is reason to argue for earlier dates, especially for Luke, since Acts was

written after Luke, and Luke closes Acts with Paul in Rome in about AD 62, more-or-less. Mark is a bit more firm, since Papias directly connects Mark's Gospel to Peter, who was martyred in the early 60s. Presumably, Mark's Gospel was composed shortly after Peter's death and at Peter's request to Mark.

All that being said, I can understand why Dr. Kooten might suggest John's Gospel being even earlier based on the Pool of Bethesda, which was likely destroyed in AD 70 by the Roman legions. If John speaks of it in the present tense, this would make sense. How much traction this view will gain in the larger world of NT scholarship is hard to say.

I'm less clear on why an early date for John would make unnecessary the hypothetical Q document, which really affects Matthew and Luke, not John, but not having read Dr. Kooten's thesis, I'm not in much a position to offer any opinion. In any case, Q is not a source for which we have an actual text. It is a source that is deduced based on the common passages in Matthew and Luke that are absent in Mark.

My sense of things is that contemporary scholars continue to prefer the priority of Mark, followed by Matthew and Luke using the hypothetical Q, and then John. There are some actual references to John in the post-apostolic fathers about it being a "supplement" to the other gospels, which would suggest that it is later.

In the end, we can only offer educated guesses, but for me, at least, the most important feature for all the canonical gospels is that whatever their precise date, they were all composed within the era of living witnesses to the life of Jesus. This, in itself, offers a level of corroboration that is virtually unheard of in ancient historical studies. To have four independent documents, all within the living memory of the person they describe, is truly a one-of-a-kind witness without parallel in ancient literature. *back*

FORNICATION

QUESTION: H*ow should one understand the word porneia in the New Testament?*

ANSWER: The word *porneia* has a long history. The word group (*porneia, porneuo, porne, pornos*) appears some 55 times in the NT, about half of which come in the letters of Paul, though the expression appears in the words of Jesus as well.

Among the Greeks, the word goes back to the classical period, where it initially had the connotation of "selling" oneself (based on the Greek word *pernemi* = to sell). Hence, it was used of prostitution, both positively and negatively. In a positive sense, the Greeks in Athens were quite open to it, since in the words of Demosthenes, "The chattel we have for our pleasure, the concubines for the daily care of our bodies, and our wives so that we can have legitimate children and a true guardian of the house." Sacred prostitution was widespread in the ancient world, both in Greece and Mesopotamia (not to mention Canaan), where it was believed to ensure the fertility of everything in the land. Herodotus, for instance, describes that once in her life, every Babylonian woman must "sacrifice" herself to the goddess Mylitta by giving her body to a stranger in the temple precincts. Strabo writes that in Corinth alone there were more than a thousand courtesans consecrated to Venus. Greek married women were encouraged to have sexual relations with slaves and to indulge in lesbianism. Pedophilia developed as well. The word *porneia* eventually came to refer to harlotry, homosexuality, promiscuity, and pedophilia, all of which were "allowed" if not expected for health and pleasure.

The Stoics, who came somewhat later, took a more rigorous and negative view

of *porneia*, condemning all adultery and extra-marital sexual intercourse. Still, it is probably fair to say that more Greeks followed the positive assessment of *porneia* than the negative one, even into the period of the NT.

When it comes to the Bible, the Hebrew words for "fornication" (*zanah*) and "adultery" (*na'ap*) were captured by the Greek words *porneia* (fornication) and *moicheuo* (adultery) in the Greek LXX, and these distinctions carry on into the New Testament. The former, which is broader, seems to include all illicit sexual intercourse, while the latter refers more narrowly to illicit intercourse with someone already married. In the NT it is probably fair to say that a writer like Paul uses Greek words but often assumes Hebrew definitions. Most scholars think so, and I agree. At least, Paul takes a decidedly negative view of *porneia* (and *moicheuo* as well), and he certainly does not follow the permissiveness of the ancient Greeks. Rather, it seems most probable that when he uses the word *porneia* he has in mind the sexual laws of the Torah (i.e., sexual union outside marriage, homosexuality, incest, prostitution, bestiality, etc.). Against Gnostic-like dualism, which regarded the body as part of material life and therefore something that could be freely satisfied without endangering the after-life, Paul forbids *porneia* outright, something incompatible and irreconcilable with Christ.

With the current strenuous effort on the part of some to relegate the laws of the Torah to an irrelevant system of the past, it seems to me that in using this word, especially in the same way it is used in the LXX, Paul is directly referring to the Torah proscriptions.
back

FREE WILL

QUESTION: *In the Old Testament we see how God uses other nations to bring judgement on Israel. Also, we see how these nations also receive punishment for their wicked actions. In my head there is a little clash here between free will and God using people, because these nations were not actively following God. So how does it work with God using them and them still having a free will? Is it right that they receive punishment? (of course it is, because God is just), but I still don't fully get it).*

ANSWER: You are quite correct that Yahweh used the Israelite nation to judge the Canaanites (Ge. 15:16; Dt. 20:17-18, etc.), and later, God used the Assyrians to judge the Israelites (Isa. 7:20; 10:5, etc.). So, what has this to say about human freedom?

In the first place, I think all Christians would agree that only God is free in the ultimate sense. Humans may have freedom, but it is at best a limited freedom, since we are finite humans with limited capabilities. Of course, how much limited freedom we have has been vigorously debated for many centuries, beginning with Augustine and Pelagius in the 5th century and the Calvinists and Arminians in the 2nd-generation Reformation Period. Christian denominations still are divided, the Reformed Churches on the Calvinist side and the Methodist churches on the Arminian side. (For a history of this debate, see my study on the website titled "Sovereignty and Freedom" Literature/Theology&Ethics/2of 2).

I don't know from which theological tradition you may be, but from the way you framed your question, I am assuming you are from a Christian group that believes in human freedom to do good or evil. That said, I think you would agree that when God uses people, either for good or for bad, he doesn't do so in a way that cancels out their human

freedom altogether. Humans are not puppets. For instance, God "used" Paul as the missionary to the Gentiles, but Paul at the same time champions the freedom of the Christian, included his own freedom (Gal. 5:1; 1 Cor. 9:1-5). His language suggests he is "free" to get married, free to choose what he eats or drinks, and so forth. Still, he uses his freedom to follow God's calling as a missionary. Hence, God using people in one way doesn't eliminate their freedom in other ways.

Furthermore, God holds people accountable for how they obey or disobey his calling for them. The Israelites, for instance, were to be used as instruments of judgment on the Canaanites, but when they failed in this mission, he sentenced them to live side-by-side with the Canaanites (Jg. 2:1-3). They used their freedom to disobey, and they reaped the results of their bad choices. While God used the Assyrians as an instrument of judgment on the Israelites, this did not cancel out the fact that the Assyrians, also, would face divine judgment for their oppressive measures (Isa. 14:24-27, etc.).

It would seem to me that in wrestling with this issue one must allow for a certain amount of divine mystery. As finite humans with limited capacities for discernment, we may not fully understand how everything works. To use Paul's language, "We see but a dim reflection." Certain things we can affirm because the Bible speaks clearly, such as, God is just, all humans are accountable, and so forth. But, as the saying goes, "the devil is in the details," and we may not fully grasp how all those details pan out. Probably, we won't fully understand until Christ returns and we "know even as we are known" (1 Cor. 13:12). I know this might sound a bit like a cop out, but I think it is wise to acknowledge that we don't get to psychoanalyze God. His ways are not ours, and while he is always near us, he also is always beyond us. So, if as you said, you don't "fully get it," get in line and join the club! *back*

GENESIS 3:16 AND THE ESV

QUESTION: What is going on in the Hebrew text of Gen. 3:16 with respect to the ESV?

ANSWER: The recent hoopla concerning gender issues and the ESV arises out of the ESV committee's newest set of revisions (August 2016) and their stated decision to refuse any further revisions, thus permanently fixing the ESV renderings much as was true for the KJV for three centuries. The background of this issue implicitly concerns, at least to some degree, the pitting of the NIV against the ESV, the NIV translating passages in more favorable ways toward women and the ESV translating the same passages in more restrictive ways. The render of Gen. 3:16 is a case in point:

One of the new changes in the ESV is the rendering "your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you", whereas previously, the ESV read, "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you". The original rendering, which agrees with the NIV and various other English Versions, is descriptive. There is some ambiguity here, since the wording can be taken in more than one way. It might mean that the woman longs for the lost closeness of her relationship with her husband prior to the fall. It might simply indicate that there would be tension between the man and the woman, the sad result of the fall for both of them. She wants to restore what was lost, and he exercises the will to power over her, a residual effect of the fall expressed in ancient Near Eastern patriarchal culture, which was male dominated. The newer rendering, on the other hand, is prescriptive, which is to say, it still treats the woman's desire for her

husband as adversarial, a symptom of her fallen condition, but more importantly, it treats the man's rule over the woman as ordered by God, in fact, a divine justification for patriarchalism and male superiority, not merely in the ancient Near East but beyond it.

Everything hinges on a single preposition, the Hebrew word אֶל. This preposition indicates movement, and it means "to" or "toward." Any of the standard Hebrew lexicons will give this as its primary meaning. If there is a lesser meaning of "against" (and some lexicons do not even list this meaning at all), it is only in contexts where it seems required. The earlier ESV translation, "your desire shall be for your husband", reflects the primary meaning of the preposition. The recent revision, "your desire shall be contrary to your husband," reflects the lesser meaning of the preposition. It would appear that the ESV committee chose the more unusual nuance rather than the primary nuance to reinforce a theological position of male dominance—and this is one thread in a fabric of several passages where the NIV translates words with nuances more favorable to women while the ESV translates those same words with nuances that are more restrictive.

However this passage is to be translated, a major point to be acknowledged is that all translation is a first step toward interpretation. It is incumbent upon the church not to relegate the issue of translation to only a handful of experts, but also to have sufficient widespread knowledge of the original languages to follow the discussion and make informed decisions. At one time, this was common among the clergy of the Christian church, who uniformly were required to study both Greek and Hebrew in seminary. Today, increasingly, this is not the case. *back*

GOD'S GLORY, CAN WE ADD TO IT?

QUESTION: *If God created things for his own glory, then does that mean that we are somehow able to add to the glory He receives or possesses? That doesn't seem to align with what I understand of theology proper. Or, is glory not a quantitative thing that can be measured, added or subtracted to? And if that's the case, doesn't that undermine one of John Piper's primary theological foundations for missions in his book, "Let the Nation Be Glad," which is that every unbeliever is another person whose praise and worship God deserves. Or the idea that if we do not praise Him, the rocks will cry out? These seem to indicate to me the idea of a potential glory deficit, which, again, doesn't seem to align with the all-sufficient nature of God.*

ANSWER: One of the challenges in such a question is defining what glory actually is. The Hebrew word for glory, *kavod*, carries the connotation of weight, which I assume must be metaphorical, since God is spirit and has no physical weight. If that is the case, then glory is not quantitative as though it were a substance. Hence, when humans come to faith, I think this is more along the lines of displaying God's glory rather than adding to it. I doubt that God's glory has a deficit. Rather, his glory is primarily displayed in his character, which is to say, his essential goodness, grace, and mercy. At least that seems to be the explanation given to Moses when he asked to see God's glory (Ex. 33:18-19). This, it seems to me, lines up with what Paul says, when he describes the church as being to the praise of his glorious grace. Of course, if we do not praise him, the rocks—the very pieces of the created world—will do so, not to add to his glory, but to recognize and announce it to a deaf world. This would also be in alignment with what John says, for when speaking of the incarnation he says, "We saw his glory, the glory of the one and

only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). In this sense, then, Christ is the greatest display of the glory of God, since he is the very imprint of his nature (Heb. 1:3). back

HOMOSEXUAL LANGUAGE IN PAUL

QUESTION: *How should one understand the Paul's Greek term arsenokoites? Some suggest this word is only concerning adult men taking advantage of boys. Is this correct?*

ANSWER: Several research articles, both recent[1] and not so recent,[2] have suggested that the word *arsenokoites* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 should be understood, not to refer homosexual union in general, but rather, only to exploitative homosexual union between men and boys. Almost certainly there is an underlying agendum in this suggestion, which aims at neutralizing a biblical passage that usually has been understood throughout the history of Christianity to prohibit same-sex union. The reinterpretation of the traditional understanding is now being urged in order to make this vice prohibit only sex between men and young boys, but not sex between committed homosexual adults. The arguments usually proceed along the grounds that the word is a Pauline coinage, its meaning is obscure, it was not widely used (if ever) in Greco-Roman literature, and/or it was not translated as "homosexual" until the *Revised Standard Version* of the New Testament published in 1946. This reinterpretation belongs to a much broader effort over the past several decades to neutralize, on the basis of linguistic and social-cultural grounds, several other biblical passages that seem either to prohibit outright or to describe in morally reprehensible ways the practice of same-sex union.[3] Whatever this word means, it certainly was included by St. Paul in a list of moral vices to describe those with behaviors excluding them from the kingdom of God (1 Co. 6:9a). The list includes idolaters, adulterers, swindlers and so forth.

So, how should this word be translated? In the first place, the word is a compound, made up of the word *arsen* (= a male, a word known in Greek literature from the time of Homer) and the word *koite* (= bed, or euphemistically, sexual intercourse). Whether or not Paul coined the word *arsenokoites* is unclear, but it is true that this compound word is not widely found in ancient literature, though it was used by early Christian writers such as Polycarp and Eusebius as well as the compiler of the Sibylline Oracles, an early text of mythology deriving from Jewish Hellenism and Gnosticism. Literally, it means a "male-bedder," which in turn is taken to refer to one who practices homosexuality, a pederast, or sodomite (*BDAG*). The word *arsen* means a male, and most often it refers to an adult male, not a boy. It means a male as opposed to a female (*thelys*), and indeed, in both Plato and Aristotle, the terms appear together in the phrase *arsen kai thelys* (= male and female). It occurs some 54 times in the Septuagint Old Testament, usually equating the

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[1] e.g., https://www.forgeonline.org/blog/2019/3/8/what-about-romans-124-27.

[2] e.g., J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (University of Chicago, 1980).

[3] Other reinterpreted words in this broader initiative include: **1)** the Hebrew verb יָדַע (= to know, or as a euphemism, to engage in sexual intercourse), aimed at neutralizing Ge. 19:5 and Jg. 19:22), **2)** the Hebrew modifier תּוֹעֵבָה (= detestable, abomination), aimed at neutralizing Lv. 18:22 and 20:13, and **3)** the Greek noun φυσικός (= natural, according to nature), aimed at neutralizing Paul's condemnation in Ro. 1:27 of those who exchange natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.

Hebrew term זכר (= male, man). It is the Greek term in the LXX used in the account of the creation of male and female. As a Greek word that corresponds to its Hebrew original, it normally does not mean boy. There is a Hebrew word for boy (נער), but *zakar* is not it. Hence, the notion that the first part of the compound word refers to a boy cannot stand. Further, if whoever coined the compound ἀρσενοκοίτης had intended it to refer to an adult man exploiting a boy, there are better choices for a coinage, such as, παιδιονοκοιτης or παισοκοιτης. In the seedy world of modern pedophilia, for instance, one would not expect a coinage like male-porn if one was referring to child-porn.

The history of English Bible translation, going back to its earlier iterations, has translated *arsenokoites* in various ways. The older English versions tended to follow the rendering of William Tyndale (KJV, ERV, ASV). As scholars became more familiar with ancient Greek, their translations became more precise.

- "lechers against kind...they that do lechery with men" (John Wycliffe, AD 1382)
- "abusars of them selves with the mankynde" (William Tyndale, AD 1534)
- "abusers of themselves with mankind" (King James Version, AD 1611)
- "abusers of themselves with men" (English Revised Version, AD 1881)
- "abusers of themselves with men" (American Standard Version, AD 1901)
- "unnatural crime" (New Testament in Modern Speech [Richard Weymouth], AD 1909)
- "sexual perverts" (Revision Standard Version, AD 1946, 1952)
- "rapacious" (The New Testament in Modern English [J. B. Phillips], AD 1958)
- "homosexuals" (New American Standard Bible, AD 1960)
- "unnatural sexual vice" (New Testament in Plain English [Charles Williams], AD 1963)
- "homosexual perverts" (Good News Bible (formerly, Today's English Version, AD 1966)
- "sodomites" (New Jerusalem Bible (AD 1966, 1967, 1968)
- "homosexuals" (New American Bible, AD 1971)
- "men who have sex with men" (New International Version, AD 1978)
- "sodomites" (New King James Version, AD 1982)
- "sodomites" (New Revised Standard Version, AD 1989, 1995)
- "[those who] practice homosexuality" (New Living Translation, 1996)
- "men who practice homosexuality" (English Standard Version, AD 2001)
- "practicing homosexuals" (New English Translation, AD 2005)

Obviously, the English translations of the Bible widely agree that the word refers to same-sex union generally. True, the word "homosexual" is not used in the earliest English versions of the Bible, but it could hardly have been so used, since the word "homosexual" did not enter the English language until the late 19th century. In any case, what is new in the gay apologetic is the contention that the word *arsenokoites* is a narrow term, not a broad term, and that it refers only to same-sex union between adult males and young boys.

What usually is not discussed (but should be recognized) is that the word *arsenokoites* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 belongs to a word pair, the two words μαλακός and ἀσενοκοίτης. Commenting on this word pair, Bruce Winter (Divinity Faculty, Cambridge University) points out that the first of these terms, widely known in ancient Greek texts, refers to a passive homosexual partner, while the second term would naturally refer to the antonym of the first one, i.e., the active or aggressive homosexual partner. Hence, Paul uses two terms in 1 Corinthians 6:9 in order to describe both the passive partner and the active partner in same-sex union. Those engaged in homosexual union would assume either one role or the other, and Paul forbids both for Christians.[4] Thus, the New English Translation (2005) renders the two terms as "passive homosexual partners" and "practicing homosexuals," and this translation seems best to fit the historical context.[5]

Beyond linguistics, one also must bear in mind that Paul, who uses the term *arsenokoites*, was a practicing Christian Pharisee and rabbi (cf. Ac. 23:6). His moral framework agrees appreciably with that of other Pharisees and rabbis of his day, and same-sex union was decidedly disapproved in that circle. Hence, the historical context in which Paul uses the term strongly favors a traditional interpretation, not an anachronistic one that is foisted from the 21st century back into Jewish antiquity.

As such, I do not find the arguments compelling that attempt to reinterpret the word *arsenokoites* in the New Testament. They seem to me to be attempts to justify a behavior that already has been either approved or adopted, not the product of disinterested linguistic or historical research. Several factors combine to show that the homophile apologetic is tendentious and dangerous. While it makes a show of scholarship, which might be impressive to the lay person unfamiliar with ancient history or biblical languages, it is, in fact, a serious breach of scholarship.

Furthermore, it always is suspect when a person or group first adopts a behavior and only later tries to prove from the Bible that it is legitimate. If the "discovery" had been made first that the Bible permitted homosexual behavior, one might at least be inclined to pass over the issue of motives. However, when the behavior comes first and the biblical support for it is advanced only later, then one suspects that what is being offered is an interpretation of convenience. To date, the most thorough theological and exegetical treatment of homosexuality is by Robert Gagnon, and his conclusion is worth noting:

> *Same sex intercourse is strongly and unequivocally rejected by the revelation of Scripture. Arguments put forward by advocates of homosexuality to undermine the contemporary relevance of Scripture are weak. Scripture does not reject same-sex intercourse because of some alleged ignorance of non-exploitative forms of homosexual behavior or genetic causation factors. It does not reject homosexual intercourse because of some misperception that only idolaters in the strict sense could engage in such behavior or because of some superstition about defilement and purity. It does not reject homosexual practice, at least not primarily, out of some need to assert the rule of men over women. Rather, Scripture rejects*

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[4] See the lengthy excursus on 1 Co. 6:9 and the way the terms were used in Greek and Latin in the 1st century, cf. B. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge U.K.: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 110-120.

[5] See also C. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (A. & C. Black, 1971), p. 140.

homosexual behavior because it is a violation of the gendered existence of male and female ordained by God at creation.[6] back

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

***QUESTION**: I'm preparing to lead a study that includes Deuteronomy 10: 18-19, which concerns loving the stranger and giving him food and clothing. I'm sure that the issue of illegal immigrants will come up; and I think that the O.T. makes clear somewhere that anyone coming into Israel had to agree to follow their laws. Is this true, and if so, where might I find this? Thank you!*

ANSWER: There are several Hebrew words that describe sojourners, aliens, and strangers in the Hebrew Bible. The most prominent is *ger*, variously translated as "sojourner" or "stranger" in the English Versions. The Israelites were urged toward generosity toward the *gerim*. and certain rights were conceded to them, such as, sabbatical rest (Ex. 20:10), a fair trial (Dt. 1:16), access to the cities of refuge in cases of manslaughter (Nu. 35:15), participation in the annual festivals (Dt. 16:11, 14), and gleaning privileges (Lv. 19:10). At the same time, the *gerim* were responsible to observe the Day of Atonement (Lv. 16:29) and the Passover (Ex. 12:49). Indeed, concerning the observance of the Passover, there is a clear statement, "The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you" (Ex. 12:49; Nu. 9:14). The *gerim* were responsible as well to offer sacrifice for sin (Nu. 15:26-31), and once again, there is the clear statement, "One and the same law applies to everyone..." Violators of Israel's moral statutes, including kosher laws (Lv. 17:15-16), idolatry (Lv. 20:2), and blasphemy (Lv. 24:16), were held accountable, and the latter two violations called for the death penalty. The sexual values of the Mosaic law also must be upheld by the *gerim*, which includes a ban on incest, bestiality, homosexual union, etc. (Lv. 18:29-30). Violators were to be "cut off," which probably means expelled. The *gerim* were expected to completely identify with Yahweh's covenant, including circumcision (Ex. 12:48). The bottom line is that the *gerim* were expected to identify with Israel, its law, and its values as completely as possible, including commitment to Israel's God and Israel's spiritual values.

The modern attempt of well-meaning Christians to treat illegal immigrants according to Mosaic legislation has for the most part been a "pick and choose" method of extracting various passages that seem to favor a predigested point-of-view. It has several serious hills to climb. First of all, the United States is not a theocratic nation, so it is at least questionable as to how to apply Mosaic legislation to a modern, secular nation-state. Second, the ancient world did not have sets of immigration laws comparable to what now exists in modern nation-states, so often it is a comparison of apples to oranges. In principle, however, one thing seems clear. The *gerim* were as fully bound to the laws of Israel as were the Israelites themselves. back

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[6] R. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001). With respect to the efforts by the LGBT community to make same-sex union a norm in modern society, which began several decades ago, a thorough treatment can be found in J. Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

JACOB'S WRESTLING MATCH

QUESTION: *In Genesis 32:25, when Jacob is wrestling with the angel, it says that the angel didn't prevail over Jacob. Does that imply that he couldn't beat Jacob, or is the point that Jacob wrestled fiercely until his hip was touched and God changed his name?*

ANSWER: The plain reading of the text in Hebrew is that the mysterious wrestler was unable to best Jacob, though admittedly the Hebrew text is somewhat idiomatic (וירא כי לא יכל לו). Quite literally it says, "[When] he saw that he was unable against him…" We add the word "prevail" or some such equivalent for better English usage, and also, this is a temporal phrase, so it usually begins with "when." It then remains to ask who was this strange but unnamed opponent? Some have suggested (wrongly, I think) that he was an assassin sent by Esau. Others, like Origen in the early church, thought he was a demon (but typically we don't expect demons to offer blessings). Most think he was the Angel of the LORD, a theophany of Yahweh (but if so, it seems pretty incredible that an angel could not out-wrestle a human). I suppose it is worth noting that Jacob was apparently a very powerful man. He managed by himself to move a stone that several others were unable to lift by joint effort (Ge. 29:1-10). In the end, we can only speculate, but here is my speculation. I think the mysterious wrestler was indeed a theophany, but in order to test Jacob, he limited himself intentionally in order to press Jacob to the limit, then blessing him and changing his name. In theophanies, it is not unusual to see God accommodating himself to human life, sometimes eating a meal (e.g., Ge. 18:8). If so, then there is no reason that he might not accommodate himself to Jacob in this wrestling match. Jacob's wrestling match with God thus becomes a paradigm for the future history of the Israelite nation, who also would struggle continually with God. *back*

JESUS' REFERENCE TO NIGHT

QUESTION: *In John 9:4-5, do we know what this night is that Jesus is talking about? Is that when he isn't on earth anymore? Because he did tell people to keep doing the work after he left. Does this question make sense?*

ANSWER: Concerning Jn. 9:4-5, the "night" here probably refers to the period between Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' redemptive work was his mission as God's Son, sent from the Father into the world, and he was determined to fulfil this mission while he had the opportunity. The time would come when the chance to work in this way would be at an end. He was the world's light, and he must shine brightly while he had the chance (cf. Jn. 1:5). It may be connected to a similar use of the term "night" in Jn. 13:30, where when Judas left the group in order to betray Jesus, it was "night." I don't think the passage in Jn. 9:4-5 refers to the church age or something like that, for as you pointed out, Jesus left his disciples with a charge to bear fruit in the world after he ascended back to the Father. *back*

LANGUAGE OF JESUS

QUESTION: *Was the language of Jesus Aramaic?*

ANSWER: This is one place where the answer is not as clear we might like. Aramaic, of course, had a long history as an international language going back into the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods. When the exiles came back from Babylon, many of the younger folk no longer understood classical Hebrew very well, which in turn meant that in the reading of the Torah the priests were obliged to "translate" or "interpret" for them

(Neh. 8:8). The introduction of Hellenism and the Greek language only complicated things. The upshot is that by the 1st century, scholars have widely concluded that the *lingua franca* of the Jews in Palestine was Aramaic, and hence, the language of Jesus was Aramaic (though he probably also knew both Hebrew and Greek). A variety of early texts seem to reinforce this conclusion, including the Gospel of Mark with a sprinkling of Aramaisms on the lips of Jesus (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36; 15:34), the Palestinian Talmud, the Old Syriac version, and the Peshitta Version. Aramaic, as is well-known, is a sister-language to Hebrew, using the same alphabet and having many common or very nearly common words. The general opinion of scholars has been that Aramaic was gradually supplanting classical Hebrew, and that increasingly, classical Hebrew was the language of the learned rather than the common people. We know that in the synagogue services, for instance, the Hebrew text and the Targums (Aramaic paraphrases) were read alongside each other, the one amplifying the other.

What prompted a reconsideration of this general conclusion has been the Hebrew texts discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls--not merely biblical texts, which obviously would mostly be in Hebrew, but also sectarian texts of the community, which were also in Hebrew rather than Aramaic. This has reopened the question about the common vernacular of Palestine in the NT period. If the Qumran community wrote their community texts in Hebrew, then obviously Hebrew was not as much a dying language as some had supposed.

In the NT, then, references to "Hebrew" or "Aramaic" are ambiguous, and translating the Greek word *hebraisti* depends upon which linguistic theory about the 1st century the translator adopts. If he/she thinks that Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the period, then the translation is "Aramaic" (so ESV, NET, NIV, NIB). If he/she thinks that Hebrew was the *lingua franca*, then the translation of the word is "Hebrew" (so KJV, ERV, REV, NAB, NASB, NJB, NRSV). The lexicons do not try to resolve this ambiguity. As definitions for the word *hebraisti* they offer "Hebrew or Aramaic" (Holladay) or "the Aramaic spoken in Palestine at the time" (*BDAG*), which is not very helpful for answering your question.

Well, this is a long way of saying, "I don't know the answer to your question." The majority opinion among scholars still remains that Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of Jews in 1st century Palestine, but a growing minority are urging that this conclusion must at the very least be qualified. *back*

LEPROUS MESSIAH

QUESTION: *Does the Book of Isaiah say something about the "leprous messiah?"*

ANSWER: This reference is from the Babylonian Talmud, the tractate called Sanhedrin 98b, where it addresses Isaiah 53:4, interpreting the Servant of Yahweh as a "leprous Messiah." This is based on midrashic interpretation, however, not on linguistics *per se*. The Hebrew verb *naguah* (= stricken) is much like our English verb: it could, of course, mean stricken by a disease, such as leprosy, but it doesn't necessarily mean that and often doesn't. As an example, the exact same word and inflected form is used in Ps. 73:14, where it obviously has no reference to leprosy. The Hebrew word for leper is *tsar'*, a different root altogether.

What I found fascinating, however, is that the Servant of the Lord (Heb. The *Ebed-*

Yahweh) being described as a leper. The Talmud "records" a supposed discourse between the great Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and the prophet Elijah. The rabbi asks "When will the Messiah come?" And "By what sign may I recognize him?" Elijah tells the rabbi to go to the gate of the city where he will find the Messiah sitting among the lepers. “The Messiah,” says the prophet, “sits bandaging his leprous sores, one at a time, unlike the rest of the sufferers, who bandage them all at once. Why? Because he might be needed at any time and would not want to be delayed.” Elijah says he will come, "Today, if you will listen to his voice." (Sanhedrin 98a)

There is also a strange story about the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Hasidic movement. One day the rabbi was riding with a young student. He stopped his wagon at the hut of an old leper, horribly affected by the disease. The rabbi climbed down and spent a great deal of time with the poor man. When he returned to the wagon and recommenced his journey, the puzzled student asked the rabbi who it was that the rabbi had visited. The rabbi replied that in every generation there is a Messiah who will reveal himself if the generation is worthy. The leper he had been meeting with was that Messiah, but the generation was not worthy, so the Messiah would depart.

The interesting thing about this passage, for me at least, is not that the Servant of the Lord is described in this Talmud tractate as a leper, but as the Messiah. The reason this is striking is that standard rabbinical interpretation for centuries has read Isaiah 53, not as describing the Messiah, but rather, as describing a collective figure for the nation Israel, particularly in light of passages like Is. 44:1, which the figure obviously refers to the nation. Further, The Servant of Yahweh in the latter chapters of Isaiah is never described with the title “Messiah.” That a rabbi in late antiquity should identify the Servant of Yahweh with the Messiah is “against the flow” of rabbinic understanding, but certainly consonant with the way we, as Christians, read such passages.

If you will bear with me, I’d like to send you a short section from my commentary on Isaiah and how I’ve handled this issue. Here it is:

The most intriguing question about this figure is one of identity. Who is the servant? As the metaphor is developed, it seems to fluctuate between a collective figure for the nation Israel and an individual figure who has a mission to the nation Israel as well as to the world. Even in biblical times, this question was vexing, for the Ethiopian proselyte struggled with it, as is evidenced by his query, "Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" (Ac. 8:34). As a collective figure, the metaphor clearly represents the nation Israel (41:8; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3), but this identification hardly exhausts the metaphor. It is when the metaphor depicts an individual that it is most intriguing. Could it be the prophet himself? Is he a king of David's line yet to come? Could he be an historical figure, like the suffering prophet Jeremiah? For Christians, the answer became clear in the life, passion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

If the first Servant Song presents the Ebed-Yahweh as the chosen one who was endowed with the Holy Spirit to bring justice to the nations (Is. 42:1-4), the second Servant Song explains how the Ebed-Yahweh was chosen from birth and commissioned by God to turn Israel back to himself. The far-off nations are called upon to listen to the commission of this Servant, chosen even before his birth (49:1). He would be a powerful spokesman for Yahweh, having been kept hidden in the eternal purposes of God until the time of his revealing (49:2; cf. Ro. 16:25-26). Like the ancient nation, this Chosen One also would be

called "Israel" (49:3). However, while on one hand the metaphor of the Servant is the embodiment of the nation, on the other hand the metaphor also speaks of one who is to be distinguished from the nation and who is commissioned to restore the nation (49:5-6a). Israel as the collective servant is blind and deaf (cf. 42:19), and after surveying her bitter exile, she concludes that her service for Yahweh has been an exercise in futility (49:4a). Only God himself knew what the future held for her (49:4b). But the chosen individual, commissioned before his birth to be Yahweh's Servant, not only would restore the tribes of Israel to God but also would bring salvation to the ends of the earth (49:5-6).

This gospel of universal salvation through the mission of the Servant was central to the earliest Christians. If Jesus was indeed the Servant, then his mission was to the nations as well as to Israel, as Simeon proclaimed through the Holy Spirit in the time of Jesus' infancy (cf. Lk. 2:30-32). It not incidental that Paul and Barnabas quoted Isaiah 49:6 and applied it directly to their own preaching to non-Jews in Pisidian Antioch (cf. Ac. 13:46-48).

The coming chosen Servant, the individual, would be truly effective in turning the wayward servant, Israel, back to God. This was Yahweh's promise. Though the Servant would be despised and abhorred (49:7a), in the end he would be honored by the nations because Yahweh had chosen him (49:7b). As Yahweh's Servant, he would call for salvation and Yahweh would answer (49:8a). The redemptive mission of the Servant would match the time of God's favor to the nations, as Paul also interprets (2 Co. 6:2). Those in captivity would hear the cry of freedom, "Come out" (49:9a). The land would be restored (49:8b), and the desert would change into the beauty and productivity of a paradise (49:9b-10). People from the ends of the earth would come to share in this redemptive benefit (49:11-13).

Now the voice of the individual Servant, the Coming One, is to be heard for the third time. The Servant, the individual, stands in sharpest contrast to the servant, Israel. Whereas the servant, Israel, is blind and deaf (cf. 42:19) and unresponsive (50:2), the Servant, the individual, will be persistent in his obedience, receptive in his attitude toward Yahweh, and obedient in his actions (50:4-5). Whereas Israel was stubborn, with a neck of iron and a forehead of bronze (48:4), the coming Servant would not hesitate to fulfill God's purpose for him (50:5b). It is no wonder that Jesus of Nazareth, Yahweh's perfect Servant, could say, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Mt. 5:17). Jesus was the perfect Servant, and he perfectly fulfilled the commandments that Israel did not (cf. 48:18).

Furthermore, this coming Servant would suffer greatly. He would be beaten and abused (50:6; cf. 49:7). Nevertheless, his ultimate end would not be disgrace but glory. His determination would be unflagging, and God would vindicate him completely at last (50:7-9). Is it any wonder, then, that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was understood by the apostles to be God's vindication of his Servant Jesus (Ac. 3:13-15; cf. 4:27, 30; 2:13-15, 26; 13:29-30)?

Now follows what has become for many the single most important passage in the Old Testament with respect to the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. The failed mission of the Servant Collective has been held up to the exiles for examination and shame. The fully successful mission of the Perfect Servant, who is yet to come, has been anticipated. Yet, in spite of his ultimate success, the Perfect Servant would also be a figure of suffering (cf. 49:7a; 50:6). This suffering is now to be described in detail.

In public opinion, the coming Servant would seem to fail. He would incite both admiration

and horror (52:13-14). His work would be a priestly work (52:15a), causing mute wonder and amazement from the nations and potentates of the world (52:15b). His mission would be so unusual that it would strain credulity in all who saw him (53:1), not the least of which were the Jewish people themselves (cf. Jn. 12:37-38; Ro. 10:16). His beauty would be in his gentle character, not his outward appearance (53:2-3). He would suffer greatly, empathizing so fully with the sorrow of the people that he would suffer vicariously for their sins (53:4-6). In spite of his torture and abuse, he would not retaliate (53:7). Above all, he would suffer innocently and quietly (53:8-9; 1 Pe. 2:22-23). After he died, he would be given a grave with the wicked and the rich (cf. Mt. 27:57-60).

Was this innocent, vicarious suffering to be permitted by a holy God? Most certainly! In fact, it was precisely the will of God that this suffering should be accomplished (53:10a), because in such suffering God would accomplish a sacrificial expiation (53:10b). Though the Servant would be cut off without descendants (cf. 53:8b), yet paradoxically, God would preserve for him posterity (53:10c). Though he would die a horrible death (53:8c), God would grant him prolonged life (53:10c). When the ordeal was over, vindication, victory and justification would be the result (53:11-12). Both Mark and Luke clearly understood this prophecy to be fulfilled in the Jesus of Nazareth who, in his passion, was "numbered with the transgressors" (Mk. 15:27 NIVmg; Lk. 22:37). back

MALTESE VIPERS

QUESTION: *In Acts, Paul was bitten by a viper while on the island of Malta and miraculously survived. Since there are no poisonous snakes on Malta, where did this one come from?*

ANSWER: This is a credibility question. First, it is true that there are no vipers on Malta (there are some snakes, but none of them are poisonous.) Hence, if Paul was bitten by one, it must have come from elsewhere, and my best guess is that it arrived in a ship's cargo. Malta was in the shipping lanes of the Roman Empire. Its central Mediterranean location made it a natural stopover and supply point for vessels traveling between North Africa, Sicily, and the wider Mediterranean. Cargo vessels from Egypt, Asia Minor, and Palestine made regular stops. These other lands did have poisonous snakes (Palestine, for instance, had vipers), so it could have traveled in a bale of hay or in some other commodity. back

MENE, MENE, TEQEL, UPARSIN

QUESTION: *The writing on the wall in Daniel 5:25 says, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPARSIN," but when Daniel interprets it, he interprets it as "MENE, TEKEL, PERES." My question is, why doesn't he repeat MENE twice as it's written on the wall? Is it to avoid redundancy? I also have a question about PERES: why didn't he interpret UPARSIN and instead say PERES? Is this writing in Aramaic?*

ANSWER: I think I can help you with this, but it is a bit complicated. The first issue, which is reflected in the spellings, is grammatical and involves spelling changes as well as puns. Bear in mind that Aramaic (and this passage is in the Aramaic section of the Book of Daniel), is an inflected language, so words change spellings when they serve as different parts of speech. This is why there is both *uparsin* (singular form) and *peres* (plural form) for the same word. To complicate it a bit more, the words which are participles (see below) are also puns in which the participles function as word plays for

monetary weights. It is this play on nearly identically sounding words that is part of the literary artistry of the passage. The author intends BOTH the verbal ideas (numbered, weighed, divided) and ALSO the monetary weights (*mina*, *sheqel*, half-*sheqel*). The grammatical forms and their corresponding weights are:

mene (singular passive participle) = having been numbered (but can also mean a weight, such as, a *mina* = 50 *sheqels*)

teqel (singular passive participle) = having been weighed (but can also mean a weight, such as, a *sheqel*) = 1 *sheqel*)

uparsin (plural passive participle) = having been divided (but can also mean a weight, such as, a half-*mina* or half *sheqel* or half-weight of anything). The "*u*" in the word*uparsi*n is simply the conjunction "and." It is not part of the actual word, but in Aramaic and Hebrew the word "and" is attached to the word as a connecting conjunction. *Uparsin* is plural probably because the form implies the Medes and the Persians, who would divide the Babylonian kingdom.

peres (singular active participle) = here the singular form is used because in 5:28 the reference is to Belshazzar personally, i.e., "your kingdom."

Hence, if one follows the meaning of monetary weights, a rough modern equivalent in U. S. currency would be, "Five dollars, a dime, and a nickel." So much for the grammar. Now, to your original question: why does he repeat *mene*, *mene*? This repetition is probably a literary technique for giving emphasis. For instance, the closing of the various books of the Psalms end with "Amen and amen" (Ps. 41:13; 72:19, etc.). See also Ezekiel 16:23. It is interesting that the Greek version of Theodotion (a Jewish scholar who did some revision work on the LXX in the 2nd century AD) does not repeat the *mene*. *back*

PEACE OFFERING

QUESTION: *What is the meaning of the peace offering in Leviticus?*

ANSWER: First, there are several verbs and nouns used in this section of Leviticus:

זבח (verb) meaning to slaughter for a communion sacrifice
זבח (noun) a sacrifice
כפר (verb) to make atonement, appease, make amends
קרבן (noun) something brought near, offering or gift in the most general sense
קרב (verb) to come near or cause to come near, to offer
שחט (verb) to kill, to slaughter
עלה (noun) what ascends, burnt offering
שלם (noun) peace offering, repayment sacrifice
חטאת (noun) sin offering
מנחה (noun) grain offering, vegetable offering
אשם (noun) guilt offering

To some degree, these terms sometimes overlap, but some are used individually for certain offerings. In the case of the שלם offering (= peace offering), the noun/verb זבח seems to be used because it is especially associated with communion between the person offering it and the God to whom it is offered, who is himself a partner in the act. In this sense, it is to be distinguished from offerings for transgression, guilt, sin, etc., which are reparation offerings. Later, in Lev. 7:12, it is used with תודה (= thanksgiving).

The peace offering serves to affirm the relationship between the worshipper and God or

the community and God. It is not offered due to a breach of law but as an affirmation of covenant fellowship. The NRSV renders it as a "sacrifice of well-being," which is appropriate. The word זבח has embedded in it this concept of fellowship and does not carry the connotation of guilt or transgression. It is the term used in Exodus by Moses to describe the Israelites going into the desert to "sacrifice" to the LORD. It seems to be voluntary, not mandatory. *back*

PRAYERS TO THE DECEASED

QUESTION: *What are your thoughts on praying to the Saints? Or the history on it? In growing up, I always felt that it was a bit odd, but lately have been considering it with more weight since it was done for a very long time since the early centuries. Similarly, what are your thoughts on asking saints to pray to God on our behalf, similar to asking a friend to pray on your behalf? I believe Saint Augustine encouraged this. He and other early church fathers (like St. Jerome) also insisted on honoring the saints and martyrs, but not venerating them, focusing on worshiping God.*

ANSWER: In general, I don't practice this nor do I advise it. I think that historically it may well have had roots in paganism, and certainly communication with the dead was vigorously opposed in the Old Testament. So, while I am quite comfortable in recognizing great Christians from the past as "saints" (keeping in mind that all Christians are "saints"), at the same time I don't pray to them.

The Roman Catholic point of view is grounded in what we call the Communion of Saints, which is to say, the idea that all believers, whether living or dead, belong to the same body of Christ. I agree, we all belong to the same body, living or dead, but at the same time I don't find clear biblical justification for praying either "to" or "through" the saints. I understand the logic. I am familiar with the line of thought that since all believers, living or deceased, still are the body of Christ, why not ask a deceased believer to pray for you just as you would ask a living believer to pray for you. My primary reservation is that there are no such examples in the Bible itself.

There are many passages describing early Christian prayer. Early believers, much like the ancient pillars of Israel's faith, prayed in emergencies (Ac. 7:59-60; 12:5; 20:9-10; 2 Co. 1:10-11; Phil. 1:19; He. 13:18-19), when making extended farewells (Ac. 20:36; 21:5), and when facing difficult circumstances (1 Ti. 5:5). We also know that they retained the Jewish tradition of praying before eating (1 Ti. 4:3-5; cf. 1 Co. 10:30; Ro. 14:6). They offered prayer for spiritual direction and evangelistic success. When faced with crucial decisions, they prayed and then acted in the firm conviction that God would assist them (Ac. 1:24-26). They consecrated leaders to God's service with prayer (Ac. 6:4, 6; 13:2-3; 14:23), and they petitioned God to help them in their preaching of the gospel (Col. 4:3-4; 2 Th. 3:1; Phlm. 4-6; 1 Ti. 2:1-4).

In addition to their prayers for the work of the kingdom of God, the early Christians prayed for spiritual growth and the ability to persevere under difficult circumstances. Paul's letters to the churches abound with mentions of his continual prayers for his "children" as well as his requests for them to offer prayer for him (Ro. 1:9; Ep. 1:16; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3; 4:2; 1 Th. 1:2; 5:25; 2 Ti. 1:3). Paul's primary concern for these young Christians was that they would mature in their devotion to Christ, which was to be measured in terms of love, knowledge, insight, discernment, spiritual fruit, endurance,

and patience (Phi. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-12; 4:12; 2 Th. 1:11).

However, conspicuous by their absence are any prayers to deceased saints. So, while I understand the logic of asking the saints to pray for me, and I would not disparage those Christians who do so, I am personally uncomfortable with the fact that there are no such examples in the New Testament. It would seem to me that if this were to be the case, in all the prayer passages in the New Testament someone would have mentioned it.

I probably should mention, of course, that there is at least one instance in the Apocrypha where Judas Maccabeus asked his soldiers to pray for those who had died in battle (2 Maccabees 12:38-45). It was discovered that these soldiers had been wearing images of idols from Jamnia (probably as a talisman), which of course, were forbidden by the Torah. So, Judas asked the people to pray for the deceased that they would be forgiven. He took up a collection to send to Jerusalem for a sin offering. Here, the living were not praying to saints exactly, but they do appear to be offering prayers for someone who had died. Much later, this passage was influential in the Roman Catholic doctrine for offering prayers for the dead, especially those believed to be in purgatory, and of course, 2 Maccabees is considered canonical in the Roman Catholic Church. *back*

PREDESTINATION

QUESTION: *How would you understand the Greek words in Rom. 8:28-30 with respect to predestination?*

ANSWER: The opening **οἴδαμεν** in 8:28, from the verb **οἶδα**, is typically translated "to know about" or "to be acquainted with" or "recognize." I suppose it could be taken in the sense of "we have observed," though this would be more an interpretive issue rather than a lexical one. Paul doesn't use any of the common "to see" verbs (e.g., βλέπω or ὁράω or θεωρέω), which usually concern seeing some object as opposed to a mental review. Parallels for using οἶδα in the sense of historical review might include Ro. 2:2; 3:19; 5:3; 8:22, so I think one can make a case for this usage. Still, Paul could be merely referring to what might be called collective spiritual insight, which would have a somewhat different nuance than historical review. In the end, it would be hard to pin this verb down, at least on lexical grounds, one way or another.

The verb προγινώσκω in 8:29 means to have advance knowledge and is directly related to the noun πρόγνωσις (= foreknowledge). These words are used only in a handful of places in the NT: for προγινώσκω 1 Pe. 1:20; 2 Pe. 3:17; Ro. 8:29; 11:2; Ac. 26:5; for πρόγνωσις Ac. 2:23; 1 Pe. 1:2. To take this in the sense of "those whom he formerly knew" (i.e., Israel) is, as before, more an interpretive issue than a lexical one. NT Greek does have a word that sometimes has the nuance of "earlier" or "formerly" (πρῶτος), but since it also often means "first" or "earliest" or "foremost" or "most important," Paul might have considered it confusing to use it here.

If I were addressing the verb προγινώσκω only generally, I would be reluctant to put a lot of weight on the idea of "formerly knew" as opposed to "foreknown," but the best case for doing so would be by linking it to Ro. 11:2, where Paul specifically uses this verb with respect to the historical Israel. The question, then, becomes whether or not Paul is referring to the same thing in 8:29 as he is in 11:2. If so, this is an insight—and I would say a very critical insight—that most expositors have missed entirely! Most expositors

take the context of Romans 8:28 to refer to the people of God generally, including Christians (not merely Israel), because of Paul's use of the term "saints" (8:27) and 1st person plural pronouns "we" (8:26) in the immediately preceding verses, and his continued use of 1st person plural pronouns "we" and "us" in the succeeding verses.

On the other hand, if we accept 8:29 as a reference to historical Israel, then the following phrases also must refer to historical Israel: God predestined Israel to be conformed to the image of Christ, Christ was the first-born among many brothers (i.e., Jesus was an Israelite), and it was Israel whom he predestined, called, justified, and glorified (8:30). If this is how the passage is to be read, then the remaining challenge must be to explain how this reading advances Paul's argument in the following verses of 8:31ff. in which he lapses into the collective Christian "we" and "us."

I agree that this passage has been used (and to a large degree abused) by Calvinist interpreters who reduce everything to individualism. I am convinced that Paul is speaking here in collective categories rather than individual ones. Contextually, however, I am not sure about taking 8:28-30 as referring to historical Israel, but this possibility must be seriously considered. As I said before, the strongest argument for doing so would be in the link to 11:2, but the immediate context in chapter 8 seems to be problematic.. back

PURIFICATION OF HEAVEN'S SANCTUARY

QUESTION: *I have been wrestling with Hebrews 9:23. "Thus is was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices that these."*
My question is: why did the heavenly things / the true tent needed to be purified? I understand why the earth needed to be purified, but I don't understand why the true tent that the Lord set up (8:2) needed purification.

ANSWER: As you have observed, it is not stated in this text why heaven's sanctuary needed ritual cleansing, which raises the question. The author of Hebrews does not enlarge upon it. Still, it is clear that his primary interest is in the blood-ritual with respect to the cleansing of human sin before God.

One answer that sometimes is given is that due to Satan's rebellion or the invasion of the heavenly sanctuary by the forces of evil (i.e., Ep. 6:12), the heavenly sanctuary must be purified. Perhaps this is true, but without a larger context to conform it, I'm doubtful about this interpretation. Another approach is to redefine the Greek word καθαριζω, changing its nuance from "purification" to "consecration." This approach, in my view, distorts the essential meaning of the Greek verb, so I can't go in that direction, either.

In my view, a better explanation is that the heavenly sanctuary is tainted due to human sin, since the sanctuary is the place where humans come to meet God in prayer. Because of the death of Jesus, all believers have been invited into the Most Holy Place to find grace to help in time of need, but those believers who come into this heavenly space through prayer and petition are far from perfect, even though they are believers. Hence, purification is necessary. The heavenly sanctuary may need no cleansing in and of itself, but when it is available as a place for the meeting of sinful humans and God, which earlier the Book of Hebrews asserts quite emphatically, it requires purification. back

SINLESS PERFECTION

QUESTION: *What are your thoughts on the theological doctrine of sinless perfection? Some say this is available for all Christians, while others say it is a heresy.*

ANSWER: The idea developed in the mid- to late-1800s, especially within what is called the American Holiness Movement, and especially among some Methodists. They based their theology on John Wesley's teaching about sanctification through perfect love. Wesley had emphasized that the path from sin to salvation led from willful rebellion to perfect love for God and others. He held that Christians could experience a state of being completely cleansed from sin and filled with love for God. However, for Wesley, this was not flawless behavior, but rather, a heart focused on loving God and one's neighbor along with the freedom from the compulsion to sin. Perfection advocates further developed the thought that "full salvation" involved two crises, conversion (justification) and liberation from the flaws in one's moral nature (sanctification). For some denominations (the Nazarene Church, the Church of God, the Wesleyan Church, the Free Methodist Church, etc.) it became one of their identifying marks. This theology was closely associated with Charles Finney and Asa Mahan at Oberlin College in the 1840s, where they both taught. Early on, it was linked to various reform movements, especially the abolition of slavery and the prohibition movement. Since it was possible for individuals to achieve perfection, it was equally possible for society to be perfected, which in turn motivated social reform. Later, the idea developed that this complete sanctification was possible in a crisis experience, and several monikers were attached to it, such as, baptism by fire, the second blessing, entire sanctification, the second work of grace, and the baptism in the Holy Ghost. Today, it continues as a sort of free-floating theology among some non-denominational Christians, though the issues today are neither slavery nor prohibition, but personal perfection and the ability to live a life entirely free from sin.

For me, I don't think so. If Paul, a mature Christian, hadn't reached it (and he plainly says he hadn't, cf. Phil. 3:12), I think it unlikely for anyone else. Most people who buy into this idea are limiting sin to outward, observable behaviors that are easily identified. However, human failure is much deeper. Have they ALWAYS and without exception loved their neighbors as themselves? Can they with total honesty claim such a thing? I very much doubt it. *back*

TEXTUAL AUTHORITY OF THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY

QUESTION: *What about John 7:53—8:11, which most early manuscripts of John's Gospel do not contain?*

ANSWER: Allow me to first offer a few things about John 7:53—8:11, this ancient account of forgiveness. Most of what I say can be found in other sources, but for the sake of convenience, let me pull together some things that should be considered.

The first thing that must be understood is that we do not have any original writings of the biblical writers like John or Paul or Matthew, that is to say, the actual papyrus sheets in their own hand-writing. (This is true for both the Old and New Testaments.) Not having any original manuscripts is not too surprising, since the materials they used were relatively fragile and bio-degradable, plus for roughly the first three centuries of the Christian church, Christianity was illegal, and their texts were regularly confiscated and burned. Instead, what we have are very early copies—many, many very early copies.

Indeed, our early manuscript copies for the texts of the New Testament form the largest collection of ancient texts for any writing of any kind whatsoever. Some of the earliest texts are not much older than the writers themselves. For instance, our earliest piece of John's Gospel (p52) dates to about AD 125, and we have early copies of the various other books of the New Testament from as early as AD 200 and fragments even earlier. Compare this with any other ancient writing, say, the *Lives of the Caesars* by Suetonius, and the New Testament stands out boldly as the best substantiated text in ancient history bar none.

Given that we work from ancient copies, all of which were hand-written, it is also not too surprising that over time some variations developed. No one had copy machines in the ancient world, and the reproduction of manuscripts by hand was done one letter at a time, one page at a time, one book at a time, etc. While the early scribes were quite careful, they were not capable of producing the sort of photographic replicas to which we are accustomed in the modern world, and we should not expect this of them. Some of these variations are very minor—small spelling differences, for instance—and for the most part, they do not affect our basic understanding of the text. For instance, in Paul's letters we find some manuscripts that say "to us" and others that say "to you." In Greek, this is the difference of a single letter (ημιν vs. υμιν). Still, since Paul is referring to the Christian community, it doesn't really affect the basic meaning of his words.

On more rare occasions, there are variations that are more substantial, and the account of the woman taken in adultery in John 7:53—8:11 is one of them, especially since it is not simply a word or two, but an entire narrative. This narrative is absent in the earliest of our manuscripts of John's Gospel (p66, p75, א, B, L, N, T, W, X Y, Δ,Θ, etc.). This is why many if not most modern translations will have a footnote indicating that fact. Also, the passage actual appears in one manuscript of the Gospel of Luke after Lk. 21:38 and in another after Lk. 24:53.

What seems most likely is that this story, which was part of the oral memory of the earliest Christians, was well-known, and in order to avoid losing it, it was included in later copies of John's Gospel. To be sure, this is unusual, but Christian scholars are candid about the facts surrounding this text, which is why it is footnoted. In older versions of the Bible (i.e., KJV, Tyndale, etc.), there are no such footnotes, because these early translators did not have access to the earlier copies that we now have discovered, so they didn't even know about it. Today, we do know about it.

So, this brings us to the question about "trust." I would suggest that the very fact that we not only know about it but forthrightly speak of this variation is itself a sign of trustworthiness. Trust is related to transparent honesty, and trust would surely be broken if we tried to hide the evidence as though it weren't there. The fact that we speak of it openly points to faithfulness. By contrast, for instance, the Muslims claim that the Qur'an is a perfect text without variation. What they don't tell you is that all the early copies that had variations were burned (and we have ancient evidence that this was true). Indeed, early Arabic was a consonantal text without vowels or punctuation, and these features were all added later than the life of Mohammed.

Christians don't do this sort of thing. We are not in the business of hiding stuff. Christians do believe, however, that "all Scripture is God-breathed," and that the ancient copies we have of the New Testament—small variations notwithstanding—are quite sufficient for

us to know what Jesus said and what the apostles wrote.

If a person's notion of trustworthiness is based only on some sort of perfectionism in a text, I think this is an unrealistic and unfortunate way of thinking. What if I did this to my wife. I discover that one Tuesday she said something about an appointment she had at 2:00 PM, and then on Wednesday, she said it was at 3:00 PM. Am I to say, then, I can never trust my wife again because of this minor variation? Someone pleading for such perfectionism is surely becoming ridiculous.

As to scholarly sources that address the passage in John 7:53—8:11, I can name any number of them, but whether or not these would be available in Africa (or affordable even if available) is uncertain. In any case, here are a few that I consider to be by trustworthy scholars who are themselves faithful Christians:

Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies: London).

Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 volumes)

D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. back

TONGUES-SPEAKING

QUESTION: *I'd love to hear your thoughts on speaking in tongues in biblical context.*

ANSWER: This, of course, is a highly sensitive question. I am comfortable sharing my thoughts in biblical context, but I also do not wish to say something that would cause distress. I should say, at the start, that I grew up as a Pentecostal, but I left that quadrant of the Christian family about half a century ago, and one of the reasons was because I disagreed with their theology on this issue. Still, I embrace Pentecostals and charismatics as my brothers and sisters in Christ, even though we see differently on the question of tongues-speaking. I am not their enemy, and I hope they are not mine. We stand together on the most important things like the gospel, the resurrection of the Lord, salvation by grace through faith, the authority of the Bible, and so forth.

Here are my problems with the theology that I left years ago. Pentecostals and charismatics take the view that speaking in tongues is a higher level of spirituality, and that all Christians ought to speak in tongues. I believe the Bible is quite clear that this is not the case. Paul asks the question, "Do all speak with tongues?" and the answer is a firm "no." (This is VERY clear in the Greek text, since Paul uses a μη form of constructing the question, which anticipates the answer “no.”) When Paul discusses tongues in 1 Corinthians, he is attempting to bring control in this area of gift expression. He limits tongues-speaking to two or at the most three in any given Christian worship setting—and he forbids it outright if it is not interpreted. He, himself, speaks in tongues, but he says he does not do so in the congregation. Here, Pentecostals and charismatics do not follow Paul's instructions. I realize they have their own interpretive methods of going around what Paul says, but I think their exegesis is mistaken. At the end, Paul says that we should not forbid speaking with tongues, but he also says everything should be done decently and in order, but which he means the Christians in Corinth should follow what he already has said about limiting this gift in public.

Biblically, I understand tongues-speaking to be a miraculous expression in real human languages. The defining passage, of course, is the Day of Pentecost, when people from

the various parts of the Roman world heard the disciples of Jesus speaking in their own regional dialects. It is troubling to me that most tongues-speaking in the modern Pentecostal-charismatic churches does not seem to be real human languages. I realize that there are anecdotal stories where tongues-speaking has been observed as a real human language, but I think I can safely say, this is not the norm in most Pentecostal-charismatic worship services. Thousands of recordings of tongues-speaking have been analyzed by linguists, and so far, none have been a real human language. Rather, it is a stringing together of syllables, what I would call syllabification, the verbal linking of known syllables in a random series of utterances. I suspect that this is more human than divine. At the same time, I don't think tongues-speakers are evil or intending to be deceptive or anything like that—but I do think it likely that they have attributed to the Holy Spirit something that is unlikely to be the Holy Spirit.

If I understand Paul correctly in 1 Corinthians 12, he argues that no spiritual gift is universal. Otherwise, the body of Christ would be just one big eye or hand or something else. Rather, there are various gifts, and every believer is to use whatever gift he/she has received for the upbuilding of the whole church. Surely, Paul's remarks must include tongues-speaking. So, while I have doubts about much of the tongues-speaking that I have observed, I am willing to reserve final judgment and give the benefit of the doubt. Still, I am not God, and my personal judgments are not final. I can be wrong about this, though I don't think I am. However, if someone urges that all Christians must speak in tongues, I will very firmly resist that notion as a direct contradiction to what the Bible teaches. *back*

TONGUES-SPEAKING WILL CEASE

QUESTION: *Why does Paul say, "Tongues will cease?"*

ANSWER: As to the Greek of 1 Co. 13:8 concerning prophecies, tongues, and knowledge, here are the critical words. Especially, one should pay attention to the voice of the verbs:

> προφητειαι καταργηθησονται (3rd person plural future indicative passive verb = "prophecies will be abolished")
>
> γλωσσαι παυσονται (3rd person plural future indicative middle verb = "tongues will cease [of themselves]")
>
> γνωσις καταργηθησεται (3rd person singular future indicative passive verb = "knowledge will be abolished")

The exegetical question, then, is why does Paul use the middle voice verb with regard to tongues-speaking. A scholar like Cleon Rodgers, Jr., for instance, will argue that tongues-speaking died out rather quickly in the post-apostolic church, and the middle voice is theologically significant (*The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, p. 380). Other scholars, like Daniel Wallace, argue that the change in verbs is merely stylistic, and if so, carries no theological mandate for the early disappearance of tongues-speaking *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, pp. 422-423).

Obviously, the one view favors a theological position that tongues-speaking in the modern church is inappropriate, since it already has "ceased of itself." The other view

favors a theological position that all three gifts—prophecies, tongues-speaking, and knowledge—will pass away only when the perfect comes, which in turn favors the Pentecostal-charismatic community that regularly practices tongues-speaking. back

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

QUESTION: *After listening to a Reformed Episcopal Church bishop's thought expressed as "is means is" regarding Jesus' words the "this is my body" and this is my blood," my ongoing question concerns his emphatic assertion that this necessarily must mean something literal, not figurative or symbolic. In some ways, his video was helpful, but I still find the "is" means "is" approach leaves a lot to be desired.*

ANSWER: Personally, I am and have been committed to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist for many years, but my own understanding is based more on what Paul says when comparing the Christian Eucharist with pagan religious meals in 1 Co. 10:14-22. Here, Paul is warning against idolatry. He first of all says that the Eucharist is analogous to the ancient practice of the Israelites eating from the sacrifices (Lev. 7:15). The ancient worshipper "participated" in the sacrificial altar, and in this context, he then says that pagan sacrifices are offered to demons and implies that in so doing, the pagan worshipper participates with demons. He then concludes in 10:21 that one cannot participate both in the table of demons and the table of the Lord. Hence, it seems to me that if the presence of demons in pagan offerings is a "real presence," then Paul is also saying that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a "real presence." However, it remains to address what the bishop might mean by his assertion "is" means "is."

As it appears in the Greek New Testament, here is the biblical statement:

> …τουτο μου εστιν το σωμα... (= this is my body), 1 Co. 11:24). The syntax in the gospels is slightly different, but it is essentially the same, where it says, τουτο εστιν το σωμα μου (= this is my body)

To simply assert "is" means "is" does not, in fact, answer the question; indeed, it seems to me to beg the question. The issue is not regarding the translation of the "to be" verb, but rather, the hermeneutical meaning of the verb. In the use of predicate nominative constructions like this (two nominatives connected by the "to be" verb), how can one tell whether or not a statement is intended as a literal equation or a metaphorical one? The problem is that the equative verbs in the Greek New Testament are often used metaphorically, and frequently enough, they are used with respect to the body of Christ. Here are a handful of familiar ones, most from the same book where Paul quotes Jesus as saying, "This is my body" and "This is my blood":

> …υμεις εστε σωμα Χριστου... (= you are [the] body of Christ) – 1 Co. 12:27
>
> …τα σωματα υμων μελη Χριστου εστιν... (= your bodies are a member of Christ) – 1 Co. 6:15
>
> …το σωμα υμων ναος του αγιου πνευματος εστιν... (= your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit) – 1 Co. 6:19)
>
> …εις αρτος εν σωμα οι πολλοι εσμεν... (= the many are one bread, one body) – 1 Co. 10:17
>
> …υμεις εστε σωμα Χριστου... (= you are [the] body of Christ) – 1 Co. 12:27)
>
> …μελη εσμεν του σωματος αυτου... (= we are members of his body) – Eph. 6:30

Virtually anyone, regardless of denomination, accepts these constructions as metaphorical, and all use the standard "to be" verb. To these might be added the various equative constructions of Jesus himself, such as:

> …εγω ειμι το φως του κοσμου... (= I am the light of the world) – Jn. 8:12
>
> …εγω ειμι η θυρα... (= I am the door) – Jn. 10:7, 9
>
> …εγω ειμι η αμπελος... (= I am the vine) – Jn. 15:1, 5 (and various other similar passages)

These, also, seem to be metaphorical. I suppose the statement in Jn. 6:35, 51 (...εγω ειμι ο αρος... = I am the bread) could be argued either way on theological grounds, but this, of course, is the point. The issue is contextual and hermeneutical, and just saying "is" means "is" is not very helpful.

In the Thirty-nine Articles in the Book of Common Prayer, which I think IS helpful, it says that the sacrament of the Eucharist is a "partaking of the Body of Christ" (Article XXVIII). The word "partaking" is κοινωνια (= fellowship, participation) and comes from 1 Cor. 10:16. The Article goes on to say, "Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions." So, as it says, "The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner." This, or so it seems to me, speaks of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but it clearly distances itself from transubstantiation. back

WHICH MARY?

QUESTION: *My question is regarding Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Lk. 10:48-42; Jn. 11:1-2; 12:1-3. Are these stories all the same people? There are quite a few similarities but also some differences. And then why does John mention in chapter 11 that she is the one who wiped Jesus' feet with her hair but only tells the story in chapter 12?*

ANSWER: The question regarding the identity of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet and her relationship to Mary and Martha has long been an interpretive puzzle. I think the best we can say is that it is ambiguous. If this is the same occasion recorded in John's Gospel, then Mary, Martha and Lazarus were also present, and the woman who anointed Jesus was Mary herself. I tend to think this to have been the case, due to the similarities, but I wouldn't put undue weight on this conclusion because of the differences. The problem with the name Mary (Miriam) is that it was a very common name, and without qualifying details, we cannot be sure. Likely, the story, which was carried orally for some years prior to the composition of the gospels, was well enough understood by the original audience, but alas, we don't have that privilege. While we know nothing specific of Simon the Leper, it may well be that he is named because his eyewitness testimony stands behind the story itself and serves as a guarantor of the tradition.). back

HEALING OR NO HEALING?

QUESTION: *About a month ago we had a priest come to our local church and God worked through him to heal several people. One of those people was my sister-in-law*

who had fibromyalgia (constant chronic pain). It is something I have as well and many other illnesses that affect how I live. With my sister-in-law becoming healed, it's been the only thing everyone talks about. I went to go see this priest as well, and he was sure God would heal me, too. It didn't happen, and I have been dealing with bitterness ever since. The truth is last week I had a breakdown and scared my family. The bitterness is not fully to God but to other people as well. I feel like I'm going through a sudden crisis of my faith, I have so much fear now. Any advice would be helpful, thank you so much.

ANSWER: My heart goes out to you, my friend, as you wrestle with this physical challenge, which is equally an emotional and spiritual battle as well. Paul, of course, had somewhat the same experience, and God gently informed him that he would not be delivered, but that the grace he already received in Christ was enough to sustain him.

I can only say that you are in good company! John the Baptist, when he was imprisoned by Herod, sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus whether or not he was really the Messiah. Perhaps John, like you, experienced a crisis of faith. I think at the very least this was an implicit cry for help. John seemed to be saying (without directly saying it), "Remember me?" It seemed that everyone in Galilee was getting a miracle, but John would not get one. John's disciples watched as Jesus preached and healed some people. Jesus told them that they should go tell John what they had heard and seen—and then they were to tell him one more thing, "Blessed is the man who takes no offense in me." John was the man for whom there would no miracle. Yet, Jesus also said that no human born in the world was greater than John, and most importantly, that even though John himself performed no miracles, everything he said about Jesus was the truth. This cemented his status as the greatest prophet since Moses, the forerunner of Jesus, but he neither performed nor received a miracle.

In the end, the worth of any person's spiritual life, as it was for John, is to speak the truth about Jesus. There is no higher calling. Every person lives or dies by what he or she is on the inside. Yes, miracles are impressive (and they certainly bring great relief and blessing), but there is something higher yet, and it is one's faithfulness to his or her calling and faithfulness to the Lord.

I don't know if you know much about Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French mathematician. He was a deeply devoted Christian, but one who suffered greatly from tuberculosis and several other maladies. However, he came to regard his sickness as a blessing from the Lord, because in his suffering he felt God drew him close. It was in this light that he wrote what I consider some of the most profound thoughts about sickness, called "the good use of sickness." Here are some excerpts:

Prayer 1

"Lord, you are good and gentle in all your ways; and your mercy is so great that not only the blessings but also the misfortunes of your people are channels of your compassion. Grant that I may turn to you as a Father in my present condition, since the change in my own state from health to sickness brings no change to you. You are always the same, and you are my loving Father in times of trouble and in times of joy alike."

Prayer 2

"You gave me health that I might serve you; and so often I failed to use my good health in your service. Now you send me sickness in order to correct me. My health was full of pride and selfish ambition when I was healthy. Now please let sickness destroy that pride

and ambition. Render me incapable of enjoying any worldly pleasure, that I may take delight in you alone. Grant that I may adore you in the lonely silence of my sick bed. And grant that, having ignored the things of the spirit when my body was vigorous, I may now enjoy spiritual sweetness while my body groans in pain."

Prayer 3

"How happy is the heart, O God, that can love an object so pleasing as yourself, the heart that can find its peace in an object so beautiful. How secure and durable is the happiness that is found in you, since you endure forever. Neither life nor death can separate such happiness from its object. Move my heart, O God, to repentance for all my faults, for all the many times I have looked elsewhere for happiness. Let the disorder in my body be the means through which my soul is put into order. I can now find no happiness in physical things; let me find happiness only in you."

Prayer 4

"You can see me, Lord, as I truly am; and surely you can find nothing pleasing to you in me. I can see in myself, Lord, nothing but my sufferings. Yet I find comfort in the knowledge that, in a small way, these resemble your sufferings. Look down, Lord, on the pains that I suffer, on the illness that afflicts me. Look down, blessed Savior, on the wounds that your hand has made. You did love your own sufferings, even though they ended in death itself. You became man that you might suffer more than any man has done, in order to save man. In your body you embraced all bodily suffering. Look with favor upon my body, look with love upon my pain. Let my sorrows be my invitation to you to visit me on my sick bed."

Prayer 5

"Uproot in me, Lord, the self-pity on which self-love feeds. Let me not dwell with self-pity on my own sufferings. Let me not regret the loss of worldly pleasures; remind me that such pleasures can never satisfy the heart. Clothe my heart in the sorrow that clothed your heart on the cross. Let me henceforth ask for neither health nor life, but rather, let me be content to let you dispose of me as you please. Let health and sickness, life and death, be equal in my sight. Let me joyfully acknowledge you as my king, and give and take away your blessings as you wish. Let me trust in your eternal providence, receiving with equal reverence all that comes to me from you."

Prayer 6

"O my Savior, since I share in some small way your sufferings, fill me to the brim with the glory which your sufferings won for mankind. Let me share in some small way the joy of your risen life."

I don't know if these prayers will be helpful at all, but I have found great comfort and inner healing in reading these ancient godly expressions by a fellow-sufferer. I pray that they might be of some help to you, also. *back*

APPOINTED TO BELIEVE

QUESTION: *OK, I have a question that sort of wrecked my prayer time this morning. I have a lot of people on my list for whom I pray that God would lead them to salvation. But I decided to read my daily Bible chapters first. In Acts 13:48, it says, "Those who were appointed to salvation*

believed." I read the verse in four different translations. Does that mean that God only allows some to be saved? Have I been praying for people in vain?

ANSWER: Acts 13:48 is one of the Calvinists' favorite verses, and it is easy to see why, especially if read out of context. First, regarding translation, the Greek verb τασσω does mean to appoint or to be destined or to be ordained. However, in this passage it is a middle/passive voice form (i.e., "were ordained" or "were destined" or "were appointed"), so it assumes an unnamed force that acted upon the hearts of those who came to faith. Calvinists, as might be supposed, believe that the force was God and his predetermination of who was to be saved. Arminians, as might be supposed, believe that the force was the receptive attitude of those who came to faith (here, taking the verb as a middle/passive but emphasizing the middle aspect of the voice).

In my understanding, both Calvinists and Arminians miss an important contextual factor due to their preoccupation with individualism. The larger context concerns whether or not salvation was exclusively for the Jews or also included Gentiles. I think this passage must not be ripped from this context and made to serve some other purpose. What I think Luke is underscoring is that Gentiles also, NOT just Jews, are appointed for salvation (see especially 13:44-47). This is why when the Jewish synagogue members rejected the gospel, Paul felt free to turn to the Gentiles. The issue, then, is not about individualism (which individual person gets saved and which gets damned), but rather, about the collective bodies of Jews vs. Gentiles. Luke's comment in 13:48 concerns God's choice to save Gentiles, which is why Paul and Barnabas quote Isa. 49:6. If, as both Peter and Paul say (2 Pe. 3:9; 1 Ti. 2:4), God wants all people to be saved, then your prayers for others is entirely appropriate. Your prayers for others, even if you were a card-carrying Calvinist believing in double predestination, would still be in order, since even in Calvinist theology no one knows who God chose to be saved. Still, I think the collective context is usually missed by both Calvinists and Arminians. *back*

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST IN JOHN 1:1

QUESTION: *I have been having some dialogue with Mormons lately and someone sent me this:*

> *"You are very correct we do affirm John 1:1 to be doctrine; however, we affirm the ideas of the original Greek not the interpretation that has been derived from the translation of Greek to English.*
>
> *Within the Greek language there is a nuance that does not translate to English very well. So let's take this line by line. "And the word was with God" this line in the Greek is "Kaì ó lóyos nv nòs tòv Osóv," and the important part in this is the word "mpos" which was translated as "with;" however, the nuance of this is not translated very well because "with" just implies proximity to something. This word in the Greek actually implies that something is face to face, or a motion towards. This shows that "The Word" is facing towards God as a distinct being.*
>
> *The next line, "And the word was God," which being directly translated, is actually structured as "God was the Word." In the Greek within this verse there is a predicate theos that shows which word is the subject and which word is the predicate. Theos is not placed before God in this verse implying that it is the predicate. This means that John is defining the nature of The Word. If he had placed it before God, it would have meant that God and The Word are the same being, but that would contradict the line previous stating that The Word is faced toward God. If you read this far, thank you, but the Greek is very clear, John is saying that God and Jesus are the same in nature, but that they are*

two distinct individuals"

So, my question is, What's the truth about the original Greek?

ANSWER: Your Mormon acquaintance is mostly correct in his rendering of the Greek text, though his aside that the English translations of the Bible are inadequate is inappropriate and misinformed. His aside implies that all the other Greek scholars in the world are wrong except his group.

On the plus side, the preposition pros in the phrase "the Word was with (pros) God" can mean something like "face to face." It's primary meaning is "to" or "toward," but depending on context, the English preposition "with" is often the nuance. Fundamentally, it is a preposition of relationship. He has misspelled some words in Greek, however, which makes me wonder if he really knows Greek or is simply attempting to use Greek but doesn't really know it. (He misspelled the proposition pros, and he misspelled the accusative form of God, which should be theon, not Oson).

In addressing the next section ("The Word was God"), he is correct that the Greek phrase is a predicate nominative (he just says predicate, but it is a predicate nominative in which two nouns in the nominative case are joined by the "to be" verb). In predicate nominative constructions, if one of the nominatives has the definite article "the," and the other does not, then the one with the definite article should appear first in English translation, regardless of the word order in Greek. Here, the word Logos has the definite article, while the word Theos does not. Hence, in English it should read, "The Word was God," not "God was the Word." Hence, in this, your friend is correct. However, he is incorrect in saying that this phrase cannot mean that God and the Word are the same. In fact, that is precisely what a predicate nominative does—it equates the two sides of the phrase joined by the "to be" verb. Here, it would seem that he is following his church's theology, but he is not following standard Greek grammar. He says it cannot mean "the same," because that meaning is negated by the pros preposition in the previous phrase, but this is an interpretation, not an issue of grammar. In fact, the grammar is that the Word and God ARE the same.

This passage was one of the more important ones in early Christianity with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. Granted, it is paradoxical to say that "The Word was with God" (which is to say the Word was in relationship with God) and at the same time to say that "The Word was God" (which is to say that the Word and God are the same), but that is exactly what the Greek text says.

Your Mormon friend is trying to avoid the paradox. I realize he is bound by his church to do so, but he cannot claim the high ground that his theology is based on the grammar of the Greek text. It is not. He says, "The Greek is very clear." Yes, it is very clear, and it does not support his position. *back*

JESUS IN MY HEART BUT ALSO IN HEAVEN

QUESTION: *Jesus is in our heart and Jesus is in heaven...how can that be?*

ANSWER: First, in Jesus' own explanation about his return to the Father, he said that he would send to them the Spirit of Truth, which would at the same time be the Spirit of Jesus himself (Jn. 14:16-18). He also said that in this gift of the Spirit both he (the Son) as well as the Father would be sent to "make their home" in believers. Hence, the indwelling of

the Spirit is fully Trinitarian--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is in this sense that Jesus can be in our hearts, but he can also be in heaven at the same time. In the same way, God can be in our hearts even though the Spirit of God fills the universe. Paul teaches us that Christ ascended into the heavens 'that he might fill all things' (Eph. 4:10), which is another way of saying the same thing. *back*

JESUS REMAINING IN HUMAN FORM

QUESTION: *Why does Jesus remain in human form?*

ANSWER: Here, I think we must understand that Jesus' resurrection body has both continuity as well as discontinuity with his earthly life. On the one hand, he could both appear and disappear, as he did to the disciples in the locked room on Easter. On the other, he could say to them to look at his hands and his feet, and to Thomas, to actually touch the wound in his side. This paradoxical character of Jesus' resurrection body continues to be evident in the heavenlies, where he claims to be the one who was alive, was dead, and now is alive forevermore (Rev. 1:17-18). It would seem to me that the answer to the question as to why Christ will continue to have a body lies in the eternal accomplishments evident in his incarnation, death, and resurrection—his glorified body serves as the decisive evidence of his incarnational work, a work that will last forever. Hence, even in heaven Jesus is depicted as the Lamb slain (Rv. 5:6). In Jesus' great prayer, he said to the Father, "I have accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (Jn. 17:4). This work concerned his incarnation, and now he was ready to submit to death by which he would procure eternal life to all who came to faith (Jn. 17:2). *back*

JESUS' RESURRECTION IS PROOF THAT GOD ACCEPTED HIS SACRIFICE

QUESTION: *Why do we say that Jesus' resurrection is proof that his sacrifice was accepted by God?*

ANSWER: The idea that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is God's way of confirming that he accepted Jesus' sacrifice of himself is most clearly described in the Letter to the Hebrews. The author says that in Jesus' prayer of submission to death on the night he was arrested was heard by the Father, who accepted his sacrifice as the source of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:7-9; 9:11-12, 24-26). The fact that he "sat down at the right hand of God," which obviously is only possible because of his resurrection, directly implies that God accepted his sacrifice (Heb. 10:12). *back*

FATHER'S WORK IN THE BELIEVER

QUESTION: *I think I know what Jesus and the Holy Spirit do in life of a believer, but I'm having difficulty with the Father. Is He the initiator, planner, source of divine action?*

ANSWER: Here, I think the idea of roles is important. Yes, the Father is the source from which everything proceeds. He initiates salvation in the sending of the Son into the world. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 15:26). As the divine "parent" he adopts us as his children. He offers protection, unconditional love, and parental discipline. It is to him that we may come directly in prayer, calling him "Abba," as our source of help in time of need. *back*

FLOOD AND GEOLOGY

QUESTION: *I'm currently in Cologne, Germany, and I have a student who is questioning the geological validity of the ancient flood event. He's asking if there is geological support for the event, or is the Bible simply copying ancient stories and putting God into it.*

ANSWER: As for geological evidence for the great flood, there is considerable evidence for a particularly wet period in the 4th millennium BC, with particularly dry periods both before and after. At Ur, Sir Leonard Wooley discovered an almost 3-meter-thick sterile layer, while other flood deposits were found at higher levels at several sites. If he can access it, the student may want to have a look at "The River Runs Dry" by scholar James Sauer in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (July/August 1996). At least it is a place to start.

While not geological, there are various ancient texts that describe a great flood, such as, the Sumerian Deluge Tablet (University of Pennsylvania), the Gilgamesh Epic (British Museum), the Atrahasis Epic (British Museum), and the Sumerian King List of rulers before the great flood (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford University). The idea that Genesis just copied older accounts is a common viewpoint in many universities, especially since these texts are older than Genesis. However, I agree with those scholars who argue that Genesis is an apologetic corrective to these ancient accounts. Yes, Genesis interacts with them, which accounts for the similarities. However, there are significant differences as well, and these remarkable differences account for the apologetic motif. *back*

GIFT OF THE SPIRIT AND HUMAN NATURE

QUESTION: *Does the gift of the Holy Spirit change the nature of man?*

ANSWER: Here, I'm going to say "yes" and "no." Certainly, there is spiritual change in being born again. Paul says, for instance, that in the work of the Holy Spirit we have been clothed with a new nature, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator (Col. 3:10). On the other hand, we still wrestle with our own human nature (Rom. 7:15-24), but this struggle, which is real, is completely offset by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, who delivers us from condemnation (Rom. 8:1-4). *back*

HIERARCHY IN THE TRINITY?

QUESTION: *Is there a hierarchy in the Trinity, or are Father, Son and Holy Spirit equal? I thought equal, but then I read an article that said there was hierarchy? He the "head" of the Trinity. Does that give him a "boss" position or first to be introduced?*

ANSWER: This question is more complicated than most. Personally, I don't care for the word "hierarchy" with respect to the Trinity. I do agree, however, that there is a priority. With respect to the persons of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they are all equal in majesty, power, essential nature, attributes, etc., but still, in the way they generally are spoken of in the New Testament, there is a priority of order (Mt. 28:19). In the introductions to Paul's letters, he refers to the Father and the Son and usually in that order. When he speaks of the work of salvation, it is the Father who planned (Ep. 1:3-6), the Son who performed the atoning work (Ep. 1:7-12), and the Holy Spirit who seals believers (Ep. 1:13-14). This priority of order was followed by the writers in the post-apostolic church. That being said, however, I don't think we should view the persons of the Trinity as a boss and those under him. There may be a functional difference in role (i.e., the Father "sends" the Son), but this does not imply that one is greater than the

other. Ontologically, they are equal. back

JESUS REMAINING IN HUMAN FORM

QUESTION: *Why does Jesus remain in human form?*

ANSWER: Here, I think we must understand that Jesus' resurrection body has both continuity as well as discontinuity with his earthly life. On the one hand, he could both appear and disappear, as he did to the disciples in the locked room on Easter. On the other, he could say to them to look at his hands and his feet, and to Thomas, to actually touch the wound in his side. This paradoxical character of Jesus' resurrection body continues to be evident in the heavenlies, where he claims to be the one who was alive, was dead, and now is alive forevermore (Rev. 1:17-18). It would seem to me that the answer to the question as to why Christ will continue to have a body lies in the eternal accomplishments evident in his incarnation, death, and resurrection—his glorified body serves as the decisive evidence of his incarnational work, a work that will last forever. Hence, even in heaven Jesus is depicted as the Lamb slain (Rv. 5:6). In Jesus' great prayer, he said to the Father, "I have accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (Jn. 17:4). This work concerned his incarnation, and now he was ready to submit to death by which he would procure eternal life to all who came to faith (Jn. 17:2). back

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL—WAS IT COMPOSED IN HEBREW?

QUESTION: *I wanted to ask you about the claim that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew. I heard in one of my church history classes that Papias of Hierapolis said something like, "Matthew compiled the sayings of the Lord in Hebrew, and everyone interpreted them as best they could." Later, Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome repeated this tradition.*

ANSWER: This is a much discussed statement, and in the end, there has been more smoke than light. Yes, Papias, Eusebius (and Irenaeus, also) made the claim that Matthew was originally composed in Hebrew or Aramaic, and this was common throughout the Medieval Period. The shift away from this point of view probably begins with Erasmus, the Dutch scholar, and today fewer modern scholars follow this assumption. Probably the primary reason concerns the priority of Mark. Most scholars today embrace the point of view that Marks' Gospel underlies much of Matthew's Gospel, since there are so many word-for-word agreements in so many places. If so (and Mark's gospel was almost certainly composed in Greek, not Hebrew), then the idea that Matthew wrote his Gospel in a different language is nearly impossible to sustain.

So, if one takes that point of view, what is one to do with the early statements by the early church fathers that Matthew was composed in Hebrew? The easiest answer, I suppose, is to simply say they were mistaken. A more nuanced answer is that Matthew may have been writing to a Jewish community, which would account for the stronger Jewish accent in his gospel, and this the orientation gave rise to the idea that he may have composed his gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic. At the end of the day, however, there is no certainty. Roman Catholics tend to accept the idea, based on the early and Medieval Church testimony, that Matthew did compose his gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic. Protestants are more inclined to think otherwise. back

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HEAVEN AND ETERNITY

QUESTION: *I've been struggling with the idea of eternity recently and wanted your input on the matter. Where does the idea come from that in heaven we will be able to walk about and talk to each other and kind of live in an amplified version of earth? I don't see how that could work on the scale of eternity. If we're experiencing change and motion, then we would be experiencing time passing which doesn't seem to make sense, because no matter how long we would experience a moment for, we would have all of the rest of eternity still ahead of us. If you told your life story to every single person in heaven 50 times, you would still have the same amount of eternity at the end as you did at the beginning. I guess looking at heaven, I've come to consider it as just a single moment where we will be reunited with God and we will stay consistent and unchanging. But where does this idea come from or is it just something we say to children to help them deal with loss? I don't mean to be callous if that's how it comes across. I lost someone close to me recently, and I have been painfully struck by what an eternity without them would look like.*

ANSWER: Let's start with the idea of eternity. Both Old and New Testaments capture this idea in the expressions *'olam* (forever) and "ages of the ages" (eternal). Despite some thinkers like Greg Boyd and Rob Bell, who put God within the time continuum, the classical theology of the church is that God is outside the time continuum as part of his essential nature. In other words, God is not bound by structures he did not create; hence, time itself is a created structure, and the created universe is within that created structure. Some, like William Lane Craig, argue that God is both timeless (in his essence) but enters the time

continuum in order to communicate and direct historical affairs within time, but nonetheless, the idea of eternity is the idea of forever (captured in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer by the phrase "world without end)." Because we are creatures within the time continuum, it is very hard for us to conceptualize the idea of eternity. Granted, there is a part of us that instinctively reaches out toward such a concept (Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes, for instance, says that God has put eternity into human hearts, 3:11), but while we yearn to continue an existence, even after death, we have only vague ideas of what this might mean. As you have pointed out, the qualifying factor of time is change. Change makes history linear, not cyclical (as in eastern pantheism). It is "going somewhere," so it has both a beginning and an end, and for Christians, it also has a midpoint in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. (If you should wish to read more about this concept in a theological way, I recommend Oscar Cullman, the French thinker, in his book *Christ and Time*.)

Having said that, what about the ideas of heaven in which believers will be able to communicate with loved ones who have died and, as you artfully put it, they now "live a kind of amplified version of earth?" This is a question Christians have wrestled with for many centuries. As you indicated, change and motion, if this is a quality of heaven, suggests the passing of time. It seems to me that our attempts to describe heaven, the afterlife, and our union with God must remain largely undefined. In 2 Peter, there is a remarkable passage concerning us becoming participants in the divine nature (2 Pe. 1:4). The notion of participating in the divine nature has a long history in the ancient world, especially in Greek philosophical and religious thought. In the Hellenistic mystery religions, for instance, religious ritual made it possible for a person to be united with the gods and goddesses. By participating in religious drama and other ceremonies, the initiates believed they could share in the life of the deities. During the first century of the Christian era, Christians carried on a "running battle" with groups which later came to be known as Gnostics, that is, those who claimed to possess superior knowledge of God by special revelation. While full-blown Gnosticism is more of a second century phenomenon than a first century one, the Greek world-view of spirit-matter dualism lay behind all such thought, and it was prevalent throughout the entire Hellenistic Period. Such dualism advocated the inherent goodness of spirit over matter and held forth the possibility of liberation from the material world into the spiritual world of the gods and goddesses after death. The benefit of such religion was the power to overcome matter, death, and fate and to be able to participate in the divine powers.

The author of 2 Peter must surely have been aware of such concepts. The fact that he uses phrases such as *theias dynamis* (= divine power) and *theias koinonoi physeos* (= sharers of divine nature) can hardly be accidental. He puts the issue to his readers squarely. As Christians, they have indeed been given everything they needed for life and godliness--not through some hidden knowledge gained by a secret ritual, but by knowing God and his Son (1:3). God, by his own glory and virtue, had called them and promised them that they could participate in the divine nature as well as escape the corruption of evil desires (1:4). By participating in the divine nature, the author means not that Christians will become demi-gods or merge in the being of God (as in Hinduism), but rather, that they will share in the heavenly nature of immortality. This includes the idea of resurrection and the corollary that nothing God created is evil, including physical human life. The thought of 2 Peter is analogous to the thought of Paul when he says that the

perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, the mortal with immortality (cf. 1 Co. 15:50-57). His words are simply another way of talking about the concept of eternal life. Thus, God has given to his people all that they need for the present life as well as the ultimate promise that, in the end, they will live in the same imperishable state as God himself. Later, this imperishable state will be called "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (1:11). Still, the question persists as to what eternal life will be like? The Book of Revelation near the end, of course, offers some hints, but surely these must be metaphorical, not literal, encouraging us to believe in this blessed future without a full range of details.

The idea that we will have memory and will be able to communicate with people from our earthly lives is based on scattered passages in the Bible. Jesus, for instance, speaks of this future as a realm in which one never dies (Jn. 11:25-26). He also said that people from all points of the compass will sit down together in the feast of the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Mt. 8:11). Here, there will no longer be grief or pain (Rv. 21:3-4). At least we can say that the concept of eternal life focuses upon our union and eternal fellowship with Christ in a state of blessedness and comfort (1 Jn. 3:2). In addition, it seems to suggest that we will be united with other believers who have passed (Jn. 14:2-3; 1 Th. 4:13-17; 1 Co. 15:51-52; Mt. 22:31). It would seem to me that this eternal state will in some way preserve the memory of time, even if we are beyond time. What would be the point of portraying Christ as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, our Redeemer and Savior, if we couldn't remember how it happened? So, while I am not able to say very much about eternity, it seems to me that memory will at least be part of it.

Now, I will frankly concede that many well-meaning Christians have gone a long way beyond anything the Bible actually says. I won't say that popular hymns about family reunions in heaven are necessarily wrong, but they do go beyond what is written. I think we'll have to leave that up to God and the future and confess with St. Paul, "Now we know in part... We see but a poor reflection..." It is not a sin to confess such limitations, and I am content to live with a range of unanswered questions about this future with Christ. I do, however, resonate with another Christian song that says, "Heaven holds all the secrets that we'll never know 'til we're there." The song is country in style and homey in character, but I think it is on the right track. *back*

ADAM—WAS EVEN WITH HIM WHEN TEMPLED?

QUESTION: *A Bible translation question from Bangladesh… In Bangladesh there is a debate as to the proper translation of Genesis 3:6. The older translations say, "... and she gave some to her husband." Other translations add, "... and she gave some to her husband, who was with her." Based on the older translations, most people here teach that Adam wasn't there, that he only later 'caved in' due to his wife's persuasion (3:17), or even he didn't know what fruit it was she gave him to eat. Is the Hebrew of 3:6 clearly leaning one way? or does it leave both options open?*

The Bangla translation by William Carey (which has a status like the KJV used to have in English) omits the phrase, and so does the Common language version, which is based on Carey's work. The Catholic Bangla Jubilee Bible as well as the WBTC Bangla version add "who was with her." The common Bangladeshi interpretation is that women are

more easily tempted than men and that women sin more than men, which is why men need to control them (3:16). So, I think proper translation/interpretation of this passage is crucial as much hangs on it—and all the more I am grateful for your help!

ANSWER: I'm happy to help you with this question. The Hebrew Bible (Masoretic Text) from which all scholars work in translating the Old Testament into English) has the phrase:

ותתן גם לאישה עמה

which translates to "she gave also to her husband with her." The critical word is עמה, which is the standard expression in Hebrew "with her" (it is the preposition "with" appended with the pronoun "her"). In surveying the English translations I have at hand, only the RSV does not include this phrase (and, indeed, it was corrected in the NRSV to include this phrase). All others (KJV, ASV, ERV, JPS, NAB, NASB, NAU, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NRSV) have this phrase "with her." Furthermore, the Greek Septuagint also has this phrase (μετ' αυτης), which means "with her." Why the RSV did not include it is a mystery to me, but in any case, it is clearly there in Hebrew, and all other English Versions translate it appropriately. In my view, this text does NOT leave both options open. The most natural way to read the passage in Hebrew is that Adam was there—saying nothing and doing nothing, but there all the same. Perhaps some older Bangladeshi versions might be following the RSV in omitting this phrase, but that is beyond my level of expertise. *back*

PSALM 124, CONTEXT?

QUESTION: *I would like know the context of Psalm 124, its audience, and its historical and figurative meaning.*

ANSWER: Psalm 124, first of all, is subtitled as a "song of ascents" (which, in the Hebrew text, appears as the first verse rather than as a subtitle). Some 15 Psalms are labeled as "songs of ascents," and the blunt truth is we don't know for sure what this designation means. As long ago as St. Augustine and Origen, they were understood as symbolic of the ascent of the soul to God in prayer. Other less figurative approaches include that the line might refer to a song of the returning exiles (cf. Ezra 2:1; 7:9). It should be borne in mind that when one goes to Jerusalem, he/she always is "going up." The idea of "going up" in ancient Hebrew is a matter of elevation, not direction, so when one is "going up" to Jerusalem, it would be true whether he was traveling north, south, east, or west, since Jerusalem was in the central mountains. A third interpretation takes the term "ascents" to refer to a poetic device where the steplike climatic parallelism within the lines of the Psalm is a form of ascending. Yet another is that these Psalms were sung by priests as they ascended the steps in the temple, especially the 2nd Temple. Still another is that these "songs of ascents" were an attempt to encourage northern Israelites during the Persian period to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Finally, there is simply the idea that this Psalm and the others with this subtitle are ones sung by pilgrims approaching Jerusalem for the three *haggim* festivals (Passover, Weeks, Booths).

As you can see, scholars and interpreters are literally "all over the map" in trying to locate the setting and use of these Psalms. There is nothing in the text of Psalm 124 to locate it in any particular period or for any particular audience, but what does seem clear from the context of the Psalm, is that it speaks directly of formidable enemies who, except for the help of Yahweh, would have been overwhelming. One point is significant in that the

Psalm is composed in the 1st person plural (note the various plural pronouns like "we" and "our" and "us"). This immediately suggests that the lyrics are to be sung by the community, not merely a single individual. Many Psalms are from individuals and use 1st person singular pronouns like "I" and "me," but this one doesn't. Hence, whatever was the formidable threat, it was a threat to everyone, not just someone. Yet, despite these overwhelming odds, the help of Yahweh made all the difference.

I am more inclined to the view that Psalm 124 likely arose out of a specific historical incident, but there is no clear indication of what or when. One can speculate about a score of possible candidates, ranging from the wars of David to the invasion of Hezekiah's Jerusalem by Sennacherib to the opposition by locals during the building of the 2nd Temple. At the same time, its meaning certainly goes beyond whatever this particular incident may have been, whether a confrontation in war or siege or banditry, and it bids the listener to trust in Yahweh in the midst of his/her own threatening circumstances. The imagery of the flash flood, the attack of predators, and the entrapment by hunters all combine to describe how desperate was the circumstance. But Yahweh, the Creator of the universe, is mighty in power! He is the Help to the helpless.

For what they are worth, those are my thoughts on this Psalm. I realize that I am not offering anything quite as specific as you may have hoped, but I'm not sure this is possible. *back*

HERODOTUS AND THE EXODUS

QUESTION: *My Bible studies sometimes take me down rabbit holes but*

I sometimes find interesting things. I am sending you this article from the Armstrong Institute (https://armstronginstitute/1487-herodotus-earliest-extrabiblical-author-to-mention-the-exodus)
not for your education but to see if you find it off the beaten path
or a legitimate source of accurate information.

ANSWER Interesting article, but I have some misgivings about its source. I have read Herodotus from time to time, but I hadn't encountered the parts noted in this article (or else, may not have caught their significance with respect to the Israelite exodus). At this point, all I can say concerning the article is "maybe." It is uncomfortable that the Armstrong Institute is an offshoot of Herbert W. Armstrong College, which is a residual of the late Herbert Armstrong, who among other things, claimed that the lost ten tribes of Israel were the British and the Americans. Most evangelicals have considered Armstrongism to be a cult. Armstrong himself, a non-trinitarian, published a magazine called *The Plain Truth*, and he made it his mission to perpetuate his view about Anglo-Saxon peoples as widely as possible, i.e., British-Israel and American-Israel. However, with his death, the movement, called The Worldwide Church of God, lost its foremost proponent. Subsequently, his followers (including his son) splintered into several groups, the larger of which eventually established a new church called Grace Communion International in 2009.

All that is to say that I'd probably never cite a reference in any of my own academic writings from such a source due to its dubious history. At the same time, I'm not

necessarily saying that there is nothing to the quotations from Herodotus, but having read them (now), I find them sufficiently ambiguous that I wouldn't be able to give an unqualified “thumbs up.” back

WALTON, JOHN AND GENESIS

QUESTION: *Can you tell me what you think of John H. Walton who wrote The Lost World of Genesis One?*

ANSWER: Dr. John Walton, Professor Emeritus of Wheaton College in the Chicago area, is a scholar whom I've followed in a number of his writings through the years. I don't always agree with him, but nonetheless, I think he is a legitimate scholar and has much insight to offer into the ancient world. I have read the work you mentioned, The Lost World of Genesis One, and on the whole, I concur with many if not most of his observations. However, I don't agree with his understanding of the Hebrew verb bara (= "to create"), which he argues refers to the creation of only functional things, not material things, though I do agree with many of his other points. back

TRADITION AND NEW WINE

QUESTION: *I am wondering/looking for wisdom. I'm preaching on the new wine and new cloth. I was wondering if you in your experience know what are things people seldom let go of in terms of traditions or habit? what are ways people are not getting the new wine into their life?*

ANSWER: No doubt Jesus was correct when he said that for most people "the old wine is better" (Lk. 5:39). It would seem to me that the issues of tradition that are most problematic are the ones that take us away from Christ himself. Christ and the gospel comprise the "new wine" and "new cloth." What is most needed, even in the 21st century, is an unobstructed Christ. Everything that goes under the label "new" is not necessarily spiritually healthy. Indeed, this is even true of things that are alleged to be from the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that when the Spirit of truth came, he would not speak of himself, but he would speak of me (Jn. 16:13-15). Hence, even things that are attributed to the Spirit must lead one back to Christ himself, and if it does not, then there is every reason to doubt that this is from the Holy Spirit in the first place. Many things can obstruct our vision and understanding of Jesus. People are often either ignorant or uninformed of what Jesus said and taught. Jesus certainly can be obscured by our human traditions. We can lose clear sight of him because we are enamored with popular points of view that in themselves may be new, but they don't lead us back to Christ.

Tradition itself is not necessarily a bad thing, and regularly in the New Testament Paul uses the language of tradition in a positive way (cf. 1 Cor. 11:2, 23ff.; 15:1-7; 2 Thess. 2:15). However, such tradition must lead us directly back to Christ. This is why a good maxim is "if it is new, it's not true—and if it's true, it's not new." Christ, not some new thing, is the center, and as a preacher of the gospel, we must always strive to present an unobstructed Christ.

I've not attempted to construct a list of things to watch out for, but rather, I've tried to offer a perspective concerning new things and traditional things. Either new or traditional, the benchmark for whether or not something is spiritually healthy and

valuable is whether or not it leads directly back to Christ himself. back

HEBREWS 9:28 AND FUTURE SALVATION

QUESTION: *Verse 28 is curious to me since it appears to imply that salvation is tied to Jesus' second coming. When Christ comes and takes residence in a person through the Holy Spirit—isn't that the moment of salvation? Or, does this mean that we do not have salvation until Christ comes again at an end of time?*

ANSWER: The New Testament speaks of salvation in three verbal tenses, past, present, and future. As such, the experience of salvation has past, present and future dimensions, or more precisely, salvation can be viewed simultaneously as a past event, a present experience, and a future hope. As a past event, salvation rests on the completed work of the cross which is appropriated in the life of the believer by faith. In this sense, Paul can write to his converts, "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified" (1 Co. 6:11). He can say, "By grace you have been saved" (Ep. 2:5), and "In this hope we were saved" (Ro. 8:24). The verbal metaphors Paul uses for salvation appear for the most part in the sense of completed action (usually the aorist tense in Greek):

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law (Ga. 3:13)

We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son (Ro. 5:10)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God (Ro. 5:1).

You received the Spirit of adoption (Ro. 8:15)

Paul...to the church...to those sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Co.1:1-2).

The past character of salvation depends both upon the finished work of Calvary and the believer's acceptance of this finished work. Hence, Christians are those who have believed (Ro. 13:11; 1 Co. 3:5; 15:2, 11; Ga. 2:16 (Gk.); Ep. 1:13; 2 Th. 1:10; 1 Ti. 3:16; 2 Ti. 1:12; Tit. 3:8). Their salvation in the past tense dates to Christ's death and their subsequent awakening of faith.

At the same time, Paul also speaks of salvation as an ongoing, progressive experience. He can write, "By this gospel you are being saved" (1 Co. 15:2; cf. 2 Co. 2:15; 1:18). In this new life, they "work out their salvation" as God "works in them" (Phil. 2:12-13). They progress toward maturity (Ep. 4:13; Phil. 3:12). Paul's language embraces both the past and the present, so he says Christians strive to "live up" to what they already have attained (Phil. 3:16).

Finally, Salvation is a future hope, or as Paul says to the Romans, "We shall be saved...through him" (Ro. 5:9; Phil. 1:28). Every day that passes, the believer's moment of future salvation is "nearer now than when we first believed" (Ro. 13:11). Christians anticipate the return of Christ, the blessed hope of the church (Tit. 2:13). When Christ comes, they will be joined to him forever (Ro. 6:8; 1 Th. 4:17).

While I doubt that the Book of Hebrews was written by Paul, I think the basic theology for both writers is the same. Resurrection, which is still future, will be the completion of the salvation that has already been awarded because of one's faith in Christ. back

CONSUMMATION OF THE AGES

QUESTION: *What is the "consummation of the ages" in Hebrews 9:26? Does this mean the fulfillment of God's purpose for humanity?*

ANSWER: First, Heb. 9:26-28 is the climax of the argument as to why Christ's priesthood is superior to the priesthood of Aaron and the Old Testament. Everything the writer says should be read in light of this basic intent. He reasons that Christian believers are like the congregation of Israel on Yom Kippur waiting in the outer court for the reappearance of the high priest. The ritual for the Day of Atonement would not be complete until the High Priest appeared to bless the people, and indeed, there always was danger when entering the Most Holy Place, since the immediate presence of God was lethal (cf. Lev. 10:1-2). After Jesus had entered the Most Holy Place of heaven, his disciples awaited his appearing in his second coming at the end of the age (cf. 9:28). By the way, the tension between Christians entering the Most Holy Place (He. 4:14-16; 6:20; 10:19-22) and Christians waiting outside in the outer court matches the paradox of inaugurated eschatology. In fact, both analogies are true at the same time, since Christians live in the "already/not yet" tension between the present and the future. In a spiritual sense, they already have access to heaven by a "new and living way." At the same time, they await their final entry into heaven in the resurrection. This paradox is similar to the Pauline paradox in which Christians already are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ep. 1:3, 20; 2:6), yet they await the "redemption of our [their] bodies" (Ro. 8:23).

The phrase "consummation of the ages" refers to what earlier the writer called "these last days" (Heb. 1:2), by which he refers to the advent of Christ the first time. The incarnation, life, and death of Jesus, in the view of this biblical author, was the climax of time. To be sure, for us who live 2000 years later, this seems to be a rather long "last days," but nonetheless, theologically the last days began with the advent of Christ. So, your own question, "Does this mean the fulfillment of God's purpose for humanity," seems to me to use appropriate language. The "last days," of course, will not be complete until Christ appears the second time, just as the high priest on Yom Kippur would emerge from the sanctuary to appear the second time after he had finished presenting blood in the Most Holy Place for the whole nation. Christ, by analogy, will appear the second time when he returns. *back*

COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE

QUESTION: *Was the Council of Carthage in about the year 400 a meeting at which many New Testament books were "fixed" for the New Testament and several others excluded? I heard that Constantine was involved in the canonical process, expelling books he didn't like and accepting ones he liked. Is this true? Were there reasons that have become clear to history why this and others were excluded? Did they conflict with established teachings or beliefs by 400 or were they just not widely enough known to be included? If they did not conflict, are there passages or messages that add anything interesting or enlightening about the early church? Were they suppressed as time went by or simply forgotten?*

Also, I read somewhere that three of the four Gospels were thought to have been based the same earlier lost record. Is that your understanding?

ANSWER: The Council of Carthage in about AD 400 was a regional council in North Africa, not an ecumenical one, so it had no authority to make decisions for the whole church.

This council merely affirmed what was already a growing consensus. True, it focused on the canon of Scripture, confirming which writings were considered authoritative for reading and teaching in congregations. However, it offered no new decisions, but rather, followed and reinforced what Christians already widely held to be the extent of the New Testament, the 27 books as we now have them. The main point is that the canon of the New Testament was fixed by the consensus of the whole church over time, not the decisions of one person (or even one council).

The legend of Constantine, perpetuated in Dan Brown's novel, The Da Vince Code, which many people read as history, is patently false. In his novel, Brown presents a fictionalized account in which Constantine the Great, at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, is portrayed as the emperor who suppressed “80 gospels” and decided which books would be included in the New Testament. According to the novel’s antagonist, Leigh Teabing, Constantine was a pagan ruler who sought to erase alternative Christian narratives—particularly those that portrayed Jesus as a divine figure—and instead promoted a version of Christianity that aligned with imperial interests. (Another of his fictions was that in the bishops' vote regarding the Trinity at the Council of Nicaea, the affirmation that Christ was divine was a "close vote." Actually, it was 305 to 2, not particularly close.) In any case, Constantine died in AD 337, many decades before the Council of Carthage even convened.

Brown’s depiction is part of a broader conspiracy theory, suggesting that the Church’s official canon was a later imposition that concealed earlier, more “truthful” accounts of Jesus (especially Gnostic texts), including a hidden lineage through Mary Magdalene. He frames the Bible as a human product rather than a divine revelation, claiming it evolved over time through imperial and ecclesiastical decisions, and hence, lays a foundation for a modern reformation of Christianity.

Scholars and historians unilaterally reject Brown’s portrayal. The New Testament canon was largely fixed by the early 2nd century, with Irenaeus (ca. AD 130–202) explicitly listing the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—as authoritative. The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) focused on doctrinal issues like the nature of Christ’s divinity, not on deciding which books should be included in the Bible. Constantine’s known actions included ordering 50 standardized copies of the sacred texts to be produced, but this was to ensure uniformity in Church instruction, not to create a new canon.

In short, Brown’s claim in The Da Vinci Code is fictional and historically inaccurate—it is a central part of the novel’s plot but not supported by credible historical evidence.

There were, in fact, other candidates for books in the New Testament, especially the Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistles of Barnabas. The Shepherd of Hermas was a 2nd century Christian work widely read. It appears in a few canon lists, but excluded from most. The author was Hermas, a freed Christian slave, so it was not composed by an apostle or someone close to an apostle. Hermas narrates his own life, including his experiences as a slave, his later wealth, loss of property, and acts of penance for past sins. Hermas experienced five visions, including allegorical representations of the Church as an aged woman and the appearance of the Angel of Repentance in the fifth vision, who appears as a shepherd and gives the text its name. Twelve moral commandments are delivered by the shepherd, emphasizing repentance, humility, forgiveness, and ethical conduct, including instructions for Christian husbands to forgive repentant adulterous

wives. Ten parables illustrate moral and spiritual lessons, reinforcing the ethical and allegorical teachings of the visions. The overarching theme is repentance and moral rectitude, with a focus on post-baptismal sin, the possibility of forgiveness, and the urgency of ethical living. While it reinforces ideas and theologies that were already current, it does not offer anything particularly new. The primary reason for not including it in the canon is probably that it was post-apostolic, not because it contained some heresy.

Probably the other most popular candidate for the canon that was excluded was the Epistle of Barnabas, another early Christian writing emphasizing the way of light versus the way of darkness. Both the Shepherd and Barnabas are included at the end of Codex Sinaiticus (c. AD 300), following the 27 books that make up the New Testament (and currently on permanent display in the British Library in London). It is definitely one of my "tour stops" when I give tours to university students at the British Library and the British Museum each year. Here, again, the author is not one of the apostles (and almost certainly not the Barnabas who was a companion of Paul). Other lesser candidates would be 1 Clement, the Didache, and a few others in what are called The Apostolic Fathers collection. They are translated into English and easily accessible if one is interested in reading them. Far from being repressed, they were widely read, but more as devotional and supplemental literature alongside the New Testament. Still, in the end, they were not accepted as "Scripture" by the whole church.

As to the first three gospels, which are all very similar (giving them the name "synoptics"), there is general agreement that each was composed separately but probably contained material based on oral tradition and possible some early written accounts of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:1-4). A widely accepted theory by scholars is that there may indeed have been an early written source of sayings underlying several sections of Matthew and Luke (dubbed "Q" from the Latin quelle or source). This is hypothetical, of course, since we have no such text, but there are reasons for thinking it might have existed, especially for parallel areas of Matthew and Luke which are absent from Mark. All that aside, what is particularly important is that all four gospels were written within the living memory of people who had known Jesus personally. This fact forms a type of corroboration which is unique in the ancient world. It is very rare in antiquity to have historical texts written within the living memory of people still alive. None of the other so-called gospels (mostly Gnostic literature) have such corroboration. *back*

ROMANS 8:29-30

QUESTION: *Please explain to me how you interpret Romans 8:29-30 in reference to predestination.*

ANSWER: This passage, of course, has been a mainstay for Calvinists, who interpret it in terms of God's predestination of all humans, one by one, before the creation of the world, either to be saved or to be damned—and humans do not nor cannot participate in this divine decision. It was fixed for every person before they were born. Why God would choose to create some humans in order to eternally damn them seems significantly at odds with what we know of God's character elsewhere, but be that as it may, this is the Calvinist position.

My own understanding of this passage departs from traditional Calvinism and is as

follows: All along in Romans, the over-arching promise had been that in Abraham's seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. The giving of the Torah did not change that fundamental promise. God's eternal purpose was larger than the Torah, for even before the Torah existed, God foreknew his people—and he foreknew them in a category much broader than what the Torah defined (8:29a). He decided in advance that this body of God-lovers would become like Christ Jesus, his very own Son, who was the prototype Child, the firstborn among the many who would follow him (8:29b). Paul's use of the term "firstborn" is not a biological statement about Christ's origin, as though he were the first created being (as urged in the ancient world by Arius and in the modern world by the Jehovah's Witnesses), but rather, it is a statement about Christ the first-born in a new humanity, resurrected and glorified.

This process of being changed, as Paul says elsewhere, "into his [Christ's] likeness" (cf. 2 Co. 3:18), has already begun in the call to holiness, suffering, and prayer, which Paul has just described (cf. 6:19, 22; 8:17, 26-27). Being conformed to the likeness of God's Son is what he earlier described as being "co-heirs with Christ" (cf. 8:17). It involves death, of course (cf. Phil. 3:10), but beyond death will come glorification. This goal will not be completed until that moment when glory "will be revealed in us" (cf. 8:18a).

In accord with this good purpose, God decided in advance (predestined) to accomplish this end by calling, acquitting, and glorifying this company of God-lovers (8:30). He describes them here in corporate terms, not merely as individuals (note the plural pronouns). In other words, what God predestined was concerning the body of believers. (I think Calvinists make a grave exegetical error in changing the plural references into individual ones. What God predestined was his people, not the eternal destiny of individuals to heaven or hell.) Furthermore, what he predestined was that those in the body of believers would become like his Son. He speaks of this calling, acquitting, and glorifying all in the past (aorist) tense in order to emphasize the unshakeable future God has predetermined. The aorist verb in Greek, which views action as a single whole, has some special uses, one of which is to emphasize dramatically a future reality with the certitude of a past event. The use of the aorist verb here does not imply that glorification is itself in the past (as, for instance, in Christian baptism), but rather that the ultimate goal of God's good purpose is viewed from the perspective of its completion.

There is another possibility, of course, since Paul is speaking in corporate terms, and it concerns the phrase "those whom he foreknew." Later, Paul will use this exact same expression to refer to the people of Israel (11:2). Hence, some interpreters think that the passage in 8:29 is also referring to the people of Israel. However, contextually, I think it is a broader reference to all believers, not just ancient Israel. However, either way, both approaches understand the passage in corporate terms, not individual terms. My own perspective on John Calvin and those who followed him is that they were too much influenced by Renaissance individualism, and read all these passages in individualistic terms. However, what seems clear to me, especially because of the plural pronouns, is that Paul is speaking in corporate terms, not individual terms, when he uses words like "predestination" and "foreknew." *back*

GENESIS AS APOLOGETIC

QUESTION: *I heard someone say something about the book of Genesis being polemic, as being*

written to speak into, or perhaps against, a pagan polytheist culture. To be very clear, I am NOT quoting her. I was slightly unsure and was waiting for her to explain further but she did not. I felt unsettled in that it sounded like a purpose statement. I would say the purpose of Genesis is the unfolding of God's plan and purpose to redeem mankind. He used individual people and a nation to picture a relationship with Him as He intended, and we get repeated proof that despite His overwhelming goodness, in the flesh, no man could hold up his part of the relationship. Over and over we get the foreshadowing of Jesus as fulfillment. Genisis is not in competition with worldly culture, it wasn't just given to contrast that broken time period. If anything, doesn't it demonstrate that all mankind is depraved and in need of God's intervention and mercy? Is this a "common" way of addressing Genesis?

ANSWER: Your question is an interesting one, and I guess my take on Genesis, especially the early chapters, is that you and the other person you described are both correct. Genesis, just as you indicated, does indeed unfold the origins of the universe, the rebellion of humans, and eventually, the call of Abram as the path toward a redemptive future. This is paramount and must not be set aside in view of other concerns.

However, there may well be more than a single horizon here, and there also seems to be an apologetic motif alongside the other alternatives about creation and human life in the ancient world. In Egypt, the Israelites would have been exposed to the mythologies and worldview of the Egyptians, while in Canaan they would come into contact with the mythologies and worldview of the Canaanites and Mesopotamians. There certainly are some points of contact in the early chapters of Genesis between the faith of Israel and these other belief systems, and Genesis offers a very different set of religious beliefs than existed elsewhere in the ancient Near East. I think it does offer a corrective and apologetic to these pagan systems. So, in this sense, there is a polemical character, especially in the stories of creation and the flood, where the Book of Genesis seems to offer a corrective to accounts that were older than Moses and already widely held. In the ancient Near East, the deities were personifications of the mysterious forces of nature. By contrast, Yahweh was transcendent, known only by his own self-disclosures and his mighty acts.

Allow me to offer an example regarding creation. In the Enuma Elish tablet (older than Genesis), creation was the result of a violent primeval conflict. Marduk (god of order) fought Tiamat (goddess of chaos), defeating the gods of chaos, and splitting Tiamat's corpse into sky and earth. Humans were created out of the blood of the slain god Kingu. In Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Canaanite mythologies, their religion was replete with polytheism, the gods were whimsical and cruel, the universe was chaotic, the sun, moon, and natural phenomena were deities, and humans were an afterthought. In Genesis, the creation is by one God only, Yahweh, and he is just and loving. Creation is orderly and good. The Genesis creation account does not even use the words "sun" (shemesh) and "moon" (yareah), since in the ancient world, these words were the name of deities. Rather, it uses the words "greater light" and "lesser light" to show that these are not gods, but rather, things that the one true God made. Especially, humans are the climax of creation.

The same sort of corrective is offered with respect to the great flood. Several ancient tablets in cuneiform, all of which are older than Genesis, describe the great flood (Sumerian Deluge Tablet, Gilgamesh Epic, Atrahasis Epic), but in these ancient Near

Eastern accounts, the gods are characterized by their cruelty, irritation, and anger. They decide to destroy humans because they are too noisy and over-populated. The basic story line of the boat an d the flood is much the same as in Genesis, so there see very clear points of contact. The gods instruct a hero to build a huge boat, fill it with animals, and ride out the flood. However, it is the differences that are most remarkable, and it is here that Genesis provides a corrective. Yahweh is characterized by moral grief over human sin. He sends the flood as a moral judgment because of wickedness, violence, and perversity. Noah and his family are spared because he is righteous and obedient.

So, about the purpose of Genesis... It would seem to me that the redemptive purpose of Genesis, which is foremost and occupies the largest portion of the book, need not cancel out a secondary purpose to correct the current worldviews of the ancient world, which the Israelites would doubtless encounter and probably already had encountered, especially with respect to how to view God, the origins of the universe, and the judgment of the great flood. This corrective is largely confined to the first 11 chapters. The climax of those chapters, following the great tower story at Babel, is a world in desperate need of salvation. Babel forms the climax of the primeval history, depicting a world deeply alienated from and in rebellion against its Creator. The progress of human history is arrogant and destructive. The earth is saturated with discord: husband against wife, son against father, son against son, people against creation, nation against nation, and all against God. While Mesopotamian versions depict humans rising from obscurity to establish culture and asserting themselves through ingenuity, Genesis depicts humans as tragically fallen from a place of honor and goodness. It was a twisted world, crying out for salvation.

In the end, I don't think the speaker you described was wrong in saying that there is a polemical element in Genesis, but perhaps she said either too little or too much, too little without further explanation or too much if there was no opportunity to address these points of contact with the mythologies of the ancient Near East in the larger context of God's purpose to redeem fallen humans. *back*

THE ISRAELITES PAYING FOR WATER AND FOOD

QUESTION: *I am looking through the book of Deuteronomy. The passage of most interest to me is Chapter 2:6-7. I was wondering what you make of it because to me it seems to suggest that either the Israelites would trade in the wilderness or work with their hands to earn something. Would I be extrapolating too much from that? I know they left Egypt with the Egyptian's wealth but it clearly talks about blessing the work of their hands, and also that they are still going through the wilderness.*

ANSWER: When the Israelites turned back from Kadesh Barnea toward the Sinai desert and had completed the 40-year sojourn in the desert, they skirted the hill country of Seir, the ancestral home of the Edomites (Dt. 2:1). The Book of Numbers describes this in more detail than Moses' brief summary here in Deuteronomy. The original attempt to enter Canaan had been from the south, but now, after completing the 40 years in the desert, the Israelites would take an alternative approach and travel eastward and northward to the Transjordan in order to enter Canaan from east of the Jordan River. The geographical

area of the Edomites was squarely in their path. Since it was through this area that the Israelites intended to go, Moses requested permission for peaceful travel, promising not to use any Edomite resources or at least to pay for anything they did use (Nu. 20:14-21). This offer to pay for resources (probably consisting of water rights and perhaps food as well) would later be extended to Sihon of the Amorites, also (Nu. 21:21-22). The point of such a request seems to have been an attempt to avoid war. A sizeable group like the Israelites would be a serious economic drain on any areas through which they passed, and at least in these two cases, where they would pass through territory that was already occupied by villages and farms, they offer to pay for their passage without disrupting the local populations.

In both cases, the offer was refused. The ancient reconciliation between Esau and Jacob, the two mutually hostile twin grandsons of Abraham (Ge. 33), seems not to have passed down to Esau's descendants, the Edomites. Not only did the Edomite king refuse their request, he marshalled his army to threaten them, but rather than fight against their "brother," the people of Israel skirted Edomite territory. However, later Moses indicates that they were able to buy some food and water from them (cf. Dt. 2:28-29). The same thing happened with Sihon (Dt. 2:26-37), and apparently, they paid for water rights and food there as well. However, while the Israelites avoided war with the Edomites by skirting their territory, they engaged in full battle against Sihon and took over their territory (Nu. 21:23-31).

There is no record of this sort of thing happening during the long 40-year sojourn in the Sinai desert. However, it should be remembered that the Sinai desert was not populated with farms and villages. In the desert, the Israelites would find sustenance by the miracle of water from the rock and the daily appearance of manna (and later, quail). Now that the 40 years were at an end, however, the Israelites would be passing directly through areas where there was population, so the situation was different. Hence, I doubt that Israel was continually trading or buying resources during their 40-years in the desert. Rather, it was at the end of this sojourn, when they were working their way eastward and northward through the populated areas of Edom and the Transjordan, that they faced a different situation. *back*

LGBTQ COMMUNITY, RESPONSE TO

QUESTION: *I have a few friends that would identify themselves with the LGBTQ community and in the past, I have regretfully hidden the aspects of my faith that would speak to the destructive nature of this lifestyle. I love them and I know that they are special and kind people. I am truly blessed to have them in my life. However, I want what is best for them and that is of course, living a life surrendered to Christ. When people that are a part of the LGTBQ community ask what views Christianity has on homosexuality, what is a loving way that we can still remain close to the truth of our faith while still maintaining those relationships in our lives. I have been asking a lot of different leaders in my life about this question. If you have a chance, I would love to hear your thoughts on this matter.*

ANSWER: xxx I understand your reluctance to directly confront people whose lifestyle is dangerous, such as, those in the LGBQT community. I will offer some thoughts, for what

they are worth, about evangelism in this context.

First, I want to always remember that Jesus, also, related to people with such lifestyles. Among the Jews in the 1st century, the behaviors in our current LGBQT community did not exist (though it certainly existed in Greco-Roman culture), but prostitution, on the other hand, was common enough in both cultures. Jesus did not shy away from these people. The gospels indicate that he extended table fellowship to them, which in the ancient world, was huge. Just how he handled such things as a lifestyle that was directly at odds with the commandments in the Torah we are not told. (I wish I knew more about that.) However, he was certainly criticized by the religious elites for his openness to these people. At the very least, this seems to suggest that he treated them with kindness, and in turn, we should do the same. At the same time, in the case of the woman caught in adultery, he said, "Go, and don't sin any longer." Disapproval of someone's lifestyle and sexual choices does not mean a rejection of them as people that God loves.

One of the things that you almost certainly will encounter is a defense of these behaviors that seeks to remove the sting from the biblical passages that condemn it. Have a look at the longer study concerning Christ and Culture on my website (www.dkonos.org)> You can access it under Literature, clicking on “History and Culture<’ and scrolling down to “Christians and Culture.” Especially, you may want to have a look at pages 29-39.

It is one thing to point out what we believe to be misinformation on the part of the LGBQT community, but quite another to take a course of action that honors Christ and puts into practice his ethic of love as the highest response to sinful people. For too long, Christians have put homosexual behavior in a special category that prevents them from acting graciously toward homosexuals. But like it or not, Christ calls us to be gracious toward all sinners. Gays and lesbians, whatever else you may think of them, are first of all people created by God, loved by God, and people for whom Christ died. In this way, they are no different than you or me! God does not love them less—and he does not love us more! In general, I think it fair to say that evangelical Christians generally have failed to show God’s love to homosexuals. Rather, homosexuals have been objects of scorn, insult, fear, prejudice, and oppression. In many cases, evangelical Christians treat homosexuals much as the ancient cultures treated lepers—they are unclean and to be avoided at all costs. Fear of AIDS, fear of family destruction, fear of unhealthy influences on our children—all these threats are real enough, and I do not deny them. The aggressiveness with which many in the LGBQT community advance their lifestyles is threatening and offensive. But if the only thing we can muster up is hostility and revulsion, we are a long way from learning to look at people in the way God does. It may very well be that God has revulsion for some of our sins as much as for theirs!

At the heart of most homosexuals is a deep and gnawing loneliness. They have a natural hunger for human love, a search for identity, and a longing for completeness—just as we all do! If homosexuals cannot find this from Christians, where are they to go? The option for them should not simply be the warmth of homosexual union versus the pain of isolation in the cold. Rather, there must also be a third option—the environment of Christian love—love that is generated by God’s love—which offers understanding and

support while not offering endorsement. Still, we cannot continue to offer only rejection and cruelty based on our fears. We must offer hope based on our Christian faith and Christian love. Perplexing and painful as homosexuality is to most of us, Christ Jesus still offers forgiveness, hope, faith and love—and the greatest of these is love. Most of us are too much like Jonah: we are willing to accept God's grace for ourselves when we are in the belly of the fish, but we have a hard time accepting his grace for others whom we have learned to hate. It is clear from Paul's letter to the Corinthians that some believers in the church were former practicing homosexuals. He lists the sinful conditions of those who had come to Christ, and they include homosexuals along with thieves, slanderers, drunkards and others. And that is what some of you were, Paul says, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the by the Spirit of our God. May we, too, reach out in compassion to those for whom homosexuality is an overwhelming and bitter struggle. May God guide us to be more like Christ Jesus himself! *back*

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

QUESTION: *When you have a moment, could you explain what Jesus says regarding divorce?*

ANSWER: This subject has long been a contention among Christians. Roman Catholics believe divorce is not possible, hence, the only solution is to seek an annulment of the marriage, which in effect says it was not a legal marriage in the first place. Most Protestants believe divorce is possible, though it violates God's ideal, but they are divided over the issue of remarriage. Within Protestantism, there are several theological approaches, ranging from 1) no remarriage after divorce under any circumstances, 2) no remarriage after divorce unless unfaithfulness can be proved and/or the former spouse has remarried, 3) remarriage after divorce is permissible so long as there is sincere repentance for the failure of the first marriage, 4) remarriage is permissible under all circumstances. The question about divorce and remarriage, in its most acute form, is formulated in the context of one passage more than all others, Mark 10:11-12, where Jesus says, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

Mark offers a series of accounts sometimes called "the conflict narratives", and the question about divorce is one of them. The Pharisees attempted to entrap Jesus with the question about divorce. In 1st century Jewish society, the option for divorce lay open only to the man under Jewish law (though under Roman law a woman could initiate divorce proceedings). The Jewish context is important. Jesus was not dealing here with an actual situation of divorce, but rather, with the possibility of divorce before it happened.

By the time of Jesus, rabbinic discussion concerning divorce had polarized into two camps. Though both camps agreed that divorce was permissible on the basis of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, each fostered different ideas about the grounds for divorce when they interpreted the Mosaic phrase, "He finds something indecent about her."

> *The School of Hillel offered a liberal interpretation in which a woman could be divorced by her husband for almost any reason, even as trivial as annoyance or embarrassment.*
>
> *The School of Shammai maintained stricter standards and defined indecency as*

being something morally shameful, such as adultery.

This law did not stipulate the procedure for divorce, but it assumed such a procedure to be in place. A certificate of divorce would normally free a divorced partner to be remarried, but in this case, not to the first marriage partner.

From this case law, the Jewish rabbis argued over the justifiable conditions for divorce. The issue revolved around the expression *'erewath davar* (= an indecent thing). The more severe position, following Rabbi Shammai, defined the basis for divorce as sexual infidelity along the lines of Deuteronomy 22:13ff. The more relaxed interpretation, following Rabbi Hillel, defined the basis for divorce as more or less anything that might be offensive, whether sexual or not.

It was this assumption that divorce was an inherent right with which Jesus disagreed. A certificate of divorce in the Mosaic law assumed the right to remarry. At the same time, divorce could only be considered as breaking the divine ideal. One does not "tolerate" what is inherently a right, and this is the point Jesus makes. Jesus' instruction assumed that divorce was NOT good or desirable, even though it might be tolerated under Mosaic legislation. This is why he says that Moses only permitted a certificate of divorce "because your hearts were hard" (cf. Mk. 10:5). The marriage ideal implicit within the creation account of man and woman was for life-long union (cf. Mk. 10:6-9).

When the Pharisees posed their question, Jesus responded with another question. His words, "What did Moses command you?" were intended to call attention to God's will in the matter. In other words, the Pharisees wanted to know how far they could go and still be within the parameters of the law (cf. Mt. 19:3). Jesus wanted them to consider what God's intentions were! They obviously could not cite a commandment concerning divorce, for there weren't any commandments ordering divorce! The best they could do was cite a concession. Moses only gave a command about what could or could not be done after a divorce. Still, the recognition of divorce is clear enough, and the writing of a certificate implied that the woman was free to remarry. (Without a certificate, any remarriage was tantamount to bigamy.)

Jesus' next statement shocked his audience (cf. Mt. 19:10)! He stated that the very concession they cited was, because of its nature as a concession, antithetical to the purpose of God. Divorce, even when given as a concession, destroyed God's purpose for the institution of marriage. God's intent, as is clear from the creation account (cf. Ge. 1:27; 2:21-24), is one man for one woman for life. Since God joins the man and the woman in marriage, society ought not break that bond.

Hence, Jesus countermands any effort toward easy divorce. "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her." This statement has the force of: "Anyone who divorces his wife so that he can marry another woman…"

In Matthew, Jesus offers an exception to this life-long union, and that exception is *me epi porneia* (= except for unchastity). Such behavior violates the marriage ideal so severely that divorce, while always an evil, may be justifiable. Furthermore, divorce for any other reason virtually compels the woman to commit adultery, since she would in most cases seek remarriage in order to survive. Such a remarriage would mean that her new husband also committed adultery, something that was certainly a surprise to Jesus' listeners, since under Jewish law a woman could commit adultery against her husband, but he could not commit adultery against her.

Modern application of this teaching has been complex and debatable, to say the least. Nevertheless, some things are clear enough. First, Jesus clearly intended marriage to be "until death do us part" (cf. Mk. 10:9). Divorce along with remarriage is always an evil and a breaking of God's ideal. It always merits mourning and repentance. Jesus' instruction is not aimed at delineating the reasons that might justify divorce, but rather, to emphasize that among his disciples there should be a basic disposition not to divorce, since God intends marriage to be a union for life.

It has taken a long time to get to what is for most people the "real question." Should Christians be divorcing and remarrying? No, they should not be doing so. Divorce always mars God's intent for marriage. Still, there are exceptions. Such exceptions do not make divorce "right," but they might mean in some cases it is justifiable.

Can Christians remarry after a divorce without living in adultery? Jesus' statement in Mark 10:10-12 seems to refer to the person who divorces a spouse with the preconceived intent to remarry someone else. Divorce does not always proceed from such motives, however. Some marriages are broken, not with the intent to find a new partner, but out of the acute distress of a present situation. Any decision toward remarriage, in all cases, should not be made quickly and can only be considered after repentance for the broken marriage that marred God's purpose for marriage in the first place, along with a serious consideration of the single life as a real possibility.

back

PSALM 82:6 – "YOU ARE GODS"

QUESTION: *Psalm 82:6—why does it say "you are gods..."?*

ANSWER: Ps. 82:6 seems to use the term *'elohim* in a rather unusual way, since in most of the Old Testament, the term is used to refer to the one true God. Here, however, the context is critical. Notice, especially, that the Psalm begins with a reference to the assembly of "the gods" (82:1), probably a taunt toward the pagan pantheon of deities, who are on the side of wickedness (82:2). As such, they are commanded to attend to the plight of the weak and most vulnerable, something that they obviously are NOT doing (82:3-5). Later, in 82:6, the reference to "gods" probably refers to these same pagan deities. Like the "sons of God" in Job, which included Satan himself, they are accountable to Yahweh, the true God, but they are fallible and will "die" as do all humans and all rulers. Later, in the New Testament, St. Paul will say that such pagan deities are fronts for demons (1 Co. 10:19-21). This passage is similar to the taunt in Isaiah 14, where the king of Babylon exalted himself as though he was a god (14:12-14, but in the end, he would go to the place of the dead just like everyone else (Is. 14:3-11, 15-20). *back*

JUDGEMENT OF SIN OR SINNERS

QUESTION: *I may have blundered in class I was teaching. I said that God punishes sin and not the sinner, and then I wasn't sure if what I'd said was correct. I was attempting to communicate that God doesn't delight in punishment, but he holds people accountable for the consequences of sin. But I am uneasy with the phrase, God punishes sin and not the sinner, and I'm wondering how that might work? Is it totally wrong, partly wrong, or how I might think or present things properly? I was trying to present the idea that God isn't*

gleefully punishing people when they don't love him, but rather, he is holding people accountable for what they've done.

ANSWER: Hmmm... l think you may want to clarify your statement. It is unclear to me how God could punish sin without punishing the sinner. Sin is not an independent substance, and there are plenty of passages in the OT indicating that God's wrath is exercised against rebellious people. (Take a concordance and follow the many passages about "wrath.") Divine wrath is the obverse side of holiness, and God is a consuming fire. In the NT, also have a look at Ro. 2:5; 3:5; 5:9; 13:4-5; Ep. 5:6; Col. 3:5-6; 1 Th. 1:10.

On the other hand, there are clear references about being spared God's wrath through the redemptive work of Christ. If one can accept the idea of penal substitution (not everyone does), then the wrath of God against sinners was satisfied in the death of Jesus.

I concur with the basic principle that you are trying to get across. If l may borrow from the Book of Common Prayer, there is a line that expresses this succinctly, when it says, "God hates nothing that he has made." It may be helpful to distinguish between divine wrath and divine hatred. They are not the same thing, though l think many people assume they are. It would be proper to say God hates sin but not the sinner, but I think you should adjust the language that God punishes sin but not the sinner. *back*

NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

QUESTION: *Today I was asked my opinion on whether our goal is heaven or the new earth? I have never really thought about it directly. It seems there is a common viewpoint that heaven right now is a waiting place for believers who die before Christ comes back and that a new earth will be the permanent dwelling place after He comes again.*

ANSWER: I must say at the outset that this is somewhat of a shadowy question (pun intended). If the Bible held forth no promise of a final consummation at the end of the age and a final state of affairs for all creation, then a person's final situation could be considered completed at death (as in Greek mythology). However, a constituent part of the Christian hope is resurrection, judgment, and the eternal state that follows. This hope in turn raises several questions about the intermediate state, that is, the period of time between death and resurrection, so let me start there. When a person dies, the activities in the living world go on. That history shall not be complete until the second coming of Christ. So, what of the dead in the intervening time?

There is no sustained reflection on the intermediate state in the New Testament. Still, the apostolic writers offer scattered but important data that must be considered. Beginning with Jesus, the word paradeisos (= paradise, the garden) is used to describe a heavenly existence (Lk. 23:43; 2 Co. 12:4; Rv. 2:7). As a Persian loanword (pairi-daeza), this term was adopted by the Jews after the Babylonian captivity. It was used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) to refer to the Garden of Eden in Genesis (Ge. 2:8-10, 16), and this idea of a park or garden was coupled with the eschatological hope of blessedness after death. In Jewish thought, the idea of a garden fit well, not only with the original garden of Eden, but also with the imagery of the prophet Isaiah, who anticipated a blessed future for the people of God (Is. 41:18-19; 51:3; 58:11; 60:13). Jesus seems to have used this same idea in his promise to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Other New Testament passages that allude to the state of the righteous between death and

resurrection come largely from Paul. In the context of anticipating the possibility of his own death (Phil. 1:20-22), the apostle indicated that after death he would be “with Christ” (Phil. 1:23), a state that was the obverse of remaining “in the body” (Phil. 1:24). Further, he says that “as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,” and he looked forward with hope to being “away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Co. 5:6-9). Christians who die should not be unduly grieved (1 Th. 4:13), for those who have died in faith await the resurrection in which their mortality will be transformed into immortality (1 Co. 15:50-57). At his second coming, God will “bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Th. 4:14). Presumably, this means that he will bring their spirits in order for there to be a reunion of their spirits and bodies in resurrection. In turn, this implies that after death but even before resurrection, the righteous are with Christ.

The idea of heaven in the Old Testament is usually concerning the space above the earth, often in the plural in Hebrew ("the heavens"). It is regularly used in the Old Testament to describe the abode of God, and in the New Testament, Jesus follows this same pattern (i.e., "Our Father who art in heaven..."). Hence, if believers are joined to Christ after death, this would naturally be in heaven, the abode of God. After death, Christians have "an eternal house in heaven" (2 Co. 5:1) which is their hope (Col. 1:5). Here, there is the mysterious "throne of God" (Rv. 4:1-6). However, I call this a mysterious place, not to detract from its reality, but to suggest that the reality might be above and beyond what we can imagine in our limited, earthly understanding. Technically speaking, God is spirit, so he doesn't need a “place,” at least in the sense of our own physical places of abode (Je. 23:23-24). Hence, I think we should leave plenty of room for mystery and surprise when it actually happens. How can one describe what is essentially beyond anything we know and experience in earthly life? I think the descriptions provided in the Bible are not so much direct depictions as they may be indirect metaphors that point us to something beyond our wildest imaginations.

The terms "heaven and earth" are linked in Isaiah 65:17; 66:1-2, 22, and John adopts this same language (Rv. 21:1). It would seem to me that the vision of a new heaven and new earth is not about a hemisphere above the horizon, as though this were a place one could theoretically travel to in a spaceship. Rather, God’s heaven is God’s arena of existence, denoting an invisible, mysterious sphere of God’s rule over the universe. Heaven symbolizes resurrection hope and is interconnected and simultaneously grounded in both heaven and earth. Heaven is both now and in process, but it has not yet been realized in its fulness. We "sit together in heavenly place in Christ Jesus," yet we still live our earthly lives until death. Heaven embodies the vision of eternal life with God steeped in mercy and justice that results in a transcendent freedom, an eschatological love, and a liberating salvation of humanity. Whether or not the new heaven and new earth will be anything like what we experience now, I simply don't know. I know in the resurrection life of Jesus, there was both continuity and discontinuity. (He could eat bread, but he also could appear and disappear.) Perhaps, resurrection life will be similar with both continuity and discontinuity, but again, I simply don't know. Hence, I think it is at least possible that to pose the question as to whether or not our goal will be in a new heaven as opposed to a new earth, as though these were separate physical places, might miss the point. For me, at least, the basic question is not "where" or "how," but "with whom." *back*

INSPIRATION AND PERSONALITY INDICATIONS IN THE BIBLICAL AUTHORS

QUESTION: *We are about to begin the study of Genesis at Community Bible Study. As I was reading the Intro, I felt my hackles rise. I am struggling with the idea expressed, when it says, "Biblical authors wrote from an ancient worldview. They didn't have the same scientific mindset as we do today. When we read Genesis, we need to remember it's written from a different perspective than our own," and further, "Why did the writer want us to know about this?" This feels somehow like a trend toward human interpretation rather than God's view being what is given to us. Wasn't the "perspective" God's? Aren't we reading God's perspective in Genesis? I understand that Genesis spoke directly to and against the mindset of the pagan religious thought, but it can't just be that the words are Moses' perspective from within his time, can it? Am I too simple minded to think that, "Because God told him to write it," this is sufficient?*

I realize, of course, that the New Testament letters definitely show the personality of authors, but are they creative expressions that are entirely from the individual? Does not the Scripture represent God's direction in clarity or do we allow for the author's own interpretation of their "times?"

As a teacher, I just want to be really careful not to misdirect learners that Genesis is just "a guy in his own way, writing the history of the beginnings." This is a bit disjointed, for which I am sorry, but it is a genuine challenge to my view of "authenticity," especially in our current spiritual climate of watered down, "correction" of words from God.

ANSWER: I, too, am very much committed to the Bible as the inspired, God-breathed Word. I think Jesus was equally committed to this understanding. His frequent language, "It is written..." immediately implies as much. There is a remarkable interchangeability of the terms "God" and "Scripture" (Ro. 9:17; Ga. 3:8). When the biblical writers speak, God speaks (Mt. 22:43; Ac. 28:25; Ro. 3:2; 1 Co. 14:37; He. 3:7). It is appropriate, then, to say that the Bible is the Word of God in human language. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Bible's own testimony about itself declares that this inspired word did not originate in the human will, but rather, God's spokespersons only spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pe. 1:20-21).

Having said that, we must also acknowledge that the Bible comes to us in human language. Two terms have originated in Post-Reformation history to describe the extent of biblical inspiration. One is "verbal inspiration," an expression meaning that the inspiration of the Bible extends to the human language which is in it and that this human language is adequate to express what God intended. A belief in verbal inspiration stands against the idea that the Bible only gives general insights. The other term is "plenary inspiration," an expression meaning that the inspiration of the Bible extends to all of its parts. A belief in plenary inspiration stands against the idea that some parts of the Bible are inspired while other parts are not. When compounded, the term "verbal-plenary inspiration" attempts to express what the Bible says about itself as the Word of God.

It is also important to observe that the inspiration of the Bible did not cancel out the personalities and literary characteristics of its human writers. Biblical writers made use of existing sources in their researches (Nu. 21:14-15; Jos. 10:13; 1 Kg. 11:41; Lk. 1:1-4). They even occasionally quote from non-Israelite and non-Christian literary works (Pr. 30-31; Ac. 17:28; 1 Co. 15:33) as well as repeat popular clichés (1 Sa. 24:13; Tit. 1:12). Diverse literary styles and grammatical peculiarities in the original languages abound

among the various authors (unfortunately for most readers, such peculiarities can only be accessed in Greek and Hebrew, but they are clearly there, and all readers in the original languages must deal with this feature). Biblical writers also made use of pre-existing biblical documents, such as 1 and 2 Chronicles which draws heavily, and in some cases verbatim, from the earlier documents of 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. Certain independent oracles were preserved and brought together into collections long after they were written (cf. Pr. 25:1). Biblical writers inject their own human emotions into their works (Ga. 1:6; 3:1; Phil. 1:7-8).

All this is only to say that equal attention must be given to the documents of the Bible as both the Word of God and as the words of humans. As the Word of God, a reverence should be extended to the Bible that can never be extended to any other document in the world, precisely because the Bible is the Word of God. As the words of humans, however, the Bible is capable of historical study in language and historical context. In short, the origin of the Bible is fully divine and fully human, and in order to do justice to the statements of the Bible about itself as well as to the character of the Bible as it is, this paradox must be retained.

So, yes, the perspective is God's perspective, not merely a human one, and it is entirely appropriate to inculcate in the minds of Bible students that this is what the Bible says about itself. The authority of the Bible is directly tied to its divine inspiration. If the Bible is indeed the Word of God, then it bears the highest possible authority because God himself vouches for it. The Scripture cannot be broken (Pr. 30:5-6; Jn. 10:35). Still, the authority of the Bible is not the authority of an irresistible force, like gravity, to which one cannot help but succumb. People do indeed refuse to submit to it (Ac. 7:51-53) as well as nullify it by extraneous loyalties (Mt. 15:3-6). Rather, the authority of the Bible is that which determines what is true and right in religious teaching as opposed to what is not (Mk. 12:24, 27). It is the recognized standard which determines Christian faith and a Christian lifestyle that is in a right relationship with God and his will (Mt. 19:3-6; Ro. 4:3, 22-24; 2 Ti. 3:14-15; 4:2-4; 2 Pe. 3:16).

At the end of the day, I don't entirely disagree with the statement you put in quotes, but I think it must be qualified by this larger and much more important feature—**the Bible is God's Word.** Whatever we think about cultural limitations, the confines of the Hebrew and Greek languages, the expression of human personalities, and so forth, we must never minimize the basic and most important thing: the Bible is God's Word. You are quite right in wanting to avoid misdirecting teens so that the Book of Genesis ends up as just "a guy in his own way, writing the history of the beginnings." That would be a dangerous and disastrous conclusion. *back*

EPHRAIM IN ISAIAH 11:13

QUESTION: *I want to ask a question about Isaiah 11. I am trying to understand how/if Ephraim is used figuratively in verse 13. In this messianic prophecy, and with that understanding, is it too much of a stretch to understand Ephraim as representing the Gentiles being united with the Jewish believers in Christ in the new covenant?*

ANSWER: Several times, Isaiah has employed the metaphor of deforestation to depict the devastation of war. This metaphor is the background for the stump-branch figure in Isaiah 11. The "fruit" of this coming Branch would be glorious indeed! The coming Branch

would be filled with the Spirit (11:2), he would resolve the injustices against the poor of the earth (11:3-4a), and a reign of universal peace would prevail (11:4b-10). Even in the animal kingdom, all violence would cease. Changing the metaphor dramatically, the Branch is now called the Root of Jesse, one who is both Jesse's origin as well as his offspring (11:10a). With the appearance of Jesus, Paul can boldly say that Jesus is the Root of Jesse, and the rallying of the nations to him is fulfilled in the preaching of the Christian gospel to the Gentiles (11:10; Ro. 15:8-12). Isaiah says that this coming Root of Jesse will be a banner to which the nations will rally, and the holy remnant will be gathered from the lands of exile, both Israel and the nations, from the four quarters of the earth (11:10-12). This Branch and Root of Jesse would become a rallying ensign for the survivors of both the northern and southern nations (11:12). No longer would Ephraim and Judah be divided by border wars (11:13), but they would unite to extend the borders of Israel to the full measure achieved in the time of David, encompassing Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon (11:14). Just as Yahweh once brought his people across the Red Sea in Egypt (cf. Ex. 14:21-22), he would now bring them home in a second exodus over the Euphrates River from Mesopotamia (11:15-16). Ephraim, of course, is one name used frequently by the prophets to refer to the northern nation of Israel.

Could this regathering foreshadow the gentiles coming to Christ? I think so, especially in the larger context of 11:10, where the nations would rally to the Root of Jesse. Whether or not the name Ephraim is a stand-in symbol for gentiles is not entirely clear to me. However, the immediate context in 11:13-seems oriented toward the northern nation, of which Ephraim was probably the most important tribe, and the greater scope of this vision is for "the remnant of God's people left from Assyria" (11:16a). In any case, yes, I think that it is possible for Ephraim to represent the gentiles. The northern tribes exiled to Assyria were not allowed to live in community as would be the case for the southern nation of Judah in Babylon. They were scattered throughout the Assyrian empire and essentially lost their identity among the Assyrians. Hence, the regathering of northern Israel in Isaiah's vision might very well be a symbol for the gentiles. Given the ambiguity of the passage, I don't know that I would put too much weight on this possibility, especially since it does not appear in the New Testament, but I certainly think it is possible. *back*

STREET EVANGELISM

QUESTION: *Some Christian outreaches heavily emphasize street evangelism, and at times, street preaching (approaching people and striking up a conversation with the intent of bringing them to Christ). This is a method that I have come to enjoy more over time but I am still unsure of its effectiveness. I am certainly not saying that we should stop street-evangelism altogether, but I wonder if this is where our focus should be. I believe that a huge part of our walk with Christ is continued discipleship and growth rather than just a one-time decision.*

I have been reading a lot about evangelism and different methods that people go about spreading the gospel as well as methods of the Early Church. It seems to me that a large focus of the Early Church was to be a light in the darkness, feeding the poor, and healing the sick rather than anything that could be compared to street evangelism. I would love to hear what your thoughts are on Evangelism and what it looks like from a Biblical Perspective as well as how the Early Church saw it.

ANSWER: It would seem to me that the effectiveness of street evangelism to a large degree depends upon the culture. I doubt that there is a single method of evangelism that fits every place equally. Jesus seemed to have practiced at least open-air evangelism if not street evangelism, teaching to crowds on the mountainsides, from the prow of a boat, and in Jerusalem when attending the Jewish festivals. Perhaps the village culture lent itself to such an approach. Of course, Jesus' miracles, which were performed publicly, certainly generated a crowd. Paul, also, may have practiced street evangelism in Athens, but this was not his usual method. Rather, he nearly always began in the synagogues. Still, he describes his ministry as "public" and "from house to house" (Ac. 20:20). All this is to say that street evangelism, while it is one method, is not the only one and may not be the most usual one in the early church. It would seem to me that the outreach of the early church was, as you pointed out, more focused on ministry to the poor, healing the sick, and behaving in such a way that it impressed outsiders precisely because it was so selfless and compassionate. I have to be honest, I don't have a wide range of evangelism books to recommend. Most of the books I've looked at start with a settled assumption and go on from there. Still, the great commission of Christ was to go and teach the nations, though this commission focuses on the extent of evangelism but not its technique. *back*

PHINEAS' COVENANT

QUESTION: *Does the eternal covenant God made with Phineas rank with the other covenants, such as, those made with Abraham and David in Numbers 25:10-13?*

ANSWER: First, yes, there is a perpetual covenant for the high priesthood for Phineas and his family. However, there was an interruption during the period of the Judges, when the high priesthood shifted to the family of Eli (who came from Aaron's son Ithamar, not the line of Eleazar and Phineas). Here's how I would regard it: This covenantal promise of a perpetual priesthood to Phineas was indeed fulfilled, but not without some irregularities. After entry into Canaan, Phineas was allotted land in the territory of Ephraim (Jos. 24:33) and appointed as the third High Priest serving in Bethel (Jg. 20:27-28). However, for reasons unknown (none of the biblical documents comment on this), the high priesthood shifted to the family of Ithamar, and Eli and his sons were appointed as the high priests following a different family line (though still from Aaron). According to rabbinical commentators, Phineas' high priesthood was compromised due to his failure to relieve Jephthah of his rash vow (Genesis rabbah 60.3). Whether true or not, Phineas' priestly family line carries on down to Zadok (1 Chr. 6:4-8, 50-53), who replaced the family of Eli as the high priestly family line in the time of David and Solomon (1 Sa. 2:35; 1 Kg. 2:26-27, 35). At this point, the high priesthood shifted back to the family line of Eleazar, the ancestor of Phineas. Ezekiel mentions the Zadokite priesthood several times in anticipation of a new temple (Eze. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11). Much later, Ezra, the priestly-scribe from the same family in the post-exilic period, came to national prominence, also from this same family line (Ezr. 7:1-5). According to 1 Maccabees 2:54, Phineas was also the ancestor of Mattathias, the father of the Maccabean priestly family who led in the liberation of Jerusalem in the 160s BC.

I would differentiate between what I would call "primary covenants" and "secondary covenants." Covenants can be made in varying situations, and not all of them are of the same significance. Primary covenants would be the ones that are controlling, extensively discussed in the Bible both in their origin and in later texts, and specifically recalled in

the New Testament. These would be the covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David. Secondary covenants would be ones that are not discussed widely (and sometimes not at all) in the rest of the Old Testament or the New Testament. These would include covenants like the one with Phineas. Perhaps the covenant with Phineas foreshadows the priesthood of Christ, but if so, no writer in the New Testament comments on it. Rather, the emphasis on Christ's priesthood in Hebrews is that it is based on a different order altogether than Aaron's priesthood, and it is especially to the point that it is not based on a family line. I suppose one could argue for some sort of symbolism in this promise to Phineas, but I am a bit reluctant to put very much weight on something that is discussed nowhere else in the Bible. *back*