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# *Vanguard Journal of Theology and Ministry*



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## ABOUT US

The Vanguard Journal of Theology and Ministry (VJTM) is an open-access journal dedicated to publishing the scholarly works of students, scholars, and practitioners. It is based out of Vanguard College, an evangelical Bible college affiliated with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) in Edmonton, Alberta. Issues are published once a year and are peer-reviewed in a double-blind process. The VJTM welcomes original scholarship in the fields of theology and applied ministry.

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## A Note from the Editors



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With immense joy, we, the editorial team, are privileged to introduce our second volume, *The Lord is Our Shepherd*. Reflecting on our previous publications, it has been astonishing to see the journal's transformation from a mere dream to a tangible reality. Though I was not yet involved in the journal's early days, I am grateful for the pioneers in attendance at the first meeting in spring 2021. Indeed, with that team's late nights, tedious copyediting, and faithful labour, they made the release of our inaugural issue not only possible but timed its publication to coincide with Vanguard College's seventy-fifth anniversary, a truly remarkable accomplishment. Over a year has now passed, and by the grace of God, our team has grown. We are poised to continue building; it seems we have found our footing and are set to begin the adventure ahead, moving closer toward the College's centennial, providing a space for scholarly and creative discourse. In this regard, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to our editorial team who not only went above and beyond to make the present issue possible, but also went through the work of onboarding myself as Editor-in-Chief.

While our team was discussing the prospective theme for the present volume, the proposal was made to orientate the call for papers around Psalm 23. At the time of praying into the decision, I had never felt more insecure regarding the goodness of God. If I may use this space to speak candidly, this year has been difficult. I read of God's goodness in Scripture, I could articulate and conceptualize His goodness from a theological perspective, I could testify of His goodness in previous moments of my life, and I could rejoice with brothers and sisters in the faith who could share of God's goodness in their own lives. Yet, there remained a gulf between my head and heart which seemed to be an eternal chasm.

In a desperate attempt to come back to my first love, Psalm 23 became a plumbline. By the grace of God, I can now rejoice and testify that I have begun to see with new eyes the goodness of God in the land of the living. Although we are sojourners passing through a foreign land, our God is faithful, and more than faithful: He is the Good Shepherd. Reflecting on the present issue's content, I have been struck by the submissions, which have been for me, the collective community of saints testifying to the goodness of God. From the journal's conception, the desire has been to provide a space for practitioners, students, pedagogues, and alumni to enter the 'vanguard' of discourse through the scholarly forum. In practice, this has been a gathering of the sanctified, proclaiming that though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil, for His rod and His staff, they comfort us. Through the concerted effort of undergraduates, practitioners, and alumni, the present volume contains six articles which elucidate the truth presented in Scripture; not just Psalm 23, but drawing on the rich repertoire of pastoral imagery seasoning the biblical cannon. Readers are invited to reflect again on the work of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Matthew, and others. Furthermore, the creative submissions offer raw, honest, and inspiring prose, which inevitably draw the reader's heart to worship.



I have been awestruck by how so many people can say the same thing in such a kaleidoscope of ways. If I were to identify a red thread uniting the present volume, it is that God is good. It is so simple, but in many ways, I believe this is what the Church needs at this moment, I know this is what I need at this moment. It has been a source of inspiration to engage with not only the intellectual nature of this issue's content, but the Spirit-filled authors who have undoubtedly brought to the public form what has been taught in the prayer closet. Psalm 23 is familiar to many, yet timeless; never old or irrelevant, a good word in and out of season. Though storms rage and the night is long, we know that joy comes in the morning, for the Lord is our Shepherd.

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## Valedictorian Speech: 2023 Graduating Class



Graeme Gibson, Vanguard College Alumnus.<sup>1</sup>

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*This speech was originally presented at the class of '23 graduation ceremony on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Minor edits have been made in order to transition from spoken to written format.*

Thank you so much, Pastor Mark, and thank you to all of you here today. As introduced, my name is Graeme Gibson, and I am so grateful to stand here before you all by the tremendous grace of God, and with the honor of being this graduation class's valedictorian.

On behalf of the graduates, I'd like to begin by addressing all of you here today in the room, as well as those joining us online, who have contributed to this moment. Among us are our treasured families; there are dear friends, pastors, and mentors. We have with us the incredible staff and faculty of Vanguard College—and loved ones of all sorts. As a grad class, all of us want you to know just how grateful we are for your support in our lives. Today is not possible without you. *So, from all of us, we say thank you.*

And now to us, friends: we did it. We're here. And I know we've come from different places and had different journeys to get to this moment. But I say to all of us, graduate to graduate... *congratulations.*

Now I imagine that many of us are at different stages of processing where we're at right now. The gamut among us likely runs from "excited-but-chilling"—*Andrew Barbe, Tim Kitumba kind of thing*—to, "ready-to-burst-into-tears-at-any-moment," which I'm not even gonna say who that might be. But what I will say is that these reactions are natural. This is a massive moment in our lives; it makes sense that we'd have lots of different feelings to go along with it.

So, can I offer an analogy to help us process today? We can look at life as a race, right? Paul talks about that in his letters to Timothy, and it remains a common image today. And while all of life is a race, we have now officially reached the end of this leg of our journey. In other words, today we are crossing the finish line. And that's an awesome thing; we've run a long way to get to this point.

### **First Question: What's Kept Us Going?**

So, here's a question for us, grads—and to all our loved ones here, please think along with us. In the race we've just run... *what's kept us going?* Through all the papers, all the hours, all that's come our way—*what's kept us going? What's kept you going?* I imagine we've all got things coming to mind, but I think we'd be remiss to not start with some of the big ones. The non-negotiables.

I'm talking *Skip the Dishes* from McDonald's. I'm talking about the free coffee bar run by Campus Life, from which we have likely consumed three to four times our own body weights in Keurig coffee.

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<sup>1</sup> *Graeme is a young man and a recent graduate of Vanguard College (BaTH, 2023). Born and raised in the Edmonton region, Graeme currently ministers as a lay leader in his local church and is passionate about loving and guiding others as Christ does for his people. His valedictory speech resulted from a felt burden from Jesus, rooted in the Letter of Jude, that not one of Vanguard's students or staff would fall away from their journey with the Lord. This prayerful weight is at the centre of the entire address, and it continues to be Graeme's prayer not only for those affiliated with Vanguard, but for all who seek to follow Jesus with their whole lives.*



How about Dr. Ron Powell's meme-riddled slide shows? How about witnessing the chaos of our youth graduates, who adopted and decorated a literal tire from Professor Matt Ball's truck, and bowled with it in the hallways? *How about the arrivals of Phoebe Derksen and Jonathan Vanzandbeek??* All of this has kept us in it.

But there's more, isn't there? *What's kept you going, friends?* Was it the care of a loved one back home? Was it a timely word from a classmate, a gentle "how are you doing?" when you needed it most? Was it a moment in your practicum or internship where what you were doing clicked, and you realized, "*Yep, this is what God has made me to do?*" All these things, and so much more, have kept us going.

### **Jude 1: Called, Beloved, Kept**

Now, as I reflect on this question and on these things, I am drawn to this short letter at the very back of our Bibles, the letter of Jude. Jude was the brother of Jesus and a leader in the early church. He wrote his message to a group of Christians that, like us, followed Jesus; like us, they faced challenges and uncertainty; and, like us, had persevered in the face of it all. So, what did Jude say to those believers about what had kept them going?

Well, we find the answer in the opening line of his letter, and it says this: "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those.... who are *called...*". Let's stop right there; did you catch that? My friends, do you know that you're called? Now, that can mean a lot of things, but what does Jude mean here? He continues in the same verse: "To those who are called, *beloved* in God the Father, and *kept* by Jesus Christ..."

Our road to today has not been an easy one. We have faced heartache, loss, and disappointment. *There was a pandemic somewhere in there, if I'm remembering correctly.* And yet, how many of us can attest that, through it all, having persevered in our calling, we have been *beloved* and *kept*; cherished, forgiven, and delighted in by our Father in heaven; and, guarded and preserved by Jesus Christ. As we have followed *after* him, he has remained *alongside* us.

Ultimately, that is our answer to *what's kept us going*. In everything that we've mentioned today (the light and the serious), we—just like those in Jude's day—have been beloved of God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ in our calling. That is why we're here at the finish line today.

### **Second Question: What's Gonna Keep Us Going?**

Yet, that's not the end, is it? Because there's another reality here. We've crossed the finish line, we're at the end, and we're celebrating. And yet, there's more ahead for us. This moment is not just a finish line, it's also a starting line.

So, here's a second question for us, grads. We've thought about what's kept us going. As we look ahead to what's next...*What's gonna keep us going? What's gonna keep you going?*

Now this is an important question to ask ourselves for two reasons. One is that unfortunately, we now must leave behind many of the amazing blessings and people from Vanguard. We won't always have unlimited Keurig pods. We won't always have counseling sessions with Dr. Cath in the hallway. We won't always have Addison Martin to hype up our class presentation one moment, school us in basketball the next, then prophesy over our lives immediately after. We're not always gonna have these things.

But the second reason this question is important is a more serious one, and one that's hard to bring up on an occasion like this. In Jude, the reason he's writing is that not everybody makes it. Not everyone finishes the race with Jesus. In his situation, some called it off, either by their *words* or their *behavior*, and said, "I'm done. I'm not walking with Jesus anymore." And these same people influenced



others to do likewise. Here's the hard news, friends: *we face the same risk today*. Jesus wants us to be aware of this. *So, what's gonna keep us going?*

### **Jude 21: Keep Yourselves in The Love of God**

Well, as we turn back to the text for an answer, it first becomes clear that we have a part to play in this, an element to which we must keep ourselves. Jude, after discussing those who have dropped out of the race, turns to the remaining faithful and says this: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, *keep yourselves in the love of God*, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life."

There's a lot there, and all of it is so good. But the central instruction is to *keep ourselves in the love of God*—to abide and remain in it. Now this is not putting all the pressure on us. But it is recognizing that even as we are already loved and kept by God, we have a responsibility to stay there. It's a tension, but it's one to recognize and lean into.

I encourage us, friends, as we cross this finish line and keep going, *to keep ourselves in the love of God*. Let's be quick in this new season to establish rhythms that keep us close to Jesus and in his care. As life brings victories and wins, let's celebrate as those who know that our God delights in the well-being of his servants. And when the pain comes—which it will—let's take it not as a rejection from Jesus, but as an invitation from him, and to him.

And by the way, none of this is a solo assignment. Jude's writing to a community, so this is a group effort; I'd say group project, but then none of us would want to do it, so "effort" it is. As we go on from this day and look to stay connected with those we've grown close with, we're gonna want to keep in touch, right? Well, let's not just keep in touch but keep each other in touch with the love of God. That would be the greatest graduation gift any of us could ever give to each other. Amen?

### **Conclusion: The Doxology of Jude**

As I end today, I want to leave us graduates—and all of us here—a last word of good news. And this good news is found in Jude's ending doxology. Now, if you were in the Pastoral Program as I was, you know that we always ended our retreats by singing the traditional doxology together. We stand in a big circle, hold hands, pray, and sing in beautiful, a cappella harmony: *Praise God from whom all blessings flow!* So, everybody stand up, circle around the room...

Just kidding.

But I want to end today with a doxology. *With a word of worship to God*. Because graduates—my friends—here's the good news. In this next leg of our journey with Jesus, our hope does not lie in ourselves. The answer to "what's gonna keep us going" is ultimately neither inward nor outward, but upwards. As Pastor Mark likes to say, "the best we can do is in response to what God has already done."

We worship the God who has already called us, already loved us, and already kept us. We certainly have the responsibility to keep ourselves within his care. Yet in both our strength and our weakness, our hope is in Jesus, who can absolutely keep us walking with him. Even until the very end of our days, standing in his presence, our God is able. And if he can keep us until that last day—*the ultimate commencement ceremony, the ultimate finish line*—we can certainly trust him now as we continue the journey onward.

So, my friends, I finish with the words of Jude for us today: "Now to him, who is able to keep us from stumbling, and to present us blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

## Poetry



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### A Prayer Based on the Truth of Psalm 121

Dr. Catherine Thorlakson, Vanguard College Faculty.<sup>1</sup>

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Lord, I lift my eyes above what I naturally look at to find help. I find that help in You, my powerful, creative, almighty God, Who made the whole earth and the entire, incredible universe. Thank You that You make my steps and my stance solid and firm. Thank You that You are always and certainly attentive to everything concerning me. You *never* get tired or lose focus. You are always watching me, keeping me, and shielding me where and when I cannot shield myself.

Thank you that not even the heat of the sun or the darkness of night can harm me. Thank You so much for Your protection from evil, for Your care and protection over my whole life. Thank You that You always and everywhere take care of me - for my entire life. Your attention and care of me is whole, complete, and lifelong. I am so grateful.

I love You and rest in Your attentive care.

Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Cath has been training and working in various ministry roles for more than 35 years. She served in various pastoral positions including worship, women, children, and young adults. She worked with her husband in leadership in camp ministry for several years, and later served as a clinical counsellor, Mental Health Therapist, and Addictions Counsellor. Cath has a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, and is a Registered Psychologist. She works as the Pastoral Care & Counselling Program Director and Academic Success Director at Vanguard College while also carrying a small private counselling practice. It is an honour to be able to serve those looking to build skills and care for others.



## Creative Nonfiction



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### Knowing the Good Shepherd 'The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing'

Valentyna Hamova<sup>1</sup>.

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*"In the darkest times, the light that dwells becomes the brightest."* This axiom has become something of a creed for me in the last 14 months. It has been widespread across Ukraine, touching every heart and appearing in almost every public speech. Of course, most times, it concerns the noble acts, support, and sacrifice of Ukrainians. It speaks of unity and selflessness among the people. But I believe that, especially for the children of God, this phrase becomes real and powerful when it reveals our Good Shepherd's hand at work. We've seen hundreds of miracles, felt the Spirit guiding us, watched the Lord providing and caring, leading and protecting, giving joy amid trials, and creating something beautiful from the ashes.

When full-scale war hit Ukraine, many churches were left without their usual pastors and leaders. Mine was one of these communities. Many of our ministry leaders and families evacuated to Germany. I stayed in Ukraine and continue to serve our local church alongside one of my good friends. Together, we have provided shelter for so many. Overnight, I switched from "youth pastor" to "co-pastor," a transition that was extremely overwhelming. It took half a year to get used to what was going on, and I'm still processing. I am certain this experience of truly reflecting the Good Shepherd's heart will dwell with me for the rest of my life, no matter where I go or what God calls me to do.

In the most difficult moments, I remember this passage from Psalm 23; somehow, it always appears in my mind. In my dreams, during times of prayer, and in sermons, I continuously hear, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." This promise is haunting. It protects me in moments of temptation, through hard choices or loss, and in seasons of doubt. More recently, it has become increasingly practical, real, and clear.

Long before the war, the decision to stay in Ukraine had been placed in my spirit. Since I was 16, God had given me dreams about the war, along with dozens of details that meant different things in various situations. As God had already revealed such pictures to me, I had my answer when the time came to decide amid stress, pressure, and the absence of peace. In my heart, there is a certain resolve, even though it hasn't been easy. I know what I need to do. My Good Shepherd is leading me step by step and welcoming me into His arms, granting me peace every day.

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<sup>1</sup> Valentyna Hamova is a Ukrainian author, social activist, translator, public speaker, and next-generation pastor at God's Family Church in Poltava, Ukraine. She has provided counselling and consultancy to The Good Hearts Charity Fund, Help All Together, and is a member and participant of the global missionary movement, Steiger.



He is there during lunchtime when people laugh and share food under the sound of sirens; He is there in the new pair of sneakers brought to you exactly when you needed them; He is there when your favorite food appears in a box sent to you from abroad; He is there when the exact sum of money appears in your bank account the morning after you told your friends about a need you wanted to cover; He is there when the person you met at just the right time gives you the encouragement you needed.

One of the most amazing things for me is that the first year of the war collided with my seventh year of being in ministry. The seventh year described in the Bible—the year of rest and restoration—always had a place in my heart. Gradually, during my dialogue with God, I received a picture of how He sees this year for me. It seemed impossible and even absurd, but God does not live according to human events. God’s schedule has become a vivid example of His care, timing, and faithfulness.

When the storm is raging and the wind is strong, Jesus still ‘*sleeps in the boat*’ if He decides to. This is the time I’ve learned to separate people’s opinions from God’s voice and see the fullness of His promises, no matter what. I’ve learned to love myself as God sees me and in that, I can truly love my neighbour. In a time of harvest, I have tasted and seen the faithfulness of God. I’ve experienced the fruit of submitting my finances to the Lord for years. I’ve learned it is not about the number of people you have; it’s about quality, faithfulness, and the smallest acts of love and care. In this time, I’ve realized that even in seasons of great need, desperation, and panic, God’s wisdom still prevails and teaches us not to be blinded by need, fear, or hate, but leads us by the Spirit each and every day.

I am at a loss for words when I reflect on the stories, moments, and times when I’ve seen God’s goodness during one of the hardest and most stressful times of my life. But the weird part is, at the same time, it has shaped my heart and faith in a certain way that I would never trade for temporal peace and slow development. This is so clear to me. I am certain I am not even close to the ‘final point’ of knowing my Heavenly Father’s heart, freedom, boldness, and peace. And I’m okay with that, because discovering all these things, and *growing* in the knowledge and wisdom of the Lord is life-sustaining, and I pray this process never stops. There is no limit. I have tasted and seen the goodness of God, and for that, I am forever grateful.

## Poetry



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### Beautiful Chaos

Priscilla Lim, Vanguard College student.<sup>1</sup>

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Old friends lost  
Emotions make strong...  
We want badly to cry:  
Is it so wrong?  
Among the delusional throng,  
We weren't wrong, all along.

Grace, oh, grace!  
Do we dive in and seek His face?  
What defines the human race?  
It's hard to keep up with the pace...  
From self-made men  
To herds of a hundred sheep,  
We teeter about,  
Sliding in the snowy sleet.

Fire, fire,  
The inevitable pyre  
Blazing into our minds, so deep...  
Our souls are charcoal: we forget about sleep.  
Drenched in the blood of His hands, head, torso, and feet,  
The thoughts of Mary, the thoughts she kept discreet  
We feel forlorn, as though we are obsolete  
The look of our rising Saviour: "The dead **have** been complete."

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<sup>1</sup> Priscilla is a Worship Arts student at Vanguard College. She enjoys writing imprecatory poems and written word pieces whenever inspiration strikes or when she is feeling blue and needs to process ill thoughts and feelings with Jesus. Priscilla finds growth and release in her creative writing, as introspection is her favourite hobby. Many-a-time, Jesus has pulled Priscilla out of the depths of her mental darkness by transforming her thoughts of sorrow, self-deprecation, pride, numbness, apathy, trauma flashbacks, soul-crushing loneliness, and doubt into thoughts of remembrance, glorifying His name, and focusing on what matters most: seeking His face. She hopes this poem, written in first person-plural, engenders deep reflection within your spirit. Contact: [priscilla.lim@v\\_mail.ca](mailto:priscilla.lim@v_mail.ca)



Lim, Beautiful Chaos

“Remember Me?”

He prompts us, hanging up our tattered sheets

“What about My Paraclete?”

If we ran then, we would never be free

Slaves to righteousness, oh, how locked are we.

Step and in step

Our fallen in-step

We wash our footprints in the sand...

Our houses start to crumble:

We think that trying is the land

“What happened to your heart?

“I think you need a restart.

“Here, let me carry your art

“Let us not grow apart.”

But the cognitive distortions hurl us, as we tumble —

Tossed around by the heavy waves of the sea, we forget to be humble

We think with one swoop of His Mighty Hand

We could be gone forever,

discounted by the Holy Trinity

Our blinders have removed our skill to see.

Oh, how utterly lost are we.

Though we wander around aimlessly,

The Lord searches our hearts.

He knows us through and through,

With so much wisdom to impart.

“Hey, come walk alongside Me:

I will show you The Way.”

In a flash, we remember Him

How He has made it that our hearts are not whippet thin,

And we are no longer lost.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.”

Emotions made strong,

We weren't wrong, all along.

## Creative Submission: Poetry



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### The Shepherd's Daughter<sup>1</sup>

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My Father is in the pulpit  
he claims the Good Shepherd will lay down  
His life for me

He says that He restores my soul  
and here

In this old building  
there is a pool  
I guess  
of refreshing water  
and I can lay down  
He says  
in some grass

But the Good Shepherd looks a lot like my  
Father  
and I'm not sure he would  
let me lay down  
by a pool  
and rest

there is a photo on the wall  
He holds a sheep  
lost  
crippled  
weak

A wandered sheep safe in His arms

But  
I'm not sure my Father,

the one in the pulpit  
would come and get me if I wandered

Like a lamb  
that chose  
to stray

from the

rules  
regulations  
expectations  
and  
congregations

And I want that.

To be held  
and carried in the arms of a Shepherd

But I'm not sure I can leave this old building  
to lie down in green pastures  
and rest  
by some quiet water

So, I sit, just right  
in this pew  
and try very hard  
to believe  
my father in the pulpit<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Author is a Vanguard College alumnus that wrestles with accepting the ways that things have always been done and seeking to live life in a way that challenges cultural norms. They do this by living cross culturally here in Canada and sharing the ways and life of Jesus with youth from various religious and cultural backgrounds. They have chosen to remain anonymous to protect those youth and this ministry.



## Creative Nonfiction



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### For Better or Worse

Vadim Yurchenko, Vanguard College Alumni.<sup>1</sup>

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"For better or worse."

The chances are you have heard these words before, perhaps even spoken them. This short little phrase, when uttered at the right time and place, works like a secret passcode that lets you in to the mystery of marriage. I remember saying these words on my wedding day. Of all the things memorable on that memorable day, the words I remember best were "for better or worse." The rest, I don't remember.

I don't remember what my best man said, what the pastor preached. From an arm's length away, they spoke loud and clear. Yet their words remain vague in my mind. I dimly remember my vows, eloquent though they were. Marriage promises, spoken intentionally, were understood superficially. Their existential significance was hidden, obscured by the dazzling visual galore. I meant what I said, but although my lips captured the vows, my brain did not yet understand their meaning.

Dazzled by the beauty of my bride, I stood there at a loss for words, at a loss of meaning. All I could think of was *that* moment. It was a "better" moment then, filled with the "better" parts: the "you get to kiss your bride" part, the "honeymoon" part, the "healthy" part, and the "happily ever after" part. Back then, I also had a choice: better *or* worse.

Four years later, I didn't.

When my wife and I lost our daughter, it was the *worst* day of our lives. The world fell silent, leaving us at a loss for words, at a loss of meaning. I cannot describe that overwhelming sense of despair, that subduing sense of hopelessness. It made the air heavy,

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<sup>1</sup> Vadim is a teaching pastor at Evangel Downtown, a small-town church in British Columbia. He is also an adjunct professor at Vanguard College. In 2019, he and his wife, Mary, had to walk through their own "valley of the shadow of death" after losing their child. Deeply profound and emotional, it was the journey of trying to cope with intense grief while at the same time grappling with questions of faith and trust in the Good Shepherd. Vadim shares their experience in his book, *Life After Hope: A Memoir of Father and Daughter* (available on Amazon). To follow more of their journey, visit [www.reimaginehope.com](http://www.reimaginehope.com)





difficult to breathe. There was nothing that could make things easier, or happier, or better. No number of words, or hugs, or prayers were enough to ease the pain.

Loss. The *worst* feeling of all.

The experience was disorientating. It left us confused and out of touch with reality. Our brains tried hard to process the feeling of absence but failed. Our bodies were in limbo, with no solid ground beneath our feet. We were floating down a river of tragic circumstances, going with the flow, not knowing where it was taking us. We also didn't resist; I think we were too tired.

The sense of loss put a strain on our relationship. It was an invisible pressure, but one that was whenever there was conflict or misunderstanding. To maintain intimacy, both emotionally and physically, we had to work extra hard. One day it felt better, the next *worse* than the day before.

I grieved alone. Like a wolf, wounded in battle, I would retreat deep into the woods to bleed, to lick my wounds. I would withdraw into myself, then out again, then back into myself again. I found it difficult to tell my wife how I was feeling. Sometimes I didn't want to. Often, I didn't know how. Sharing feelings wasn't my "thing"; too embarrassing, too painful - I didn't want to cause more pain than already existed.

It took time, sweat, and tears to heal. With the help of words, I started to give shape to the formless jumble of thoughts and emotions inside me. These were the feelings of despair, shattered dreams, and unanswered prayers. These are the kinds of thoughts that make you sick, that make you feel depressed. The *worst* kind.

One day I felt heard, understood. I felt *felt*. The next day, I didn't—my wife was hurting too, some days *worse* than others. We were both in pain, bleeding, screaming. Alone and together, we were at our *worst*.

But as the two of us listened to each other and felt each other, the cloud of resentment began to dissipate. And although the pain of loss didn't go away, it was the pain that brought us closer. It was the pain that bound us together more tightly than we had been before.

Holy matrimony.

Today we know the meaning of vows, that promise of a lifetime: "For better or worse." We have had the chance to experience the better part and the privilege of tasting the bitter one. We were joined together, by those sacred words and by the silence of our shared loss. Today I can look back and say: together we were broken, together mended.

For better, *not* for worse.

## Creative Nonfiction



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### On Preparing a Table

Leah Sookoo.<sup>1</sup>

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#### A Blessing for Tables

As we gather together,  
*let us remember that this  
is not just a table, but an altar,  
not just a meal, but a miracle.*

*May every cup that is filled  
and every plate that is used  
and every seat that is warmed  
be a sweet offering to you, Lord:  
this, our heart, our family,  
a vessel prepared for presence.*

*Come and be the water we drink  
and the bread that we feast on  
as we remember that this  
is more than food and drink,  
it is a sacred communion.*

A vase of flowers, a table set, seats empty. A meal prepared, wine and ease overflowing. Bowls full, glasses raised, the fragrance of abundance. Garden carrots, pickled plums, rhubarb, fresh cream, olive oil, black figs, pink ladies, sweetie drops, salt, bread. Maybe candles, maybe music, maybe lights dimmed. It is an innate, shared desire to gather around a bountiful harvest of intention.

The dinner table is a well-known landscape, a facet of home life and one of the earliest marks of society. From the beginning, we have gathered with our tools of worship: goblets and saucers, clay pots and ceramic plates, engraved and embellished, painted or plain. However, this social routine does not depend on lavish and ornamental objects. The only requirement is room enough for every guest, and enough to eat. Here, we lay our weapons down to take up our forks, our animosities and

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obligations set aside for the ritual at hand. Here, we are no longer ravaged by insatiable demands of work and life, nor besieged by the assiduity of hurriedness. The table invites us to come to rest in the sprawl of belonging. To know that a seat has been prepared and the table has been set is to know that there is nothing more that we must do other than arrive. There is no other place that demonstrates this like the table does. The setting is universal; the symbol is conclusive. And it is for everyone: we all know how to use utensils, hold food, place it in our mouths, be fed. It's our earliest ritual, and our most instinctive habit. We must be fed; we will be fed. And God promises that we will be. *Come, all who thirst. Come, all who hunger. Recline at the table.* But you say: we shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God! Yes, but what is that word? Is it not Jesus? And what does he come to bring? Is it not a new covenant? And how does he reveal that covenant? Is it not through bread and wine? You see, they are inseparable—the spiritual and physical—and it has always been about a feast. Nourished in holy communion, without pretenses, in the simplicity of togetherness, we are demonstrating the kingdom of God.

That God's new covenant is illustrated around a table is not a delicious accident. He deliberately eschews empty gestures in favour of embodied sacramental elements. Bread and wine: tangible morsels that one can taste and touch. It is not a metaphor; it is the physical, mystical practice we perform with friends and family and foes and foreigners as an act of holy unity. Communing is to eat together and communion restores our divine identities. Our *Imago Dei*. Co-crucified with Christ, we are no longer sinners, but saints; no longer orphans, but beloved children of God. To return to the table is to return to the consciousness of who we are and who we always were. Oh, what a feast it is. The table is the centerpiece of connection and the altar of love. The Father sits at the head of the table, and we, the children, eagerly await the meal. When we ask for bread, would He give us a stone instead?

In the depth of gratitude and the fullness of hunger satiated, we are abundant. We are lacking nothing; we have everything we need. Filled to the brim. Pouring out and overflowing. In the presence of our enemies, we are safely veiled by power of connection. What is our enemy? Is it soldiers from beyond the planes? For most of us, it is not. The enemy of our society today is loneliness<sup>2</sup>. It is ubiquitous across ages, and it is an epidemic of suffering caused by isolation. In crowded cities we live in small apartments without dining tables; between jobs and meetings we eat in our cars and at our desks. In our homes, we rest plates on our laps as we snack in front of screens. We have forgotten the sacred experience of luxuriating slowly over a meal, severing ourselves from the first and most basic method of connection. In a digital society, there are many benefits to how we access information, but we have been deceived into thinking we are truly connected. We have access to more people, across borders and languages, and yet somehow still we are starved for true familial affection and practices. This counterfeit for real intimacy has resulted in less time together and affects all age demographics and communities<sup>3</sup>. The solution is not profound, nor is it new. The solution is illustrated in the very verse:

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

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<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation." May 2, 2023. Web. [https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html?utm\\_source=osg\\_social&utm\\_medium=osg\\_social&utm\\_campaign=osg\\_sg\\_gov\\_vm](https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html?utm_source=osg_social&utm_medium=osg_social&utm_campaign=osg_sg_gov_vm)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Sookoo, On Preparing a Table

How fitting that the table is a symbol for connection. It's almost as if God knew our greatest enemy would be that which keeps us afraid of coming to the very thing that will heal us.

If we are fully awake to the groanings of this world, fully present in our own sojourn through valleys, conscious of our good Father in the presence of our enemies, then we know we all ache the same way. Between the broken sinews of our own hearts, a luminous question emerges like a candle in the dark: Could you give what you want the most? Would you share the fruit of family? Would you reserve a place at your table? Would you pour out enough so that their cup would overflow? The shepherd is leading his little flock home to a place prepared for them. That place is a sanctuary for the suffering and a resting place for the lonely, where blessings spring from the soil and belonging is its first fruits. On the voyage from isolated to interdependent, from "them" to "us", from lonely to loved, this is how we shepherd the lost home: around the table, washed and fed, rested and nourished. Here, the scene is set for Heaven to come.

# *The Monarchical Mandate for the Marginalized: A study of shepherds in Jeremiah 22-23*



Daniel Zander, Vanguard College Alumni.<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *The depiction of God being the shepherd of God's flock is familiar among many modern Christians. This is an image rooted in the themes of provision, protection, and authority, which characterize the reign of God as King and Shepherd of His people.<sup>2</sup> In the same thematic stream, the kings and rulers of Israel were also seen as shepherds.<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 22 contrasts the wicked shepherds of Israel and their rule of oppression with the righteous shepherd that is Josiah and his rule of justice. The praise of Josiah's righteousness is then sanctified in Jeremiah's prophecy of the Branch of David in Jeremiah 23: one wholly Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Justice, shepherd, Christ, government, public, ecclesiological, biblical justice, marginalized, oppressed, poor, orphan, widow, righteousness*

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## **Introduction**

Jeremiah is a complex and dramatic biblical book as it uses poetry and prose to convict the heart of the reader to live righteously under God's holy direction. The book of Jeremiah gives a comprehensive account of the wickedness of the people of Israel and their unwillingness to repent, both in their personal and the corporate domains. Jeremiah 22 and 23 demonstrate the wickedness of the unjust reigns of the Hebrew leaders, Jehoahaz (otherwise known as Shallum),<sup>4</sup> Jehoiakim,<sup>5</sup> and Jehoiachin<sup>6</sup> (known by the prophet Jeremiah as shepherds), while contrasting such reigns with the righteous reign of Josiah.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, these chapters lead us to an understanding of the nature of justice in God's Kingdom as perpetrated by our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. As the reader will soon discover, these shepherds either embraced or rejected God's monarchical mandate for justice in the land.

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<sup>2</sup> Allen Myers. *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans). 1987. 939.

<sup>3</sup> Is. 44:28, Jer. 6:3, 2 Sam. 7:7, NRSV.

<sup>4</sup> Jer. 22:11, NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> Jer. 22:16, NRSV.

<sup>6</sup> Jer. 22:24, NRSV.

<sup>7</sup> Jer. 22:15, NRSV.



## Historical Study

Being a shepherd was a common vocation in Ancient Near Eastern culture.<sup>8</sup> Due to the continued image of provision, protection, and authority over sheep, kings and rulers were seen as shepherds within their own nations.<sup>9</sup> Israel was not exempt from the tradition of Ancient Near Eastern cultures in viewing their leaders as such. As twenty-first century Christians, we typically attach the imagery of the shepherd to Jesus Christ. However, Jeremiah 22 demonstrates that the shepherds of Israel were evil and oppressive rather than holy and just. We expect the leader of God's flock to be one of justice and mercy, but Jeremiah 22 serves as a warning that any shepherd or leader (be it political or ecclesiological) fall well short of the expected mandate of ruling with justice for the poor, the stranger, the oppressed, the widow, and the orphan. Specifically, the rules of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin show the biblical reader that those who do not rule with justice are far from knowing God.

Before exploring the reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, a study into the nature of justice in the Ancient Near East needs to be undertaken. It is suggested that the Code of Hammurabi attempts to have Babylon's authorities submit to a law of justice in the land; indeed, this was a feature that is said to be common among many Ancient Near Eastern societies.<sup>10</sup> Of these societies, Israel too required its leaders to adhere to the Torah, which includes its own form of justice in the land: the neglect of military might, political favour in the form of marriages, and accumulation of excess wealth, rooted in the divine mandate for humility in the kingship.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, Jeremiah 22 gives an account of the misdeeds of the kings of Israel by mentioning that Shallum (known as Jehoahaz)<sup>12</sup> had committed idolatry, and his successor Jehoiakim had dealt injustice in the land.<sup>13</sup> Rather than being an indictment against these acts in particular, Jeremiah 22 serves as a rebuke against any shepherd of Israel who reigns with injustice. John Bracke informs the reader of Jeremiah that "The king is understood to be God's agent responsible for the administration of justice."<sup>14</sup> The perversion of justice brought upon God's people by the hands of the kings Jehoiakim and Jehoahaz stand in stark contrast to the justice during the reigns of King Josiah and the Branch of David.

Lastly, Jeremiah 22 and 23 show the reader that just shepherds ruled over Israel in the past and will reign in totality in the bright future of God's Kingdom through the Branch of David, even if Jeremiah had prophesied the Davidic dynasty's destruction.<sup>15</sup> In regard to Josiah in Jeremiah 22, McConville states that his reign "...in contrast, passes lightly over the success of Josiah, using it only to sharpen the criticism of his successors."<sup>16</sup> While the shepherds of Israel previously accumulated dishonest wealth and spilled innocent blood, Josiah judged in favour of the cause of the poor and needy: such is the way of the righteous shepherd.<sup>17</sup>

This is made perfect in the image of the Good Shepherd, whose presence for the people of God was prophesied in Jeremiah 23. Succeeding the judgments in Jeremiah 22, Jeremiah 23 gives a tremendous promise from God, providing hope in an otherwise bleak prophetic book: "I will raise up

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<sup>8</sup> Jørn Varhaug, "The Decline of the Shepherd Metaphor as Royal Self-Expression", *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*. 33, no. 1 (2019). Pp. 16-23. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Allen Myers. *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans). 1987. 939.

<sup>10</sup> Peter T. Vogt. *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*. *Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications). 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Deut. 17:16-20

<sup>12</sup> Jer. 22:9,11.

<sup>13</sup> Jer. 22:18,21,22.

<sup>14</sup> John M. Bracke "Justice in the Book of Jeremiah." *Word & World* 22, no. 4 (2002): 387-95. 389.

<sup>15</sup> Jer. 22:30.

<sup>16</sup> J.G. McConville. *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah*. (Leicester, England: Apollos). 1993. P. 56

<sup>17</sup> Jer. 22:16,17.

shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.”<sup>18</sup> The passage finds its summation in the restoration of the Davidic dynasty: “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raised up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”<sup>19</sup> Where previous shepherds scattered the flock of God’s people through stomping on the poor in their unjust wealth, the Good Shepherd stands as a beacon of justice, representing the cause of the poor and the downtrodden in the very fabric of the Kingdom of God.

### Literary Study

It is tempting to draw stark divisions between the use of prose and poetry in Jeremiah due to the seemingly disproportionate amount of storytelling devices used in the former and latter halves of the book. Walter Brueggemann suggests that there may be a relationship between the practice of prose and poetry in the book of Jeremiah; while poetry is largely used in the first half of the book, it is still coherently interwoven in the latter half, thereby strengthening the weight of Jeremiah’s prosaic sermons.<sup>20</sup>

Jeremiah was a proven orator who expertly utilized poetry within his prophecies. However, among all the cryptic language about potsheards and loincloths which served as a description for Israel’s state of injustice, Jeremiah was still required to use the literary form of prose to prophesy destruction against the unjust shepherds in a clear and outright manner. In a commentary on an earlier passage of prose, R.K. Harrison declares: “Lest the impassioned poetic oracle should be dismissed as the irrational outpourings of an emotional bard, the prophet now speaks in solemn prose.”<sup>21</sup> In Jeremiah 22 and 23, particularly, the prophet’s sermonic prose serves as a direct judgment against the wicked shepherds: a judgment that had already begun in Jeremiah 21:11. Whereas Jeremiah 21 keeps the prophecy of destruction in a general fashion, Jeremiah 22 details the shepherds who are under threat of destruction. Even then, this threat remains only a warning. The corrupt shepherds are given a condition that may still lead to life for them should they give life to the orphan, the widow, and all who have been dealt injustice (even after all the oppression that had been wrought): “For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David.”<sup>22</sup> Adversely, God promises through Jeremiah: “But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.”<sup>23</sup> As Jeremiah progresses through his indictment against the shepherds of Israel, he bolsters the prose with appropriate use of poetry in Jeremiah 22:13-17. The oppressor is portrayed as a competitor in cedar, referencing Jehoiakim’s cruel forced labor for a greater palace and therefore, a greater reputation as king.<sup>24</sup> The poetic prophecy then climaxes with a reference to King Josiah in verse 17 where God gives blunt rhetorical questions with Jeremiah as his mouthpiece: “He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him. Is not this to know me? Says the LORD.”<sup>25</sup> Evidently, a righteous shepherd over God’s flock is one that is an arbiter of social justice. Furthermore, the very evidence that one knows God in any capacity is if

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<sup>18</sup> Jer. 23:4.

<sup>19</sup> Jer. 23:5.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann. “Meditation upon the Abyss: The Book of Jeremiah.” *Word and World* 22, no. 4 (2002): 340–50. 343.

<sup>21</sup> R. K. Harrison. *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, v. 21. (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press) 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Jer. 22:4.

<sup>23</sup> Jer. 22:5.

<sup>24</sup> Jer. 22:15.

<sup>25</sup> Jer. 22:16.

they themselves are a representative of social justice. This is exemplified by the leaders of God's flock (the shepherd) to be exercised by the entirety of the flock.

As the reader progresses through Jeremiah 22, they will find that Jeremiah's prophecies transition from being directed to the shepherds of Israel to being directed to the general people of Israel.<sup>26</sup> Their persistence in refusing to listen to the word of God is reflected in Jeremiah's words: "This has been your way since your youth, for you have not obeyed my voice."<sup>27</sup> As a result, God promises that "The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds, and your lovers shall be put in captivity."<sup>28</sup> There is no hope for God's people in the filth of their oppression and violence: their leaders will be scattered and their allies will be torn down.

While there was no present hope for His people, God still promises His fidelity toward them in the form of an ultimate shepherd: the Branch of David. He promises that there will be a righteous remnant preserved to be under the rule of good shepherds.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the Branch of David is promised, a title that is often used in relation to messianic prophecies.<sup>30</sup> The line of David shall be restored in the revelation of a coming King, a Good Shepherd, One who must be our righteous ruler.

As Jeremiah prophesies the coming of Jesus Christ, it is paramount to be reminded of Jeremiah's theme of justice throughout the entire book. Jeremiah's grief in the face of overwhelming evil and injustice is expressed in the existential weight of seeing the wicked prosper. Attempting to close such a propositional gap, the biblical scholar David Melvin tells us that: "The prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous are then part of the sin of the society which has necessitated Jeremiah's prophetic ministry and which now necessitates the destruction of the nation."<sup>31</sup> Justice lies at the core of both Jeremiah and YHWH's heart, presenting an internal conflict for each of these keystone characters. On the one hand, justice must reign in the land of God's people. On the other hand, the justice that must reign necessitates the punishment of God's people. Like Jesus' weeping for Jerusalem, YHWH's wrath is rooted in grief at the sight of injustice in the places that His people occupy.<sup>32</sup>

## Contemporary Applications

The people of God today are in need of shepherds who oversee God's flock with a heart crying out for justice. The inequality of wealth caused by irresponsible spending in some Western churches reflects the wicked leadership of Jehoiakim who accumulated wealth oppressively. While certainly to a lesser extent than the injustice wrought in ancient Israel, the Church in North America is still presented with the path of life or the path of death. Scripture gives us an eternal echo that those who sow seeds of oppression will follow a path of death.<sup>33</sup> Jeremiah 22 serves as a solemn warning against turning a blind eye to the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed. Oppression of the poor through the mishandling of church funds have been prevalent among many churches. Missiologist Tim Chester argues that this oppression takes root not only in individual sin, but points towards a deeper systemic sin wherein the Western Church actively avoids justice to the poor. In discussing the rising discourse

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<sup>26</sup> F. B. Huey Jeremiah, Lamentations. The New American Commentary, v. 16. (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1993). 208.

<sup>27</sup> Jer. 22:21.

<sup>28</sup> Jer. 22:22.

<sup>29</sup> Jer. 23:5.

<sup>30</sup> Derek Kidner. The Message of Jeremiah: Against Wind and Tide. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988). 90-91.

<sup>31</sup> David Melvin. "Why Does the Way of the Wicked Prosper? Human and Divine Suffering in Jeremiah 11:18-12:13 and the Problem of Evil." (Evangelical Quarterly 83, no. 2 (2011): 99-106). 105.

<sup>32</sup> Lk. 19:41-42.

<sup>33</sup> Deut. 30:15-16, NRSV.



on justice for the poor through the Church, Chester writes: “For some this renewed emphasis on church is greeted with reluctance because their experience of church is far removed from their experience of work among the poor.”<sup>34</sup> While one may discuss individual cases of ecclesiological injustice, we must recognize the systemic sin of the inequality of wealth that is reflected in the practices of North American church services that do not invite or even accept the poor. Social justice is at the core of public theological discourse, and it must continue to be. While some in the Church misrepresent the cause of social justice, Scripture is clear in the words of Jeremiah that to know God at all is to advocate for the cause of the poor and needy.<sup>35</sup> Christopher Wright informs us that Jeremiah gives us details on the responsibilities of human governments as he rebukes the Church for favoring a rebellion against the cultural sexual agenda while ignoring the cause of the marginalized, seeing as the book of Jeremiah, and the whole of Scripture are much more extensive on tearing down oppressive systems.<sup>36</sup> Naturally, the shepherds of the Church will pay more attention to some topics rather than others. Due to personal interest, the poor and the oppressed could very well be ignored within our local church bodies. Nevertheless, Jeremiah (in unity with the whole of Scripture) exhorts the believer (as well as the believer’s shepherd) to advocate for the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Some churches allow for a ‘benevolent fund’: donation of funds for the purpose of combatting poverty or other social injustices within their community. Preaching on passages like Jeremiah 22 and 23 will also challenge the congregation to hold governments (whether public or ecclesial) accountable to do works of justice. These are simple and effective methods for advocating for the poor and the oppressed within the community. As the Church continues to repent of its institutional injustice, the question will increasingly be presented on how we, as the Church, continue to uphold values of justice, mercy, and humility in the midst of an unjust society.

Furthermore, the ethics of the Kingdom of God echo the relevance of being representatives of justice within the Church. If we are to follow the rules of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, we are to pay close attention to his words for the poor: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”<sup>37</sup> This New Testament statement gives the Israelite reader a reminder of the tale of Jeremiah and his many prophecies: after the abhorrent fall of Jerusalem wherein evil had its way and the wrath of God had been completed over Israel, it was the poor of the land who were the promised remnant of God’s new kingdom, with fruitful vineyards and just shepherds appointed over them.<sup>38</sup> The rule of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, is based out of a compassionate heart for the poor and the oppressed, not only on a personal level, but also in advocating for this value to be seen in a public and governmental fashion. In contrast, the rule of the violent shepherds of Israel is rooted in oppression and injustice meted out towards the poor, the oppressed, the widow, and the orphan.

## Conclusion

As prophesied by Jeremiah, the leaders of God’s people have a divine mandate to conduct justice in the land before them. God’s blessing does not reign in places of uncontrolled and unpunished injustice. He has appointed shepherds over His flock who must take such a responsibility of bearing justice seriously, lest they see that they have persistently rebelled against God. The punishment of the shepherds of Israel and the contrast offered by the Good Shepherd shows that, as His sheep, we are to

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<sup>34</sup> Tim Chester. *Justice, Mercy and Humility: The Papers of the Micah Network International Consultation on Integral Mission and the Poor*. 2002. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press). 8.

<sup>35</sup> Jer. 22:16.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher J. H Wright. *The Message of Jeremiah: Grace in the End*. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press). 2014. 247.

<sup>37</sup> Lk. 6:20.

<sup>38</sup> Jer. 39:10.

follow in the footsteps of Jesus' example of divine justice to the stranger, the poor, the oppressed, the widow, and the orphan.

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# JEHOVAH JIREH: *The Shepherd Who Provides Then and Now*



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**ABSTRACT:** *Jehovah Jireh is a common name for God; it is in songs, sermons, and inspirational wall decor. It can often be simple to look at one's own life and point to times that support God as Jehovah Jireh. This paper, however, seeks to draw connections between the Bible and contemporary life to show how God's providence extends through all of time. The study begins with an examination of two biblical examples of God's providence—Psalm 23 and James 1—followed by a summary of five interviews with people in different places of life. The analysis of the biblical pictures of God's providence help establish an experience of God that is then confirmed through the interviews. A new perspective on the interpretation of 'doubt' became an unexpected, but thought-provoking factor. The research revealed the desired result of showing how God's providence can be connected through the pages of Scripture and daily life.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Psalm 23, James 1, Jehovah Jireh, God's Providence*

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## Introduction

God's providence flows off the pages of Scripture and into personal lives with the authority of an omnipotent God. Scripture demonstrates how Jehovah Jireh—The LORD will Provide—cares for His flock time and time again in ways unique to them. Psalm 23 portrays God the provider as a shepherd. Shepherds would give anything to and do anything for their sheep. In the New Testament, James sees this connection between God and a shepherd as well, considering this protection as a one of many gifts given to God's people. There are many connections given throughout Scripture expanding on God's character as provider, but the true impact is felt when Scripture is seen off the pages. His unchanging qualities appear when looking into the lives of Christians of any age. The depth of God's providence can be seen through the Psalm's depiction of a shepherd, James' generous gift-giver, and today's answered prayers.

## The Biblical Picture

King, solid rock, strong fortress, jealous, and almighty are some of the many names and descriptions given to God in the Old Testament. There is often a focus on His power and zeal that can be seen through how His mighty presence is presented. As both transcendent and immanent, the

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characteristics of God's love are addressed through names such as peace, father, and healer. The vastness of His attributes causes His people to call Him a multitude of names, one of which is Jehovah Jireh. The term 'Jehovah Jireh' is first used for God in Genesis 22:14, right after God provides a ram for Abraham to sacrifice instead of sacrificing his son, Isaac. After this example of providence, God continues to demonstrate this attribute numerous times throughout Scripture, from providing food for His people wandering the desert to feeding the crowds who came to hear Jesus preach. God's desire to provide is essential to His nature, as it ties in directly with His immanence and relationship with humanity. This can be illustrated in different ways in two passages: Psalm 23 and James 1.

### ***Psalm 23***

Psalm 23 starts by relating God to a shepherd, which may appear odd to people in the twenty first century, but it was a common occupation at that time. David outlines through this metaphor how God loves, protects, and takes responsibility of His people. A shepherd has to be constantly attentive to their sheep, protecting them and keeping them from straying off the right path. A shepherd leads their sheep to good pastures for feeding, and calm waters for drinking. All day and night, a shepherd actively watches their flock and provides for them. A shepherd is very intimately connected with the flock, as the shepherd "lives with his flock and is everything to it: guide, physician, and protector" (Kidner, 1973, p. 127). Just as sheep lack nothing because of their shepherd, David states that he lacks nothing because of God (Ps. 23:1). He makes the connection that a good shepherd is a good provider.

In the following verses, David lists ways that God provides both physically and non-physically. He starts by highlighting the necessities that God provides: He gives His sheep green pastures and still waters (v. 2). As a provider, the first things that must be provided are the basic needs of an individual: food, water, and rest. David acknowledges this and begins his list in a way that maintains his metaphor of God as a shepherd. A sheep feeds on plants, so David paints a picture of a lush, green pasture—rolling hills of soft, green grass for sheep to eat and rest in happily. David does not end there, however, because not only does God provide the best sustenance, He provides the best water as well. This fresh, cool water rejuvenates the body and awakens the soul. This stream is described in a way that enhances the description of peace David has provided. Quiet water flows by, adding to the peaceful atmosphere provided by God. He made the gentle lapping of water touching the grassy shore, and the soft sound of water breaking around rocks to continue the flow down river. These are sounds provided by a good shepherd for the enjoyment of His flock. This is the atmosphere provided to encourage rest for a tired soul.

David finishes listing the basic needs and moves on to describe how God goes beyond the basics. After giving the reader an illustration of how God provides for his people's needs in a way no other can, the psalmist mentions how God refreshes souls (v. 3). He sees past the physical and provides for the spiritual wellbeing of a person as well. There are times when the physical body of a person is doing well, but their spiritual side is unhealthy. Humans cannot see past the physical, so their care can only extend so far. God does not have these limitations, seeing every aspect of need a person has. He provides rest for a tired body, food for a starving stomach, but also rejuvenation for a struggling soul. God's providence is not limited to the physical or mental; rather, it reaches to the deep crevasses of the person's spirit and offers the soul rest and refreshment.

Beyond the physical and spiritual areas for which God provides care, David looks also at how God provides His presence for us. After looking into the nourishment, rest, and refreshment God gives, the psalm goes on to discuss how God is present in the darkest valleys and guides the psalmist along the right paths (v. 3, 4). Other translations call it the "valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4, NASB), which adds depth to this image painted by David. It is not merely a dark valley, but a valley where death creates the darkness. This valley that the psalmist describes walking through is one so dark that a person cannot see others around them, or even their own hands if placed in front of their face. In this moment of sheer panic and loneliness, God shows up with a presence so brilliant that it breaks

through death's darkness. God not only leads people to the right paths, but He also lights it for them. People sometimes use this verse metaphorically to reference God's presence throughout mental health struggles. When looking at the entire picture painted, the connection seems justified. Not only does God shine bright in the darkness of one's personal struggles, but he provides the peace of a restful meadow, sustenance to survive any low time, and direction to get through the valley. He rejuvenates the body, soul, spirit, and mind. He walks the darkest paths of the valley with them, never leaving their side. God provides every possible need a person could have, extending this care to giving companionship and light in darkness.

### ***James 1***

In the New Testament, there are countless times where God's providence is evident through miracles and incredible feats of God. James provides a more subtle, but no less powerful, approach to discussing how God provides for His people. The New Testament is filled with healings, redemptions, and rescues that prove how God does not fail His people, but James does not dwell long on this topic. He drops mentions of God's providence throughout his letter, never focussing on it too long, because it is a basic fact to him. It is as obvious to him as waking up is to people. A person does not stop to explain that they woke up that day, because it is so abundantly clear. With this approach, James addresses God as Jehovah Jireh by stating that He gives "generously and without reproach" (James 1:5, NASB). The word 'generous' originates from the Greek word 'haplos', which can mean "simply, sincerely, or abundantly" (Brannan, 2020). All of these words serve to enhance the concept of a generous God, but each of them does so in a slightly different way. The word 'simply' in this context does not imply that God gives simply, but that God simply gives. This slight difference separates average gifts with a profound characteristic of God. To simply give implies it is done unconditionally and without hesitation. The word 'sincerely' leads the reader to understand that God does not give with ulterior motives or with ill intention. When God gives His people something, He does so out of a desire to provide the best for them, knowing they could never repay Him to any extent. Lastly, the word 'abundantly' guides the reader to remember how James claims that every "good thing and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). This connection is a reminder that God not only gives and provides for His people, but He holds nothing back. God provides for his people in an unconditional, overflowing way. Instead of choosing one from the list of three true descriptions of God's giving, James chooses the word that encompasses all of them. His choice in terms leads the reader to understand God's generosity as a "simple, open, sincere action" (Richardson, 1997, pp. 64). Haplos was chosen as the word to use because it described the abundance and simplicity of God's generosity, which is then followed with a claim of "certainty of receiving wisdom from God" (Richardson, 1997, p. 65). There is no doubting God's generosity, nor is there questioning His motives. James makes it clear with his word choice that God wants to give this wisdom to His people, and that studying every angle of his generosity reveals its purity.

The second description of God's providence is often overlooked and blindly connected with the first. God gives to His people without reproach (v. 5). He does not express criticism, but gives without reservation. There is no blame placed on those who lack this gift of wisdom that James is discussing. He paints a picture of a God who sees His flawed, imperfect people, and chooses to give them His gifts despite their lack. God does not look at these people and criticize why they lack wisdom, or why it took them so long to ask for it. Instead, He gives abundantly, glad that His people have come to Him asking Him to provide. James says that God has what people lack, and He wants to provide for that lack. Jehovah Jireh gives joyfully and without reservation.

## Contemporary life

### *Primary Research*

In order to learn more about the connection between asking for and receiving wisdom in contemporary life, five interviews were conducted. The interviews consisted of a few questions about a time in the person's life when they asked God for wisdom. They were asked questions such as, "what led to this request for wisdom, and what was the result" as well as questions regarding the role doubt played. The questions were asked with the intention of determining the relationship between doubt and the journey to receiving wisdom. In an attempt to understand more than one perspective, this narrative analysis focused on people currently living at different stages in their lives. Among the interviewed people, there was a new mother finishing college, a young husband searching for a pastoral position, a middle-aged mother returning to college in search of a deeper relationship with God, a man with a doctorate who both teaches and preaches, and a man with a doctorate who used to teach and preach. These different stages, ranging from people beginning their careers to people ending theirs, demonstrate a multitude of perspectives on God's providence.

### *Similarities in Interviews*

Going into each interview, I had an expectation of where the conversations would lead. Personal reflection had me believing that the interviews would support the opinion that God follows through, even as there is doubt in Him. When first reading James 1:6, I understood that the doubt James talks about is translated to be doubt in God: in His hearing one's request, His generosity, and His giving of wisdom. Overall, my opinion entering the interviews was that this doubt discussed was in God's willingness to follow through. My biggest assumption going into the interviews was that each interviewed person would share this doubt on some level. Ultimately, the aspect of doubt was one area that resulted in the biggest shift in perspectives. Throughout life, not every prayer seems to be answered, and not every sick person is healed immediately. This can lead a person a person to doubting that God will truly comply with a request for wisdom. Through the interviews, however, the opposite perspective came to light. Despite the five very different people interviewed, every single one of them said that any aspect of doubt they had was not in God, but in their own self. One interviewee said that they did not doubt God, but they doubted their ability to receive what He gave. This consensus, that there was no doubt that God would follow through, was an incredible thing to hear, because it was said by people in every stage of life. People with their whole lives ahead of them did not doubt that God wanted to help them. People who had experienced most of their lives, and those who were only just beginning, already knew God wanted to help them. Any doubt was due to their own human limitations. Despite the interviews, this different interpretation of 'doubt' is not necessarily the implied meaning in James 1:6. When studying the word choice and meaning of the Greek word used, James appears to be highlighting how "this faith is an exercising of trust in the generosity and power of God" (Richardson, 1997, p. 66). James is calling believers to have faith in the Lord and not doubt His capabilities or generosity. Rather than delving further into the direct meaning of the verse, the current intended focus remains on each individual's personal application as seen in their own lives. While perhaps not James' intended meaning, this reveals a different perspective on the role of doubt in a believer's walk with Christ.

These interviews were intended to focus on the process of asking for and receiving wisdom, and thus had no questions regarding God's nature of generosity and willingness. The people interviewed were never asked about their perspective on God's providence. Despite this, every person interviewed brought up God's desire to provide for His people. They all knew God to be an eager giver; they all knew Him as Jehovah Jireh. The knowledge that God wants to give to His children backed up their opinions that their doubt was in themselves and not in God. Through each situation described in the interviews, God's desire to provide shone through to reveal an ending that was always better than the one

expected. Some people discussed a change in the direction their life was going, one where their plan was eliminated so God's could take control. Another interviewee mentioned how God provided knowledge and direction when they had exhausted their own resources and was near giving up. No matter the form the wisdom took, God's providence was always one prayer away, ready to be theirs if they only asked.

A final similarity found that was shared among all five interviewees was their perspective on wisdom. Wisdom, in their minds, was not the general ability to apply knowledge, as it is often understood by the world. Rather, it was specific direction and guidance regarding a situation they were immediately facing. These people did not desire the wisdom to rule a nation, or general, overarching wisdom; it was the wisdom in regard to marriage and raising children, guidance to the next step in life, or direction in teaching biblically sound curriculum to their children. Their requests were simple, humble admissions that wisdom is needed in every step in life. Their requests were simple prayers to a God who provides direction to the directionally challenged.

### ***Jehovah Jireh in Action***

Each person brought stories of their personal encounters with Jehovah Jireh to the interview. One man discussed how God brought past experiences to mind to help bring direction and peace to current situations. Whether it was marriage and parenting direction needed, counseling situations, or illness scares, God was always there to give peace, comfort, and guidance. Another interviewee discussed the relationship between closeness with God and receiving direction and wisdom. When one does not prioritize growth in Christ, the distance between God and self makes it easy to miss the gifts God offers. One woman talked of a time when surrendering her circumstance to God resulted in a flood of assistance and comprehension regarding her situation. Before bringing it to God, there had been a total lack of knowledge and a dead end was imminent. After exhausting her resources, God demonstrated how His resources do not deplete and are available to those who ask. Another interviewee discussed how God is willing and eager to give, but in order to receive His help, one must be listening and looking for it. They discussed how doubt in one's limitations should not become a barrier keeping one from looking for and receiving what God wants to give. A last interviewee talked about how God does not play games, and how confusion, indecision, and a lack of peace are not qualities God wishes for His people. God is a loving father who desires to provide for His children's needs. Jehovah Jireh is present and active today, demonstrating that God's providence did not end when the last book of the Bible was written.

### **Conclusion**

Jehovah Jireh's unwavering consistency is maintained through the ages as seen in Psalm's shepherd, James' gift-giver, and today's prayer answerer. Psalm 23 discusses how the Lord provides through the depiction of a shepherd caring for his flock. Just as a shepherd provides everything for his sheep, the Lord cares for His people in every possible way. James shows his readers how God provides abundantly for those who ask, connecting the Old Testament's picture of a good shepherd to the New Testament's illustration of a generous father. God's unchanging character is what makes Jehovah Jireh truly our provider, for time tests character in a way nothing else can. Original research supports the conclusion that God's providence continues to pour forth into the lives of Christians in the twenty first century. It is seen through the shared perspective that God is a generous giver who wants to give good gifts, as well as the many stories supporting how abundantly God gives direction and guidance when asked. The interviews bring to light the concern that doubt in one's own limitations is present in every generation, but the same people discussed how their limitations did not limit God. The combination

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of scriptural and personal evidence proves that God alone is the true provider of any and all needs, done out of the love and care of a father, and dealt out with the authority of an almighty God.

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## Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death; Overcoming the World



Gordon R. Smith.<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Shepherd's Psalm is arguably one of the more recognized portions of Scripture. While offering words of inspiration, the reader is encouraged to put their confidence in the Shepherd's ability to lead the follower through "the valley of the shadow of death." This paper explores how Jesus as the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:14) leads the child of God through life's challenging ways. It draws on Jesus' own experiences (Mt 4:1-11) to validate His ministry as the Good Shepherd, overcoming the temptations of the devil, and reflecting physical, emotional, and moral challenges. In doing so, Jesus as the Good Shepherd reveals for the follower the nature of life's temptations, a confident way through trials, and sure comfort in His presence through such trials (Ps 23:4). Moreover, Jesus offers a model for the believer to consider their identity as a child of God, and this serves as a living apologetic to temptations in life.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Matthew 4:1-11, Psalm 23, Good Shepherd, overcoming sin, trials, appetites, ambition, anxiety, temptation of Christ, the Valley of the Shadow of Death.*

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Conversations are important. They engage us into the thoughts and motives of others and ourselves. They reveal one's appetites, ambitions, and anxieties about living. The Bible captures multiple conversations that unfold the nature of humanity, as well as the nature of relationship with others and ultimately with God. This study explores a conversation with Jesus and the tempter. It does so by considering Jesus as the Good Shepherd: a title He confers to himself while engaged in a conversation with his disciples about the nature of leadership, both overt and covert (Jn 10:1-18). Moreover, Jesus' conversation in John 10 draws the attention of the Jewish audience to the nature of the shepherd in Ps 23. This study will attempt to connect some dots between the Ps 23 description of the shepherd and Jesus' claim to be the Good Shepherd who pastors His flock. Specifically, we will consider Jesus' credentials for leading us through the valley of the shadow of death. We will endeavor to identify that path through the valley, discover what the 'shadow of death' may be, and learn how the Good Shepherd helps us shed light into the shadows of living that haunt us.

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### Psalm 23: A Pastoral Provider and Protector

Psalm 23 is perhaps one of the more endearing and enduring portions of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> It engages the reader and captures their imagination. Reciting Psalm 23 transforms its simple prose into a prayer of presence that acknowledges one's relationship with God. The Psalm creates an image of a relationship marked by the One who has as personal interest in the welfare of the reader, and acts as provisional host to one's needs in their life's journey.<sup>3</sup> It reflects both horizontal and vertical realities in a Child of God's (COG)<sup>4</sup> experience.<sup>5</sup>

Psalm 23 is multi layered. The Hebrew word forms do not always exactly translate to English, which may challenge a reader's interpretation. For the Hebrew author the focus is more on the "one who is shepherding *me*," in contrast to the English grammatical style that emphasizes "*my* shepherd."<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew recognizes the relationship in reference to the Lord, rather than how the Greek and English define the relationship in reference of oneself. This is important; as a COG, our identity is always in reference in who we are to God - not the other way around.

The image evokes the texture of a believer's relationship with God. Scholars recognize that the image of the shepherd is common in the Mediterranean basin centuries before and after Christ.<sup>7</sup> This theme translated easily into the early church's imagination,<sup>8</sup> as Jesus' words captured in John 10:14 highlight, His ministry was that of a Good Shepherd. The role of the shepherd in context of the occupation was that of not merely passively watching sheep eat, sleep, and regenerate. Then as now, shepherding is a vibrant, robust vocation of observation, guiding,<sup>9</sup> protecting,<sup>10</sup> assisting in birth, and mending injury. Shepherding also demands constant movement of sheep through different pastures to ensure that seasonal dietary needs are met and fresh water remains available, as well as to protect the flock against predators. It reflects the idea of a plan for living that goes beyond day-to-day functions of eating and sleeping.<sup>11</sup>

Verses 3 and 4 seem to suggest that the way between pastures may hold difficulties that test both sheep and shepherd. It is a journey that sheep could not undertake on their own. Life for the sheep, as for us, is not done in isolation from the Shepherd. Doing so opens oneself up to a predatory enemy. It

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<sup>2</sup> J. Hardee Kennedy, "Psalm 23: Strong Faith and Quiet Confidence," *The Theological Educator* 29 (1984): 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ron Tappy, "Psalm 23: Symbolism and Structure," *The Catholic Quarterly* 57 (1995): 261; Philip Nel, "Yahweh is a Shepherd: Conceptual Metaphor in Psalm 23," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 27 (2005): 86.

<sup>4</sup> The term Child of God is used to capture two distinct mutually exclusive relationships for each human being. First, all of humanity are children of God. While secular humanist thought would contend a nontheist evolutionary status of humanity, Christian apologetics unfolding the Cosmological and Teleological arguments for the existence of God would contend all of humanity by virtue of creation as portrayed in the Genesis narrative are created-beings; as such are children of God. Second, the idea of those who have oriented their lives in purposeful relationship with God recognizing their creative and spiritual relationship with God through the salvific work of Jesus Christ would also acknowledge themselves as Children of God (Jn 1:12, Rm 8:14 & 17, Gal 3:26, 1 Jn 3:1).

<sup>5</sup> C.F. Delitzsch, and F. Keil, *Commentary On The Old Testament: Psalms*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), 329.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Hagen, "Exploring Psalm 23: Defining the sheep, Shepherd, host and guest," *The Priest* (2001): 41.

<sup>7</sup> Nel, "Yahweh is a Shepherd," 92, 95, 96; Hagen, "Exploring Psalm 23," 41-41; Tappy, "Psalm 23," 255.

<sup>8</sup> Kimberly Long, "The Shepherd Jesus," *Journal For Preachers* (2006): 51.

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, "Psalm 23," 16.

<sup>10</sup> Long, "The Shepherd Jesus," 52.

<sup>11</sup> Hagen, "Exploring Psalm 23," 42.

is also a journey where the integrity the Shepherd seems to be tied to the welfare of the sheep<sup>12</sup> “for His name’s sake” (Ps 23:3).

The 4<sup>th</sup> verse of Ps 23 describes the journey through “the shadow of the valley of the Death” (NASB). Scholars agree that the “valley” is a dark<sup>13</sup> place of “evil.”<sup>14</sup> Certainly, the metaphor offers multiple considerations, and, as with much of Scripture, as many practical applications for the believer. The image is unsettling and has profound implication for the believer both presently<sup>15</sup> and eternally.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the COG lives their life with a dual sense of both the ‘here and now’ and the eternal.

The “valley of the shadow of death” evokes reflection: What is the “valley” and its implication for the COG today? Though contextually separate, Jesus’ self-claim as the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:14) draws a direct line back to Ps 23 that the early church easily followed.<sup>17</sup> Its echo through Scripture urges the reader to wonder how the “Good Shepherd” will guide them through the valley of the shadow of death.

Jesus promised our everyday experience would be flush with difficulties (Jn 6:33). Jesus’ assertion seems to include not only those within ear shot but also all believers, or even all of humanity in this κοσμος (world).<sup>18</sup> The word for tribulation, θλιψιν, literally translates as “pressure.”<sup>19</sup> It is no secret for any individual that life is full of pressures. Jesus assures us that He has overcome the world and its pressure(s). As the “Good Shepherd” He, knows the way through the valley of the shadow of death. These claims come before the crucifixion; Is Jesus prophetically referencing the work of the cross here, as the passage’s context would suggest? It is also possible that Jesus is referencing His trial in the desert of overcoming the devil’s trials (Mt 4:1-11), which are common to all humanity. If so, it may be that Jesus is affirming that He, as the Good Shepherd, is uniquely qualified to guide the COG through the θλιψιν, or “pressure(s)” of the world: the valley of the shadow of death.

### **The Conversation: Jesus, the devil, and the shadow of sin.**

The Matthew 4:1-11 narrative describes Jesus’ trial by the devil. In overcoming this trial, Jesus validates His status as God’s Son, overcoming the demonic pressures which are archetypal of the pressures a COG faces. Those pressures challenge each person as it did Jesus: physically, psychologically, and spiritually. More so, if left unaddressed, runaway appetites, overwhelming anxieties, and unchecked ambitions can lead individuals in life to dark shadowy places - or to death itself.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus establishes a path through demonic traps that plague everyday human experience. Thus, when we travel as followers through our own dark valley, we can have assurance that not only will He keep us safe, but He will comfort us as we follow the pathway He has made. Therefore, as a COG follows Jesus’ steps through the trials, He give us assurance we are not alone and will not be overcome by the shadow.

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<sup>12</sup> Nel, “Yahweh is a Shepherd,” 96.

<sup>13</sup> Tappy, “Psalm 23,” 260; Hagen, “Exploring Psalm 23,” 42.

<sup>14</sup> Nel, “Yahweh is a Shepherd,” 99.

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy, “Psalm 23,” 17.

<sup>16</sup> Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 329.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Glowasky, “Cognition and Visualization in Early Christian Interpretation of Psalm 23,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 13 (2019): 221.

<sup>18</sup> All Greek manuscript references are obtained by (Berry, George. *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977.)

<sup>19</sup> George Berry, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament: Greek-English New Testament Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 47.

Perhaps one of the most interesting narratives in the Gospels is that of Mt 4:1-11 reflected in Lk 4:1-12. What makes this narrative important, standing apart from other narratives, is that it is a conversation between Jesus and the devil. The interview is profound, and only the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview biblically recorded between Satan and humanity. The first is in the Genesis 3 narrative with Adam and Eve where the conversation led to humanity's fall and resulted in universal consequence to humanity's relation with oneself, each other, and God. The Matthew 4 interview stands as the reparation of the damage inflicted upon humanity in the Genesis narrative. In the Mt 4 trial, Jesus unfolds for us archetypes of life's trials that represent the "pressures" in this world. Moreover, Jesus demonstrates how we can overcome the world as He has, or at least, not succumb as completely, naively, or quickly as did Genesis' first-family.

The Mt 4:1-11 narrative has a sense of symmetry to the Genesis narrative. Paul leans on the symmetry between Adam and Jesus in his discourse on justification (Rom 5:12-21) and the resurrection (1 Cor 15: 20-28). It is also interesting that in both the NT and OT, one of the first narratives regarding the first-family and Jesus unfolds Satan's ongoing challenges to one's character and identity. To be sure, the tests are multi-layered. The tests Jesus undertakes are directed at His identity as the Son of God and relationship with the Father. Likewise, the daily trials for each believer set by Satan are meant to redefine our relationship with God and identity as a COG. If accomplished, the individual is pressed to foster a sense of self informed by a world of subjectivity, self-expression, self-determination, and independence through conditional relationships.

The devil's test aims at three clear aspects of human experience: appetites, ambitions, and anxieties. The failure of the first-family against similar tests was what splintered individuals from a natural sense of identity as a created-being reflecting His image (Gen 1:27). The frailty of the first-family reflects the effect of an apparent lack of a clear apologetic grounding regarding their identity as a COG against real life challenges. It may not be enough to passively being known by God. Rather, the strength of identity flows out of knowing oneself as a COG through an active relationship with God. In the temptations with Jesus, the Satan finds a different individual than those in the first-family. Jesus clearly understands His identity. It informs Jesus with a means to address each test not in a bid to merely deflect, defer or evade the challenge. This is key. Jesus shows us how to get to the root of each specific query or trial. Jesus provides the believer an archetype to consider how their sense of self as a COG is key to resisting temptation; this is part each believer's identity formation.

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted for forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry." (Mt. 4:1-2, NASB)

Jesus is recognized as an exemplar for human relationship between oneself, others, and God. However, it is early in Jesus' official public ministry that His identity as the Son of God is put to test. It seems Jesus is open to the challenges of the Accuser. As such, the matter of His identity becomes an opening for challenge and riposte, as well as the fulcrum of Satan's queries. The trials are not only a challenge over cosmic authority, but are also (and perhaps more significantly) related to His identity as the Son of God.<sup>20</sup> More so, His nature as a human-being is undertaking the same test: Jesus as a COG is also being tested here. If Jesus is not a created-being as COG, His ability to overcome the challenge becomes moot. The trials are archetypes for all COG.

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<sup>20</sup> Jaco Hamman, "On Getting away with It: Jesus and the Temptation in the Desert," *Pastoral Psychology* 62 (2013): 680; Balmer Kelly, "An Exposition of Matthew 4:1-11," *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 50; Lamar Williamson, "Expository Articles: Matthew 4:1-11," *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 53.

The wilderness narrative unfolds a direct challenge-riposte<sup>21</sup> between Jesus and the Accuser. The challenge-riposte is a common rhetorical device in first-century Mediterranean culture to establish honor and status in a public forum.<sup>22</sup> It adds texture and legitimacy to the narrative for the first-century audience. The same challenge-riposte rhetoric is seen in many narratives between Jesus and the religious leaders and perhaps most profoundly with Pilate (Jn 18:28-40). While the Mt 4:1-11 exchange occurred away from the public eye, it very well may have occurred in view of all spiritual entities. The wilderness narrative sets out to validate Jesus' identity and authority to engage ministry as the Son of God.<sup>23</sup> It is what the rest of His ministry hinges upon; a ministry that surpasses theological discourses (Mt 7:28; 13:54; 22:22; Lk 6:40; 9:1-6), psychological counseling (Mt 9:32-35; Mt 11:25 MSG; Mk 12:15; Lk 4:18; Jn 2:25; Jn 4: 7-29), social advocacy (Lk 10: 30 – 37; Jn 4: 39-45; Jn 8: 1-11) and day to day interaction with people (Mt 8: 5-13; Mt 9:10-12; Jn 2:2). Taken together, this narrative of ministry forms the mythos of Jesus. The drama and tension of the interviews with Satan in the wilderness is contested on this point: "Who is this man, Jesus?" This matter of identity is clearly established prior to the desert experience in the post-baptismal narrative of Matthew 3:13-17, where the voice of Heaven declares Christ's identity as "My Son." This declaration echoes from the OT and binds His identity to Israel.<sup>24 25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Challenge-Riposte was a cultural phenomenon in the first century basin. It was reflection of an honor culture where one's identity and social status could and would be challenged by open rhetorical debate in social gatherings. It was not designed as an attack to character or as a means to validate one's social status or claims. The riposte was an individual's platform to validate their claims of identity, status, or philosophical perspective.

<sup>22</sup> David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 29.

<sup>23</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 99.

<sup>24</sup> France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 96; Julia Gatta, "If You are the Son Of God, Throw Yourself Down'," *Sewanee Theological Review* 50 (2006): 67; Nicholas Lunn, "The Temple In The Wilderness: Allusions To The Hebrew Sanctuary In The Baptism and Temptations of Christ," *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 59 (2016): 709; Philip Thompson, "Matthew 4:1-11," *Interpretation* 60 (2006): 72.

<sup>25</sup> It is important to note outside of the trial, passion week, and crucifixion narratives, the wilderness interviews with the Accuser stand as common among the Gospels, save John. The scholarship regarding the placement of the Matthean narrative against the Lukan and Marcan narratives offers more textually rich themes. It is not in the scope of this examination to compare the narratives. Suffice to note that there is reasonable scholarship to support the idea that the Matthean narrative is cued by the Marcan account which only notes the interview in passing in the Marcan text (Mk 1: 12-13). Michael Card, *Matthew: The Gospel of Identity* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2013), 15; Craig Keener, *A Commentary On The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 136; William Stegner, "The Temptation Narrative: A Study in the Use of Scripture by Early Jewish Christians," *Biblical Research* XXXV (1990): 6.

Scholarship seems to rest with the Matthean account being more extensive and informed by Jewish perspective and authorship: Card, *Matthew*, 14; Stegner, "The Temptation Narrative," 5-7; Ben Witherington III, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2006), 5. Michael Card notes that Matthew offers the most reasonable voice to furnish the Gospel narratives to a Jewish population. Matthew is identified as a tax collector (Mt 9:9) possessing skills such as attending to details and tracking families, sayings, and histories. He also had the unique capacity to set himself in the crossroads of civic, social, spiritual, and political currents of the day: Card, *Matthew*, 14. As well, his own Jewish heritage, including Second Temple Jerusalem (2TJ) perspectives, lend him insight to recognize and connect the dots of prophecy and history with the symbolism

The context of the wilderness interview is key to illustrating some interpretive features of this passage for study. The narrative elements of the locations, general geography, culture, and character furnish texture for each query and set the tone of the interview that informs the rest of Jesus Christ's ministry. The Apostle Paul captures this ministry in the narrative of many of his epistles, and is perhaps best expounded in Romans 5:12-16.

Moreover, the setting of the wilderness presents a symbolic link between the OT and NT. However, the wilderness is by no means symbolic geography. The environment described as the wilderness is rich in the Jewish literature of the OT. It is not only geographically outside of the holy city's protectorate, but also in proximity to a harsh landscape that lends itself to physical vulnerability.<sup>26</sup> It is the antithesis of the Garden imagery in the Genesis narrative. Here, the wilderness motif reflects the Mosaic narrative of God's people journeying from a life of slavery to that of God's chosen ones.<sup>27</sup>

The characters in the wilderness interview can be clearly categorized as protagonist and antagonist. Jesus is identified as the Son of God through previous Matthean narratives (Mt 1:18-25; Mt 2: 1-6, 11-12), and especially in the baptism by John (Mt 3:13-17). The other key character is identified in Scripture as the τοῦ διαβόλου, or "devil" (Mt. 4:1), and the ὑπειραζών, or "tempter" (Mt 4:3). The identity is clearly that of Satan, the one who is recognized by Jesus as the "ruler of the world" (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and Paul as the "evil one" (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2).<sup>28</sup> It is noted that it was in the post-exilic period that Israel began to recognize the activity and identity of "Satan." With "Satan" serving more

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through Jewish theology: Witherington, *Matthew*, 16–18. Jewish theology is clearly on display in how the author quotes Deuteronomy in the narrative. This differs from the Lucan narrative which follows a more Greek rhetorical style, building a teleological, theological and narratological emphasis: David Bryan, 2020. "The Center of Luke's Temptation Narrative," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (2020): 412. The era of the narrative is one of multi-layered political, social, economic, and spiritual texture. Each plays a role in the unfolding of history and Jesus' entrance to the human condition. The religious context is that of Judaism referred to as 2TJ theology. It holds to centuries of promise of messianic hope from the OT. While God was apparently quiet in the lives of the Jewish people from prophets and leaders, Jewish scholarship was in full bloom as part of the 2TJ teachings. To which, 2TJ theology understood an eschatological event would usher in a reunification of humanity and a return to an Eden-like state for God's people: Nicholas Piotrowski, "Discern the Word and Understand the Vision: Ongoing Exile in Second Temple Judaism and its Relevance for Biblical Theology," *Criswell Theological Review* 16 (2018): 39. This informed not just the priestly or scribal orders of Judaism but also filtered into the daily education system of every male Jew. It explains in part how Matthew could recognize Jesus as fulfilling OT prophecies. However, the general social context of the region also had woven into life a Hellenistic ethos that permeated social relationships: David deSilva, "The Wisdom of Ben Sira," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (1996): 58; Witherington, *Matthew*, 7. Moreover, such Hellenist influence became a point of contention within Jewish culture in the day. It added to the provincial, civic, and geopolitical tension that flushed the middle eastern environs of the day: Card, *Matthew*, 17. The Jewish people were spoiling for a change politically, culturally, and spiritually. Historically, the wilderness was the place that represented change, transformation, and revelation of destiny to God's people. Change was coming and the wilderness became its stage.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Dormandy "Jesus' Temptations in Mark's Gospel: Mark 1:12-13," *The Expository Times* 114 (2003): 183-187; Williamson, "Expository Articles," 183.

<sup>27</sup> Dormandy, "Jesus' Temptations in Mark's Gospel," 183–187; Williamson, "Expository Articles," 52.

<sup>28</sup> John Peckham, "Rules of Engagement: God's Permission of Evil in Light of Selected Cases of Scripture," *Bulliten for Biblical Research* 30 (2020): 255.

as a title than a name in Greek translation, he becomes commonly identified as the devil and the tempter.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus Christ as the Son of God stands as an exemplar in history of character and moral fortitude. The temptations of the wilderness narrative are the testing grounds that prove this. The key point in the text is verse 1, where the word *πειρασθῆναι* loosely translates as “temptation”. However, it is noted as perhaps a misleading word in context, referring to the devil by action rather than what Jesus experiences.<sup>30</sup> The idea here is that Jesus as the Son of God, incarnated as a human being, will be tested or challenged.<sup>31</sup> In other words, God may lead someone to a place where they can be tempted, but God does not tempt either Jesus or the COG, as clearly noted by James (Jas 1:13-15). For God to tempt would constitute a type of character within God that would allow for evil intent. Temptation lays within the individual’s constitution, circumstance, and character. It is worthy to note that temptations seem to follow Jesus and be as much a part of His ministry as the specific engagements with individuals who are disturbed by physical, social, or spiritual distress.<sup>32</sup> That being true, it raises the question as to the source of the ongoing challenge-riposte throughout Jesus’ ministry. The devil uses the three challenges attempting to unseat the identity of the Son of God. Satan takes aim at Jesus’ physical appetites, anxieties, and ambitions to question who He claims to be. However, Jesus seems unsurprised at this tactic meant to challenge, “Is He really the Son of God?”

### ***The Test of Appetites: We are More than we Eat.***

“And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God.’” (Mt. 4:3-4)

What stands out in Satan’s challenge to Jesus in Mt. 4:3-4 is the conditional statement, “If You are the Son of God.” Immediately, the matter of Jesus’ identity becomes the point of the discourse. The Jewish audience is reminded of the dialogue between Satan and God in Job 1 and 2.<sup>33</sup> The challenge to God’s providence over humanity is somehow conditional. It also harkens back to the first-family’s test of the forbidden fruit and the consequence of their changed relationship with God (Gen 3:5-6). Here in Matthew, Satan tests Jesus’ disposition to exercise His supposed divine power and nature.

There is diverse interpretive consideration of the tests and their implications. Most trend toward theological or pastoral considerations. It is particularly interesting to consider what the test indicated regarding Jesus’ understanding of His identity as Son of God and as a COG. Satan’s suggestion to turn stone to bread is a test that aims at His “hunger,” a basic human need.<sup>34</sup> In this, the tempter attempts to redefine Jesus in two ways: First, this test reduces Jesus’ being to that of a mere creature and orients Him to succumb to animal instincts. It makes human need out to be a primary driving force for behavior; encourages one to define themselves by what they want or need. Second, it pushes Jesus to use His power to meet His needs apart from the unfolding divine ministry to humanity.

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<sup>29</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, 137; Witherington, *Matthew*, 91.

<sup>30</sup> Peckham, “Rules of Engagement,” 679; Witherington, *Matthew*, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Peckham, “Rules of Engagement,” 679; Witherington, *Matthew*, 89.

<sup>32</sup> Peckham, “Rules of Engagement,” 686.

<sup>33</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Crisis of the Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1936), 166.

<sup>34</sup> Donald Gee, *Temptations of the Spirit-Filled Christ* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1966), 14; Dormandy, “Jesus’ Temptations in Mark’s Gospel,” 184; Morgan, *The Crisis of the Christ*, 136; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 138; Gatta, “If you are the Son of God,” 70.

It attempts to force Him to redefine terms of His relationship with God; to supersede His needs over God's plan or leverage His power against the Trinity's harmony.

These two attempted redefinitions echo the secular humanist perspective that human behavior is reducible to basic instincts. In this school of thought, one's drive to satisfy oneself is essential to individual and collective survival. It exchanges one's identity as a COG, known by God and informed by God, to an animal-driven-identity compelled by instincts, feelings, and perceived needs. By separating oneself from God, the nature of relationships shifts. Individuals become each other's means to meet a need. It reduces people to something less than a created-being, stripping one's identity from that of a COG. Even altruistic needs are discussed in terms of objectification, with people becoming things needed to meet a natural, individual, or social need. Jesus does not allow His motivation or behavior as Son of God or as a COG to be reduced to mere instinctive behavior; doing so would undermine His status of the Son of God.

In contrast, other perspectives view Satan's challenge as being meant to test Jesus' loyalty to God, tempt Him to abuse of God's power, or question how He would use God's authority.<sup>35</sup> Again, it seems to reiterate the Genesis narrative: A human's appetite for something missing leads to their independent exercise of will superseding all else.<sup>36</sup> However, deeper than even these is the matter of identity. If the Son of God redefines Himself as independent of God, He is then not bound to respond to God's will over His perceived needs. Thereby, it becomes reasonable and rational for Jesus to give in and appease His appetites over God's will. In other words, separating oneself from a relationship with God allows for independent action to be warranted in context of one's perceived needs. It is this action that defines secular humanist thought: independent self-willed action apart from God. However, Jesus understood who He was. He chose to exercise His divine role as the Son of God not to take hold of power for His personal transient human needs, but to use it to serve humanity. This becomes the basis of His teaching in the following Gospel narratives and is captured in the Apostle Paul's Kenosis hymn (Phil 2:2-8).

Jesus does not use Scripture as a battle axe to repel the devil. Rather, Jesus uses Scripture apologetically as a point of context to affirm His identity. It reminds Him of who He is: the Son of God, and as a human-being, a COG. As such, Scripture becomes the double-edge sword that cuts through any doubt as to who He is and lends an edge for Jesus to dissect the devil's verbal challenges. Jesus does not use wit or rhetoric to rebuff the tempter, but confirms His conscious understanding of His status with God. The text drawn from Deuteronomy 8:3 references the wilderness experience of the Mosaic narratives. It offers a couple points of reference in Jesus' riposte. First, Jesus clearly references Himself with humanity in the use of *ανθρωπος*, or "man". Commentators note the use of the word *ανθρωπος* is a generic form to describe humanity.<sup>37</sup> Is Jesus here counting Himself as part of humanity? If so, He sets Himself up to counter the outcomes of the Genesis 3 narrative as a human being, a created-being, and the Son of God. Secondly, Jesus draws on the Mosaic priority to orient one's relationship with God over one's base needs. Here, Jesus succeeds in not selling out, giving in, or stepping outside of His identity as God's Son over a mere appetite. It foreshadows the ongoing priority of discipline of self to the mission.<sup>38</sup>

For the believer, when one understands they are a COG, they understand that they do not have to succumb to the whims of their feelings, emotions, or physical cues which normally drive behavior. The genesis of animation for the believer is not appetite, but their relationship with God and His will

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<sup>35</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, 139; Morgan, *The Crisis of the Christ*, 169; Witherington, *Matthew*, 90.

<sup>36</sup> Williamson, "Expository Articles," 52.

<sup>37</sup> Berry, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, 9; Spiros Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 1665.

<sup>38</sup> France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 98–99.



as revealed in Scripture. Scripture helps the believer to define their identity and inform themselves of who they are. It defines how relationships with self and others are formed and how they demonstrate the power of God within each COG and in the Church. Clearly, defining the self in the terms of the Bible helps the individual overcome the influence of visceral experiences in their lives. It provides the COG direction on how to morally act toward and with others, despite their personal feelings or appetites. Further more, when one is able to see the COG identity in others, their orientation becomes that of serving others. It overrides the supposed instinctual need to be first in line, to satisfy one's needs, to ensure the self is preserved. The lesson Jesus affirms here is that the COG is not defined by their appetites; rather they exercise faith to find their physical needs met by God despite the visceral experience (Mt 6:26). Jesus the Good Shepherd overcomes the devil's attempt to define Himself by His appetites. He establishes a pathway for the COG to likewise not let their physical needs define who they are. In doing so, the COG can overcome the pressures of circumstance and avoid giving into self-indulgences, which otherwise would animate the shadow of sin to overcome the COG.

### ***The Test of Anxieties: We are More than We Feel.***

Then the devil took Him along into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and he said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written: 'He will give His angels orders concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will lift You up, so that You do not strike Your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written: 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Mt. 4:5-7, NASB)

The previous challenge tests Jesus' relationship to God. This challenge aims at how Jesus' perceives God's relationship to Him.<sup>39</sup> In other words, the tempter leads Jesus to consider, "how much does God love me?" This retraces the same tactic Satan applies to Eve in Genesis 3:4; casting doubt on how God relates to His progeny. Through this challenge, Satan attempts to lure Jesus into leveraging God to demonstrate God's declaration, "This is My beloved Son" (Mt 3:17). In other words, Satan endeavors to entice Jesus to create an artificial crisis and force God to enact a miracle.<sup>40</sup> Such an act would turn faith around and presume God to respond to Jesus whenever Jesus, as a COG, demands.

In this test, the devil has approached Jesus in a very public forum: the "temple". The temple is the focus of worship and relationship with God for the Jewish people. The temple is also the theatre of teaching, displays of healing (Lk 19:45; 20:1; Jn 5:14; 7:14) and God's kinetic power manifest through the crucifixion narrative (Mt 27:51). This location highlights the implications of the test being levelled against Jesus. Certainly, the leap and the rescue would prove God's power, not only in Jewish culture but in humanity's reality.

As before, Satan uses Scripture to manufacture doubt regarding the status of Jesus' relationship with God. Again, Satan employs a conditional statement, this time using "If." However, now devil employs Scripture (Ps 91:11-12) to establish the grounds of his challenge. On the surface it seems like a legitimate point. Yet, Jesus notes the quote is diabolically twisted out of context in an attempt to leverage Him into a leap of blind presumption.<sup>41</sup> It is the same tactic used on Eve in Genesis 3:1-4 to misquote God and alter her perception of her relationship with God. The duality of the challenge ups the ante for the devil and perhaps lends more legitimacy to the overall test of Jesus' identity as the Son of God. In other words, it is one thing to make the claim and reserve one's own power. It is quite another now to manipulate a relationship to prove claims of love within the relationship.

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<sup>39</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 127.

<sup>40</sup> France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 99; Keener, *Matthew*, 191.

<sup>41</sup> Morgan, *The Crisis of the Christ*, 182; Gee, *Temptations of the Spirit-Filled Christ*, 30.

Attachment Theory offers a lens to consider this section of the narrative. Attachment Theory is a psychological perspective that proposes how relationships are formed and sustained.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, one's sense of security within a relationship flows from a sense of the attachment within the relationship.<sup>43</sup> In this case, the devil is testing the perceived attachment between Jesus and God. The devil seeks to push both Jesus and God to a point of contention, by leveraging God's own words against Him. It is the misuse of Scripture that creates a shadow of reality and can catch the unsuspecting or naive COG unaware. Here, Jesus demonstrates not only knowing Scripture, but also knowing the context of Scripture to avoid its misuse in informing identity. This prevents the misuse of Scripture to leverage relationships with others, circumstances, and God.

Again, Jesus uses the OT to furnish His riposte: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Dt 6:16). As much as the devil endeavors to unseat Christ's identity with God on two approaches, Jesus' reply answers both points. In quoting this OT passage, Jesus serves as a link for Jewish audience to recall the actions of God's people at Massah (Ex 7:17). In this account, the exodus peoples' anxiety and indulgence lead them to attempt to leverage God's hand for their benefit. What is on display here is not some kind of spectacular manifestation of God's revelation as angels sent to preserve the Son of God. As in the first test, Jesus does not attempt prove anything by leveraging or manipulating His relationship with God. Rather, Jesus affirms His identity as God's son and as a COG, securely attached, and based on God's word rather than on a test arising from insecurity or anxiety.

When an individual's anxieties and insecurities infect their perception of who they are, it impacts how they perceive relationships as well; it creates shadows and challenges within the relationship. In other words, a disturbance of the attachment between individuals unseats the relationship.<sup>44</sup> Jesus does not take the enemy's bait; He refuses to test His relationship with God on any grounds because He knows He does not need to. Since Jesus is intimately in tune with God and knows who He is as God's Son and as a COG, nothing more needs to be proven. Jesus' faith in the relationship establishes the integrity of Jesus' identity and repels the emotional wash of the devil's subversion.

The tempter aims at Jesus' identity in order to challenge His sense of security, status, and attachment with God. As a COG, this perhaps is elemental to psychological development; it is an individual's insecurity that induces them to test a relationship. Individuals who are unsure of their status in a relationship will query or test the relationship satiate their own needs. Again, it separates oneself from others to test the bond of the relationship. In doing so it objectifies others to meet a need of comfort and security. By testing God, one reduces God to a servant of one's will or needs. It exchanges the eternal omnipotent God for an idol of one's own making, simply to meet their psychological need in a prescribed fashion. This is idol-making in the subtlest of ways. This is the tempter's agenda working in the shadows: to cause a COG to wonder, "Can I trust God?"

This dynamic, wherein the enemy leads one to require evidence in order to trust, is significant. For instance, the skeptic may challenge the COG to produce empirical evidence of God's existence, power, or character. In issuing this seemingly legitimate challenge, the skeptic may appear genuinely curious in their query. However, the reader is reminded that "the absence of evidence is not evidence

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<sup>42</sup> Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 509; Paul Bloom, "Religion is natural," *Developmental Science* 10 (2007): 197.

<sup>43</sup> Richar Beck, "God as a Secure Base: Attachment to God and Theological Exploration," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 43 (2006): 125.

<sup>44</sup> Victor Counted, "Understanding God images and God concepts: Towards a pastoral hermeneutics of the God attachment experience," *Research Gate*. November 03. Accessed November 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i1.1389>; Aaron Cherniak, Mario Mikulincer, Phillip Shaver and Pehr Granqvist, "Attachment theory and religion," *Current Opinion in Psychology* (2021): 128; Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, 472.

of absence.”<sup>45</sup> Given Jesus’ refusal to test God in Mt 4:5-7, the COG’s response to the skeptic’s challenge may be to refuse to leverage, commodify, or put on display their relationship with God in such an idolatrous way. To the skeptic, this inability or unwillingness may appear to play into their presupposition that no proof of God equates no existence of God. The COG’s reply to such a reductionist challenge is key. It is important the COG remains a counter-cultural light to illuminate the essence of faith and the reality of God’s existence, not by leveraging God to act on cue, but by expressing secure identity as a child of God. Moreover, that this extends to all relationships where the COG, reflecting God’s nature, promotes relationships for their own sake<sup>46</sup> without needing conditional testing to validate anyone’s value or identity. Perhaps the real test for the COG is not taking an open dare, but instead, understanding the nature of the dare and replying accordingly: gently, kindly, and wisely (1 Pe 3:13-16).

### ***The Test of Ambition: You Get What You Pay For.***

“Again, the devil took Him along to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’” Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to serve Him.” (Mt. 4:8-11, NASB)

In the last portion of the interview, the tempter entices Jesus with what is prophetically positioned as His essential status on earth and heaven. Again, the devil attempts to angle Jesus with a change of perspective. This time Jesus’ status is not on display for the world to see, but Satan puts the world on display for Christ to see. There is some scholarly variation regarding what the “kingdoms of the world” refers to. It is speculated that Jesus experienced this vision at Mount Nebo, echoing OT intertextual references to Moses (Dt 34:1-4).<sup>47</sup> Others consider the potential eschatological apocalyptic vision (Rev 21:11) with the implication of the devil was attempting to upend it.<sup>48</sup> Regardless, it is clear that Satan presumed the “kingdoms of the world” as his to give away. Initially, this appears to be a paradox. However, Jesus affirms throughout His ministry that worldly politics, while under God’s sovereignty, is very much the devil’s playground (Jn 12:31; Jn 14:30; Jn 16:11).<sup>49</sup>

Another possible interpretation of the vision is that of symbolic representation: from a vantage point in the mountains east of Jerusalem, a viewer could easily see the city and its surrounding lands. In this sense, Jerusalem represents the kingdom of God as set apart to serve and lead humanity to God (its failure notwithstanding). Thus, the occupation of the Middle East by Rome represents the political and economic force of humanity to rule by “might makes right.” This region lived under a Hellenist influence, including education and social values that permeated Jewish society.<sup>50</sup> It was also saturated

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<sup>45</sup> Lee Billings, "scientificamerican.com." *Atheism Is Inconsistent with the Scientific Method, Prizewinning Physicist Says*. March 20. Accessed December 2020.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/atheism-is-inconsistent-with-the-scientific-method-prizewinning-physicist-says/>.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Lim, "Doing, allowing and the problem of evil," *International Journal for Philosophy and Religion* 81 (2016): 286.

<sup>47</sup> France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 99; Stegner, "The Temptation Narrative," 9.

<sup>48</sup> Lunn, "The Temple in the Wilderness," 713.

<sup>49</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 135.

<sup>50</sup> DeSilva, "The Wisdom of Ben Sira," 58; Witherington, *Matthew*, 7.

with various religious practices of paganism, in part leftovers from the pre- and post-exile periods, and in part suffused Roman occupation.

These historical contexts paint a picture of the rich tapestry that was the multicultural society present in Jerusalem at the time of Satan's test. Thus we may interpret that, when shown 'the kingdoms,' the literal kingdoms of the world were in full bloom for Jesus to see. Any slice of society would reveal layers of the various religious forms, social stratification, economic tensions, and political currents that washed the shores of society then as they do today.

Could the multicultural tapestry referenced in Mt. 4:8-11 be the kingdoms of past, present, and future, which Jesus perceived in a moment? Could it also overlay the eschatological future of John's Revelation, which folds the world's power back on itself to establish the authority of Jesus eternally? Could this be what Jesus saw in "the kingdoms of the world," which evoked such a strong response to Satan's vanity and myopia?

Jesus' reply, as in the two previous challenges, shines light through the devil's presumptuous attempt to cast shadows and alter reality. Moreover, Jesus does not just parry or push back the devil in riposte; in this instance, Jesus definitively stops the interview and establishes His authority over heaven and earth. Despite the vision shown to Him, Jesus does not grasp His endowed rule and reign in order to leverage it. In doing so, Jesus would only subscribe to a one-sided politick animated by Satan, typified by Rome and proffered by secularism.

As before, the key to repel the devil is not by parry and thrust of Scripture or adroit apologetics. Jesus kept a clear perspective on His relationship God. He understood that pain and discomfort is a part of human living. He understood these aspects of life are every bit as transient an experience as being well fed, laughing among friends, and enjoying a cool water in the heat of the day. Jesus understood that, as the Son of God, His transcendent relationship with God did not need be proven through displays of affection or garish acts on either one's part. The steady, faithful loyalty to each other for the other's sake stood on its own merit. Whether others saw it or not did not seem to matter. Jesus as God's Son understood His authority and inheritance.

The story of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32) demonstrates the effect of ambition on relationships with others and on one's sense of identity. It is interesting to note that Jesus transmits the idea of identity and fidelity with God by defining it as how individuals, Himself included, face hardships (Mt 16:24-26). The test of identity is not a one-time event, but a daily experience of pressures that affect us in subtle ways. It is the valley of the shadow of death through which our ambitions are tested, not just once, but perpetually.

The human illusion of the fast-track is not something that affects only certain people. It develops in every person's life at some level, at some point. This temptation aims to subvert one's status as a COG or created-being, and trade it for a sense of entitlement or individual right. Being animated by ambition for rights or entitlements will then propel an individual to view others as a means to an end to fulfill or support their ambition. By separating oneself and pursuing one's ambition at the expense of others, one objectifies and renders others as subservient to meet the ambition of self. It separates the COG from each other and God by commodifying individuals into objective terms. In this way, ambition is an act of evil.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Benjamin S. Larson, "Participation and Evil: The Problem of Doing Evil When Attempting to Fight Evil," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, (2012): 456.

## Reflections, Thoughts, and Implications.

One of the lessons the COG can learn from the Good Shepherd's testing in Mt 4:1-11 is that understanding one's identity in relation to God filters out the distractions and misinformation regarding what truly matters in life. When one is clear-minded about their relationship with God and their identity as a COG, they no longer instinctually scabble about life seeking to meet their basic needs, manipulating relationships to do so. The COG recognizes how insecurities and anxieties can be used to control relationships with others and to get their emotional needs met. The COG no longer influences relationships to feed their ambitions. Families and loved ones are not ignored for the sake of a business, ministry, or recreational venture. Employees, colleagues, customers, and congregants are not used to leverage time, finances, or status to advance a career or a corporate goal. God is not commodified to validate one's status in business, church, or community. When a COG is secure in this way they guard their relationships from the distractions and disturbances of the devil.

Ps 23 offers a vibrant image of a Good Shepherd's care for his sheep in many circumstances. Most distinctly is the image and implication with "valley of the shadow of death." The text implies that the journey is not terminal. Moreover, the text seems to point to the assurance the reader has in the Shepherd that their fate will be preserved. This assurance comes through the Shepherd's experiences as a guide, but also in the "comfort of the rod and staff" (v.4). The imagery of the rod and staff suggests a tangible quality, which lends assurance to the reality that the Shepherd is with us even in the shadows.

Could the lessons recorded for us in Mt 4:1-11 be, in part, the rod or staff – tangible evidence, points of contact, and guiding principles, given for us to learn how to conduct ourselves in the shadows of this world? Perhaps, the Mt 4 narrative is a touchpoint meant to remind us that one's appetites, anxieties, and ambitions do not need to drive us to meet our needs. The valley of the shadow of death is a part of everyday living, and the shadows harbour the unknown. They work to bring uncertainty in relationships, work, and living. It is in the shadows that we hope to hide our sins and indiscretions, and it is in the shadows where our fears are exposed. However, knowing Jesus as the Good Shepherd who has overcome His own appetites, anxieties, and ambitions for our sake gives us hope and inspires us to walk with confidence in this shadowy world. We can do so without succumbing to the ambiguity of postmodernist relativism, morally or socially, for ego's sake. Rather, as COG we are guided by the Good Shepherd to harness our appetites, face our insecurities, and clarify our ambition – for His sake, and, as He guides us step by step, for our sake.

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# The Good Shepherd's Covenant: Shepherd Imagery in Targum Jonathan to Ezekiel 34



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**ABSTRACT:** *The present essay is an excerpt, with significant alterations, of the author's 2023 MA thesis at the University of Copenhagen. The original 97-page inquiry into Targum Jonathan to Ezekiel's theocratic, and therefore Messianic program, offered only one relevant section for our present theme, namely, Ezekiel 34's use of shepherd imagery. The work is divided into two sections: the first introduces the Targumin and contends for a composition date of the first century using linguistic and contextual analysis; the second is a survey of chapter 34's content, exploring themes of judgment, salvation, redemption, and theocracy. The work also investigates the meturgeman's (targum translator) use of Messianic notions already latent within the Hebrew text. For Pentecostals, this does not come as a surprise. Orthodox Pentecostal doctrine proclaims Jesus as the Lamb slain before the foundations of the earth (Rev. 13:8); the Gospel of John records Jesus as saying Moses spoke of him (Jn. 5:46); and on the road to Emmaus, the Gospel of Luke tells us, "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Lk. 24:26).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the present work, adhering to classical Pentecostal doctrine, is convinced we see Jesus in every dotting of the I and crossing of the T, from Genesis to Revelation. This statement moves us beyond the realm of historical analysis and into theological hermeneutics, a transition the present author is all too happy to make. Though there is merit in pressing the Scriptures using more critical methodology, the present work has been amended to be thoroughly confessional, exploring Targum Jonathan to Ezekiel's Christological application of MT Ezekiel's Messianic pastoral imagery.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Ezekiel, Good Shepherd, Targum, Targum Studies, Targum Jonathan, Ezekiel, Hebrew Bible, Shepherd Imagery*

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## Introduction

"The Lord is Our Shepherd," the axiom, presents the pastoral persistence of a loving God who has proven Himself relentlessly faithful. Those familiar with the Hebrew cannon will be all too aware of the metaphor's dynamic application. The present work focuses on one pericope, surveying the translation of shepherd imagery in Targum Jonathan to Ezekiel (TgJ Ezekiel). Our aim is twofold: one, to introduce the *Targum(in)*<sup>3</sup> to practitioners and undergraduates of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) who may not yet know of their existence; and two, to emphasize the Messianic

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<sup>2</sup> Article 5 of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada Statement of Essential Truths (Amended by General Conference, May 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Targumin (or Targum in the singular)





program of Ezekiel 34. The Targumin have proven significant as an expository tool, particularly when striving to understand a first century context. The present work, therefore, spends the first half introducing the corpus and clarifies common misconceptions regarding their dating. As will be demonstrated, Targum Jonathan to Ezekiel was composed in the first century and functioned as a pedagogical instrument aiding exposition of the Hebrew Bible. Regarding the latter, Ezekiel 34 is Messianic, and the Targum emphasizes this feature with profound lucidity. Though the wording of Ezekiel 34 in TgJ Ezekiel changes, the message is maintained; Messiah is presented as the good shepherd, *par excellence*, emphatically clarifying the Masoretic Text's shepherd imagery. Our analysis of TgJ Ezekiel focuses on divine judgment (vv.1-10); the Lord as Shepherd (vv.17-24); and the eternal covenant of peace (vv.25-31). Through this survey, we get a slight, yet radiant glimpse of Yahweh's sacrificial heart for the sheep of His pasture.

### Introducing the Targumin

Targumin are translations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic using both a *dynamic equivalence* and *formal equivalence* translation philosophy.<sup>4</sup> It is dynamic, in that there are divergences in the receptor language, indicating some creative liberties on the part of the meturgeman (Targum translator). Targumin are also *formal* in that much of the syntax parallels the Masoretic Text (MT) verbatim. Additionally, and most pertinent for our purpose, is the meturgeman's systematic and seamless addition of commentary foreign to the MT. These divergences and additions open a unique line of inquiry into meturgeman theology, worldview, and therefore audience, providing a wealth of knowledge regarding the religious, social, and political setting of Palestine during the Tannaic period.

It is likely that Targumin served a liturgical function, originating in the synagogue, and contributing to the weekly readings from the *Torah* and *Nevi'im*.<sup>5</sup> Within the Cairo Genizah, a group of texts have been discovered known as *serugin* (shorthand), which Michael L. Klein identifies as having "one or several opening words of each verse, or just the first letters of each word from the full text of Onqelos,"<sup>6</sup> thereby suggesting the Targumin functioned as a "mnemonic aid for the Meturgeman during the synagogal Torah readings."<sup>7</sup> This hypothesis offers fruitful implications for understanding layman Messianic expectation in the first century. In sum, the translation of the Tanakh and its weekly application in a communal space—such as the synagogue—indicates a degree of intentionality amongst the community to exposit and communicate their sacred texts into the *lingua franca*. Robert N. Bellah describes language—from an anthropological perspective—as being "effective in forming identity in intimate contexts, in families, it also operates at the level of national identity."<sup>8</sup> The very use of Targumin were therefore an intentional instrument of communicating the message and meaning of the Hebrew scriptures.

Targum scholarship is therefore poised for a vibrant avenue of research—with, however, a word of caution. Martin McNamara notes the Targumin "came to the attention of Christian scholars in the West in the early Renaissance period."<sup>9</sup> He laments, they were primarily used as an anti-Jewish polemic in works such as *Pugio fidei aduersus Mauros et Iudaeos* by Raymundus Martinus (d. 1290).<sup>10</sup> George Foot Moore agrees with McNamara, and notes, "The Targums had a time of being very much overworked by Christian scholars in consequence of the erroneous notion that they antedated the

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<sup>4</sup> Levey, 1975, p. 140

<sup>5</sup> Zetterholm, 2012, p. 93

<sup>6</sup> Targum Onqelos (or Onkelos) is an Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch. Klein, 1994, p. 26

<sup>7</sup> Klein, 1994, p. 26

<sup>8</sup> Bellah, 2011, p. 31

<sup>9</sup> McNamara, 2010, p. 1

<sup>10</sup> McNamara, 2010, p. 1

Christian era; and in particular the Messianic expectations of the Jews in that age were looked for in them.”<sup>11</sup> As is humbly put forward in the present work, I believe McNamara and Moore are mistaken; not on grounds of articulating an anti-Jewish polemic, which is regrettably accurate, but on grounds that Moore has miss-dated Targum Jonathan, and they both fail to identify the Targum's Messianic program.

Targum Jonathan either predates or runs parallel to the first century Jesus movement, making its Messianic notions that much more intriguing, and particularly exciting for any studies addressing the so called ‘the parting of the ways.’ Prominent Talmudist Daniel Boyarin contends that most (if not all) of the first century Jesus movement's ideas and praxis can safely be understood as belonging to second temple Judaism.<sup>12</sup> However, it is still curious why Levey and McNamara characterize TgJ Ezekiel as “exegetically non-Messianic.”<sup>13</sup> I believe this is a mistake. The present work seeks to correct this ‘anti-Jewish’ polemic and add to the robust picture of theocratic Messianism present in TgJ Ezekiel. Though the figure of Jesus *Christ* and/or *Messiah* (the respective Greek and Hebrew terms for the same word) is foundational to Christian doctrine,<sup>14</sup> it should not be overlooked that the very notion of *Messiah* finds its origin in the pre-‘Christian’ era.<sup>15</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins contends this approach “must be taken by those of us who view Jesus as a Jew rather than as the first Christian.”<sup>16</sup> It therefore seems any bias to restrict the research of Messianism in the Targumin are willfully neglecting a rich theocratic Jewish tradition. For example, the rabbis of the Middle Ages interpreted Ezekiel 17:22-24 as messianic; *Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki*, more commonly known as Rashi (d. 1105), in his commentary on Ezekiel, renders this passage “you are the messiah king.”<sup>17</sup> *Rabbi David Kimchi, Radak* (d. 1236), too, claims ‘Jonathan’ (as in Jonathan ben Uzziel, the figure traditionally accredited with the translation of TgJ Ezekiel)<sup>18</sup> understood this passage as being Messianic.<sup>19</sup>

In light of this brief introduction to rabbinic Messianic exegesis, the present work takes the thematically Messianic literature seriously and does not assume a supersessionist, anti-Jewish, eisegetical reading of the Tanakh and Targumin. Rather, I emphatically reject such a mutiny, and it is the present work's aim to access the voice of the meturgeman and respective authors.

### Dating and Development

Dating TgJ Ezekiel is a matter of great controversy, and two methods are commonly employed when attempting to isolate the Targum's composition: linguistic and contextual. The early errors in dating Targum Jonathan and Onqelos can be seen in the monumental work of Emil Schürer's *The History of the Jewish People*.<sup>20</sup> Schürer covers the Targumin in last place, within rabbinical literature, after Talmudic literature and the midrashim.<sup>21</sup> However, in Schürer's defense, he does admit the “works which we now possess were preceded by earlier written sources.”<sup>22</sup> This seems to be a common misconception, and Paul V.M. Flesher laments, historians dating the Targumin generally place their

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<sup>11</sup> Moore, 1962, p. 176

<sup>12</sup> Boyarin, 2012, p. 102

<sup>13</sup> Cathcart, Maher, McNamara, 1990; Levey, 1974, p. 78

<sup>14</sup> Collins, 2010, pp. 2-3

<sup>15</sup> Boyarin, 2012, p. 102

<sup>16</sup> Collins, A., 2011, p. 93

<sup>17</sup> Rashi on Ezekiel 17:22

<sup>18</sup> Megillah 3a 4

<sup>19</sup> Radak on Ezekiel 17:24: “And there are interpretations of this parable about the Messiah, and it also seems to be Jonathan's opinion that he translated, “and I took it from the top of the cedar and I will bring it from the Kingdom of David” (Present author's translation).

<sup>20</sup> Schürer, 1886-1890, p. 158

<sup>21</sup> McNamara, 2010, pp. 2-3

<sup>22</sup> Schürer, 1886-1890, p. 158

composition within the rabbinic period.<sup>23</sup> Kaufman believes the error derives from a number of similarities between the Aramaic of Onqelos and Jonathan, and the Aramaic of the Palestinian Talmud and Midrashim, but clarifying, “it is by no means the same.”<sup>24</sup> Instead of the so called *Galilean Aramaic* of the Palestinian Talmud and Midrashim, Kaufman suggests the Aramaic in Onqelos and Jonathan should be labeled *Jewish Literary Aramaic* (JLA).<sup>25</sup>

Both Flesher and Stephen A. Kaufman contend JLA was in use from 200 BCE to 200 CE in the region of Palestine.<sup>26</sup> The dialect has also been labeled *Middle Aramaic*, terminology used by Edward M. Cook and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, but corresponding to the same period and geography.<sup>27</sup> It is clear a scholarly consensus has formed, with Kaufman, Cook, Moore, Levine, and Flesher all contending both Targum Onqelos and Targum Jonathan were composed in this dialect and period.<sup>28</sup> Some of the distinct features, according to Kaufman, are infinitives *מקטול* (peal) and *מקטלה* (derived stems) changing to *מקטל* and *מקטלה*;<sup>29</sup> note the dropping of waw, and mem changing to aleph. Moreover, Cook demonstrates how Targum Jonathan and Onqelos use forms without the he prefix in a normative function, a series he contends matches that of Qumran.<sup>30</sup> In Middle Aramaic, only Syriac and Hatran use the prefix, and by the time of the Late Aramaic period, it spreads to all dialects.<sup>31</sup> Another distinct feature where Onqelos and Jonathan agree with Qumran Aramaic is in indicative forms, such as prohibitions; for the imperfect, Onqelos and Jonathan align with early Syriac as well, which is not the case for other dialects.<sup>32</sup> Finally, Cook notes both Qumran and Onqelos/Jonathan preserve the long vowel.<sup>33</sup> The agreement between the Targumin and Qumran Aramaic leads Cook to contend both corpuses precede 200 CE.<sup>34</sup> Kaufman notes, “What Qumran does appear to make perfectly clear is that as late as the middle of the first century CE, Qumran-like Aramaic, whatever its origin, served as the literary standard.”<sup>35</sup> In sum, it appears the linguists have agreed, and we can begin our search for the composition of TgJ within the time frame of 200 BCE-200 CE.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Targum terminus a quo***

There are some scholars who attempt to argue for an even earlier Targum *terminus a quo*. Pinkho Churgin contends for a significantly earlier date; his line of argumentation stems from the basic

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<sup>23</sup> Flesher, 2011

<sup>24</sup> Kaufman, 1994, p. 120

<sup>25</sup> Kaufman, 1994, p. 123; Wilcox, 1994, pp. 373–374: Wilcox reference to coins found at Masada, dating to the first Jewish Revolt, which bear the inscription, ‘The Liberation of Zion,’ and a jar with the name ‘Aqavia son of the High Priest H[annia]h,’ which has led Wilcox to postulate the prevalence of JLA amongst a demographic of more prominent social status.

<sup>26</sup> Flesher, 2011, p. 9; Kaufman, 1994, p. 123

<sup>27</sup> Cook, 1994, p. 150; Fitzmyer, 1980, p. 11

<sup>28</sup> Kaufman, 1994, p. 123; Cook, 1994, p. 143; Flesher, 2011, p. 9; Levine, 2005, p. 159; Moore, 1927, p. 174

<sup>29</sup> Kaufman, 1994, p. 129

<sup>30</sup> Cook, 1994, pp. 150–151

<sup>31</sup> Cook, 1994, pp. 150–151

<sup>32</sup> Cook, 1994, p. 152

<sup>33</sup> Cook, 1994, p. 151

<sup>34</sup> Cook, 1994, p. 150

<sup>35</sup> Kaufman, 1994, p. 123

<sup>36</sup> Kaufman, 1994, p. 122: Kaufman writes, “I think that most Aramaists today would assert that Qumran represents literary Aramaic of roughly the turn of the millennium. According to the growing consensus, the primitive basic texts of both Targums Onqelos and Jonathan of the Prophets are supposed to come from Palestine and from the second century CE. Since both of these dialects are obviously earlier.”

consideration of when an Aramaic translation would have been needed in Judaea.<sup>37</sup> Though I agree that Targum production would have started to meet Targum demand, Churgin contends Aramaic became the *lingua franca* of Judaea, not during the exile, but during the Maccabean period.<sup>38</sup> It is difficult to know exactly when this transition took place, but the use of Aramaic Ezra could suggest a date prior to 300 BCE.<sup>39</sup> Even the Aramaic in the Elephantine papyri could suggest a date as early as 495-400 BCE.<sup>40</sup> We also read in Nehemiah 8:8, “So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation [ַׁׁׁׁׁ]. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”<sup>41</sup> Though the evidence at our disposal restricts us to confirm a Targum tradition as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century, we may postulate an earlier proto-Targum might have come into being in the centuries that followed. It seems the tradition of translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic may have had its origins remarkably early in the second temple period. However, any dating of Onqelos/Jonathan earlier than 200 BCE is mere speculation.

Levey agrees with our aforementioned linguists, asserting the terminus a quo was sometime during the Maccabees and can be assigned between 200 and 150 BCE.<sup>42</sup> This argument is further supported by *Leviticus Targum: 4Q156*, from Qumran, consisting of two small fragments from Lev. 16:12-15 and 18-21, which, according to Merino, contains Aramaic from the Hasmonean period and indicates a Targum to the Pentateuch tradition already in the second century BCE.<sup>43</sup> In addition to Targum Leviticus, three fragments of *Targum Job: 4Q157* have been discovered in Cave 4, and a scroll: *11QtgJob*, in Cave 11, indicating a Targum to the Ketuvim may have also existed in the Qumran community.<sup>44</sup> This has led Hengel, Kaufman, Levey, and McNamara to contend the ‘roots’ of Targum Onqelos/Jonathan go back to at least the first century BCE.<sup>45</sup> Cook is slightly more conservative, stating “the present state of Onqelos and Jonathan as representing, by and large, the original text; that is, I make no presupposition in favor of a Proto-Onqelos.”<sup>46</sup> In sum, Cook believes there was no standardized Targum before Onqelos/Jonathan, and believes the copies we currently have are more-or-less originals. And finally, Cook is so sure regarding the current state of paleographic and archeological evidence, he takes the “origin of Onqelos and Jonathan as preceding 200 CE as a given.”<sup>47</sup>

### ***Targum terminus ad quem***

Now that we have established a possible *terminus a quo* of Onqelos/Jonathan, we need to address the *terminus ad quem*. Levey suggests a date sometime after the Arab conquest of Babylonia (640-41 CE),<sup>48</sup> or even during the Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible into Arabic by Saadia Gaon (892-942 CE).<sup>49</sup> To arrive at this assumption, Levey claims to have identified an ‘anti-Islamic’ apologetic in TgJ 2 Samuel 22:32: ַׁׁׁׁׁ (there is no god but Yahweh), contending it is an exact rendering of the

<sup>37</sup> Churgin, 1927, pp. 37-38: Though we agree, that targum production would have been to meet targum demand, Churgin contends Aramaic became the *lingua franca* of Judaea, not during the exile, but during the Maccabean period. This is not clear, and the transition seems to have begun during the exile. For example, Nehemiah 8:8 has Ezra ‘translating’ the Law for the Assembly.

<sup>38</sup> Churgin, 1927, pp. 19-20

<sup>39</sup> Moore, 1927, p. 29; Hengel, 1994, pp. 162–163

<sup>40</sup> Levey, 1971, p. 190

<sup>41</sup> The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, 1989, Ne 8:8

<sup>42</sup> Levey, 1971, p. 190

<sup>43</sup> Merino, 1994, p. 61; Also see Levine, 2005, p. 160

<sup>44</sup> Merino, 1994, p. 61

<sup>45</sup> Hengel, 1994, p. 174; Kaufman, 1994, p. 129; McNamara, 2010, pp. 2-3; Levey, 1971, p. 190

<sup>46</sup> Cook, 1994, p. 150

<sup>47</sup> Cook, 1994, p. 150

<sup>48</sup> Levey, 1971, p. 193

<sup>49</sup> Levey, 1971, p. 193

Arabic *Shahada*: لا إله إلا الله (there is no god but Allah).<sup>50</sup> There are a few problems with this line of argumentation; first, and perhaps most obvious, it is not inconceivable that two semantic languages would develop similar phraseology to express a basic monotheistic confession. The Peshitta, for example, also renders this passage, “Because there is no god besides the Lord”:

ܘܠܐ ܝܠܗ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ  
(*mettūl delayt elāh levad men māryā*)

Furthermore, TgJ 2 Samuel has a textual variant "ו",<sup>52</sup> which subsequently weakens the phonetic parallel between TgJ and the *Shahada*. Levey's argumentation for a *terminus ad quem* in the Gaonic period follows a similar methodology (comparing Gaon's Arabic syntax with that of Onqelos/Jonathan) producing no convincing results.<sup>53</sup> For Cook, the final redaction for Onqelos/Jonathan can be no later than 256 CE, when variant reading traditions from Nehardea ceased to exist.<sup>54</sup> This seems to be the most reasonable proposal. In sum, it may be impossible to assert with empirical certainty when Onqelos/Jonathan emerged from the final hands of redaction. Much depends on the degree to which the translation was revered as sacred or holy. Based on the lack of external historical references beyond the Roman era, and the continuity of linguistic form, we are inclined to agree with Cook and humbly purpose Onqelos/Jonathan remained relatively unchanged since at least 256 CE.

Within this window, TgJ Ezekiel 39:16 offers us a clue as to a possible origin; here the meturgeman renders the MT's גִּבּוֹרֵי (the crowded one) as רֹמֵי (Rome), thereby equating Rome with Gog.<sup>55</sup> This has significant eschatological overtones, implying the meturgeman understood the final eschatological war of Gog and Magog as being with Rome.<sup>56</sup> We therefore cannot purpose a date before Pompey's leadership, when, as Freyne writes, “Jerusalem was made a tributary city and so the Jews, confined within their own borders, received *autonomia* or self-government in accordance with the Roman principle of *libertas*, as was customary for a *civitas stipendaria*.” (63 BCE).<sup>57</sup> However, it is unlikely such an event immediately rendered an association between Rome and Gog. It is indeed possible the relative degree of religious freedom granted under the Roman principle of *libertas* was welcomed when compared to the tyrannical Seleucid rule, or the factious society under the Hasmoneans.

In late 40 BCE, Herod the Great was proclaimed ‘king of the Jews’ by the Roman Senate by motion of Antony and Octavian.<sup>58</sup> Three years later, in the summer of 37 BCE, Antigonus was removed and Herod entered “the possession of his sovereignty.”<sup>59</sup> Roman rule quickly began to mirror its

<sup>50</sup> Levey, 1971, p. 192

<sup>51</sup> Leiden Peshitta (Leiden: Peshitta Institute Leiden, 2008), 2 Sa 22:32. Also see Bruce D. Chilton, *The Glory of Israel: The Theology and Provenience of the Isaiah Targum*, vol. 23, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Sperber, 2004, p. 677

<sup>53</sup> Levey, 1971, p. 193: Levey compares Gaon's translation of Ps. 28:32 to Tg. 2 Sam., saying it is “assertive rather than interrogative, just as the Targum does” (p. 193), a remarkably weak argument. Furthermore, he looks at Is. 11:4b, contending that רַשָּׁיִם (rassī)—which correctly translated means wicked—to be Armilus, writing “the name Armilus is either a disguised or ‘Aramaized form of Romulus” (p. 194). In light of the overwhelming evidence for dating Onqelos/Jonathan to the period corresponding to Middle Aramaic, these arguments fail any critical attestation.

<sup>54</sup> Cook, 1994, p. 150

<sup>55</sup> Ezek. 39:1. Also see Churgin, 1927, p. 28; Ribera, 1996, p. 119

<sup>56</sup> Levey, 1974, p. 86; Churgin, 1927, p. 26

<sup>57</sup> Freyne, 1998, p. 59

<sup>58</sup> Hoehner, 1972, p. 7; Also see Ant. 14.381-385; Bell. 1.282-285

<sup>59</sup> Ant. 14 470-480; Bell. 1 349-352. “The conquest of Jerusalem is conflictingly dated. According to Dio it occurred in the consulship of Claudius and Norbanus in 38 BCE. But according to Josephus it occurred under consulship of Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus in the 185<sup>th</sup> Olympiad on the day of the fast, on which day Pompey had captured Jerusalem twenty-seven years earlier (Jos. Ant. 14.488)” (Hoehner, 1972, p. 7).

forgone Seleucid predecessor, and in 27 BCE emperor Octavian, who called himself *Divus filius*, assumed the title of 'Augustus.'<sup>60</sup>

There was further reason for Jewish discontent under the rule of Herod the Great; in the same year (27 BCE) Octavian assumed the title of Augustus, Herod constructed a temple in the city formally known as Samaria, dedicating it to the cult of the emperor.<sup>61</sup> Josephus tells us there was not a place in the entire kingdom where Herod had not erected something in honour of the emperor.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Herod's use of eagle imagery would have undoubtedly evoked eschatological fervency in a Jewish apocalyptic imagination.<sup>63</sup> It is indeed possible under these increasingly despotic, and in a Jewish religio-political perspective, blasphemous turn of events, warranted an association between Rome and eschatological Gog. It is therefore probable the earliest *terminus a quo* for TgJ Ezekiel is 37 BCE at the 'coronation' of Herod the Great.

In addition to Herod, one other figure may be a candidate for the meturgeman's association of Roman and Gog, namely, emperor Caligula (d. 41 CE).<sup>64</sup> Josephus informs us he demanded the Jews call him 'theos'.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Caligula gave the order to have a statue of himself set up in the Temple, which aroused such an uproar amongst the people that it could have quite possibly turned into a revolt had not he been assassinated.<sup>66</sup> There is little doubt such an event brought back the collective memory of Antiochus' worship of Zeus in the Jerusalem temple,<sup>67</sup> and in January 41 CE, Caligula was finally murdered.<sup>68</sup> We suggest, just as the Qumran designation of 'wicked priest' was used in reference to Seleucid and Hasmonean antagonists, so too was *Rome* employed in TgJ Ezekiel 39:16 to reference the actions prompting Rome's emperor cult in Judaea. This timeline begins to align with the traditional narrative that Targum Jonathan was composed by Jonathan ben Uzziel, the student of the first century Rabbi Hillel who lived under the rule of Herod and Augustus.<sup>69</sup> Linguistically and geopolitically, the

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<sup>60</sup> Hengel, 1976, p. 100

<sup>61</sup> Ant. 15.292, 296; Bell. 1.403

<sup>62</sup> Bell. 1.407

<sup>63</sup> Hengel notes: "The eagle also appears in the Jewish apocalyptic literature of the period as the sign of the imperial rule of Rome (It was a political metaphor even in the Old Testament; see Deut. 28:49; Is 46:11; Jer 48:40; 45:21; Hab 1:8. The text in Habakkuk is interpreted in IQHab 3.8 as applying to the Kittim (that is, to the Romans)...The vision of the eagle in 4 Ezra 11 is more clearly a reference to Rome and it is therefore quite possible that the zealous pious Jews who destroyed this offensive figure and paid for this act with their lives saw in it the symbol of a hated rule and at the very least the intrusion of Hellenistic symbols and conceptions into the sanctuary. The revolt which broke out with elemental violence after Herod's death assumed such dimensions because many Jews saw in the claim of the Roman emperor to rule a threat to the purity of the Jewish faith. It was feared that the bad times of Antiochus Epiphanes might return." (1976, p. 101)

<sup>64</sup> Hengel, 1976, p. 342

<sup>65</sup> Hengel, 1976, p. 101: Ant. 19.284

<sup>66</sup> Hengel, 1976, p. 106: Bell. 2.184-203, Ant. 18.261-309

<sup>67</sup> 2 Macc. 4:23-50; Freyne concludes it was the Menelaus' 'extreme Hellenising' policies which allowed for the worship of Yahweh in the Jerusalem temple to be assimilated to that of the Zeus Olympius cult and the Jewish religious observances outlawed (1998, p. 36); Also see 1 Macc. 1:44-51; 2 Macc. 6:1-5; 13:3-8. Furthermore, M. Stern contends Menelaus was the scapegoat, whose death "appeased the wrath of the Jewish community" (1976, p. 566). After the rule of Seleucus IV Philopator in 175 BCE, Antiochus IV, became the antithesis, par excellence to Jewish theocracy, he marched against Jerusalem in 170-169 BCE and in 167 BCE offered Pagan sacrifices on the temple altar (2 Macc. 6:1-2). 1 Macc. 1:10-15 records the compromise made with Antiochus Epiphanes. Jason the high priest is primarily to blame, and 2 Macc 4:7-22 recounts his hellenistic reforms. Furthermore, this is referenced by the author of Dan. 11:31, where the 'daily sacrifice' was abolished by the setting up of the abomination of desolation. Also see 1 Macc. 1:54 which records this event as happening on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Kislev in 167 BCE (Babota, 2013, p. 61). Furthermore, M. Hengel popularised the notion that much of second temple apocalypticism, including Daniel, was written by the Hasidim (Hengel, Martin. "The Hasidim and the First Climax of Jewish Apocalyptic" in Judaism and Hellenism I, (1974, pp. 175-218). Also see Freyne, 1998, p. 36

<sup>68</sup> Hengel, 1976, p. 342

<sup>69</sup> Churgin, 1927, p. 9

evidence points in this direction, and we therefore are inclined to take the *Bavli* at its word, and actually ascribe authorship to Jonathan ben Uzziel.<sup>70</sup>

### Judgment and Covenantal Fidelity in TgJ Ezekiel 34

Ezekiel prophesied from 593-571 BCE, addressing the Babylonian exilarch under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar II.<sup>71</sup> At first glance, the book of Ezekiel seems inapproachable, confined by rigorous barriers of judgment and exile. The prophet's prevailing antipathy towards Israel reminds readers of the Hebrew Bible's most foundational component: Israel cut covenant with a holy and just God who requires covenantal maintenance.<sup>72</sup> It is therefore in Ezekiel's most poignant proclamations that we see slight, yet radiant, glimmers of hope—emphatically contrasted by the judgment in which they emerge. Ezekiel is therefore empathetic, considering himself as a prophet *amongst* the people in plight, using the phrase בְּתוֹכָם (in the midst) one-hundred and sixteen times, significantly more than any other author of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>73</sup> The book is ultimately optimistic, extending the promise of a perfect kingdom, thereby comforting those in exile.

#### *Condemnation of Israel's Shepherds (vv. 1-10)*

Ezekiel 34 begins with Yahweh's condemnation of the 'shepherds' of Israel who have led the people astray (v.2). For Collins, the reference is likely to the priestly authority during the exile.<sup>74</sup> No doubt, the Targumist may also have second temple priests in mind as well. The meturgeman first changes the MT's 'shepherd' (v.2) to 'leaders;' in fact, the pastoral metaphor is clarified by *leader* throughout the entire chapter. Ezekiel poignantly articulates the coming destruction of Israel's leadership, judgment that will entail the desolation of Jerusalem. The section aligns with the macro narrative of Ezekiel, particularly chapter 21. As Block writes, "[Ezekiel] hereby envisions the imminent fall of Jerusalem, an event in which no Messiah shall interfere. Ezekiel has taken an ancient word, on which his audience had staked their hopes, and transformed it into a frightening prediction of doom."<sup>75</sup> This 'ancient' word, according to Block, is Ezekiel 21:27 (HB Eze. 21:32): עַד-כִּי-בֹא אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ הַמִּשְׁפָּט (until he comes whose right it is),<sup>76</sup> which he contends is a terse reference to Gen. 49:10: עַד כִּי-יָבֹא שִׁילֹה (until Shiloh (tribute/peace) comes to him).<sup>77</sup> For Block, Ezekiel's use of Genesis 49:10 is "not about tribute and subordination of the world to Judah, but the judgement of Judah by the world's principal representative."<sup>78</sup> This 'judgment' is a common theme in the apocalyptic corpus, and can be seen in other contexts, such as MT Ezekiel's use of הַצְפִּירָה (thread, wreath; decline, end, doom) in Ezek. 7:7.<sup>79</sup> Similar phraseology appears in MT Isaiah 28:5: לְעֹטֶרֶת צְבִי וְלַצְפִּירֵת תִּפְאֶרֶת (garland of glory, and a diadem of beauty).<sup>80</sup> In TgJ Isaiah, the meturgeman explicitly translates this passage messianically: "In that *time the Messiah* of the LORD of hosts will be a *diadem* of joy and a *crown* of praise, to the remnant of his people."<sup>81</sup> Whereas in TgJ Ezekiel, the meturgeman translates the passage theocratically: "*The*

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<sup>70</sup> Megillah 3a 4

<sup>71</sup> Zimmerli, 1979, p. 11

<sup>72</sup> Ribera, 1996, p. 115

<sup>73</sup> Cooper, 1994, p. 29

<sup>74</sup> Collins, 2015, p. 46

<sup>75</sup> Block, 1995, p. 170

<sup>76</sup> Ezek. 21:27 (MT v.32)

<sup>77</sup> Gen. 49:10

<sup>78</sup> Block, 1995, p. 170

<sup>79</sup> The meaning of Hebrew is uncertain (NRSV, 1989: Ezek. 7:7)

<sup>80</sup> Is. 28:5 (NRSV, 1989)

<sup>81</sup> The Aramaic Bible: The Isaiah Targum, trans. Bruce D. Chilton, vol. 11, 1990. Is 28:5

*Kingdom has been revealed* to you O inhabitant of the land! The time of misfortune has arrived, the day of tumultuous confusion is near, and there is no *escaping* to the mountain *strongholds*.<sup>82</sup>

There seems to be a parallel between Ezekiel's הַצְפִּירָה (MT: diadem/doom) becoming אֲתִגְלִיאַת מְלִכּוּתָא (TgJ: the kingdom is revealed) and Isaiah's וְלִצְפִירָתָא (MT: diadem/crown) becoming לְכִלְיֵל דְּחַדְוֵנָא ([messianic] wedding crown of joy).<sup>83</sup> The English rendering of these terms, at first glance, appear in complete juxtaposition; however, in second temple Judaism, this does not seem to be the case, 'The day of the Lord' was seen as the coming of perfect justice, and regularly employed through the metaphorical use of matrimony.<sup>84</sup> Divine wrath and divine salvation are therefore two sides of the same coin. For the meturgeman, 'The Day of Yahweh' is grounds for rendering the synonym, 'the kingdom has been revealed to you' (also TgJ Ezek 7:10).<sup>85</sup> Flesher and Chilton contend these passages in Isaiah 28 and Ezekiel 7 suggest we are dealing with a consistent theology of messianic and eschatological judgment.<sup>86</sup> Walther Zimmerli, too, agrees that Ezekiel 7 is referencing 'The Day of the Lord' (יום יהוה) as found in Amos 5:18-20.<sup>87</sup> For Collins, the destruction of the earth in Ezekiel is viewed as punishment for a breach of covenant.<sup>88</sup> In both Ezekiel of the exile, and TgJ Ezekiel, the author/redactor/translator is responding to the subjugation of Israel by foreign nations. Collins poignantly sums up the geo-political struggle:

Perhaps at this point in the history of Israel and Judah it had become apparent that the threat to a small nation in the ancient Near East was not confined to any one empire. If Egypt did not dominate, then Assyria would, or Babylon, or Persia. Greece and Rome would later be added to the list. So, increasingly in postexilic prophecy, the call is for judgment not on any one nation but on all the nations.<sup>89</sup>

It is in the context of judgment upon the nation state that the Targum's theocratic expectation comes to the fore. The meturgeman realizes the meta narrative of their collective memory and forecasts an eschatological theocracy that will subjugate all nations with perfect justice, mercy, and grace.

In TgJ Ezekiel 34, The first theocratic specification comes in v.8: 'for all the animals of the field'<sup>90</sup> becomes 'all the kingdoms of the earth.' The metaphor is therefore both clarified and retained; the antecedent, 'prey' is preserved by the Targum, and the translation (kingdom for animals) is repeated once more in v.28. The desolation of the people is therefore the result of poor and greedy leadership (vv.2-3), and Yahweh is inclined to offer redemption through Himself as The Faithful Shepherd (vv.11-16). Since the sheep have been scattered (v.5), Yahweh will hold the leadership accountable (v.10). Yahweh promises to look after the sheep and search for the lost members (v.10). The imagery employed is King David, the shepherd of Israel (v.23); but here too, the poet may have in mind factions from the northern and southern kingdoms of Judah and Israel.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>82</sup> The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of Ezekiel, trans. Samson H. Levey, 1990, Eze 7:7

<sup>83</sup> חַדְוֵנָא may be rendered 'joy' or 'wedding party' See: LS2 K. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms 1982. J. M. Jastrow, *A dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic literature*. New York: Judaica Press, 1989.

<sup>84</sup> Is. 54:5-6; Jer. 33:10-11; Hos. 2:16

<sup>85</sup> The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of Ezekiel, trans. Samson H. Levey, 1990; Also see Levey, 1974, p. 58

<sup>86</sup> Flesher & Chilton, 2011, p. 214

<sup>87</sup> Zimmerli, 1979, p. 201

<sup>88</sup> Collins, 2015, p. 46

<sup>89</sup> Collins, 2015, p. 46

<sup>90</sup> HB Ezek. 34:8 (present authors translation)

<sup>91</sup> Ribera, 1996, p. 111: "The Hebrew expression 'the house of Israel' is normally retained in the Targum of Ezekiel. In one case it is rendered by 'children of Israel' (Tg. Ezek. 3:4) and in another one 'rebellious house' is replaced by 'rebellious people' (3:27). Likewise, the phrase 'sons of Israel' is generally retained. When the MT repeats the



### ***The Lord Becomes the Shepherd (vv. 11-16)***

Justice requires grace, mercy, and judgment; Israel and Judah's wayward shepherds are therefore judged and replaced. The process may be described as covenantal maintenance, in that Yahweh has not forgotten His promise, and is faithful to His people. The extent of Yahweh's faithful determination is presented with profound clarity in the Targum's translation of Ezekiel 16:6:

MT Ezekiel 16:6

I passed by you, and saw you flailing about in your blood. As you lay in your blood, I said to you, 'Live!'<sup>92</sup>

TgJ Ezekiel 16:6

*And the memory of the covenant of your forefathers came in before Me, so I revealed Myself in order to redeem you, for it was revealed before Me that you were oppressed by your servitude and I said to you, By the blood of the circumcision I will have pity [spare] on you; and I said to you: By the blood of the Passover lamb(s)<sup>93</sup> will I redeem you.<sup>94</sup>*

There are several interesting changes and additions on the part of the meturgeman; first, is the imagery of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15:18), a ritual no doubt soaked in blood (Gen. 15:9-10). But as Israel has failed to maintain covenantal fidelity (Ezek 34:6), the meturgeman depicts Yahweh as implementing covenantal maintenance. It is by the 'blood of the circumcision' (בְּדַמַּת מְהוּלָה) that Yahweh has 'pity' (חַוָּה)—which also may be rendered 'spare'<sup>95</sup>—on Israel. The imagery is further drawing on the Exodus narrative, referencing the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:1-7).<sup>96</sup> McNamara notes the Targum's rendering of MT's 'in your blood live' is referring to the blood of the covenant of circumcision, which 'evokes God's mercy;' and 'the blood of the 'Passover sacrifice,' evokes God's redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage.<sup>97</sup> In sum, McNamara concludes, "Thus circumcision and the Passover are linked together into a bond of love and compassion, which makes God's involvement in the redemptive process inevitable."<sup>98</sup>

The phraseology of verse 16:6, "so I revealed Myself in order to redeem you," seems to imply a connection with the preemptive promise mentioned in 34:11, "Behold, I am about to reveal Myself." It is precisely in the revelation of God that Israel and Judah are given a righteous leader. The text may also be a terse reference to Isaiah 65:1, "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'"<sup>99</sup> These themes no doubt parallel much of New Testament writings, John's Gospel Prologue and Paul's Colossi Christology immediately come to mind.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, there seems to be an implicit soteriological Christology on the part of the meturgeman which becomes particularly ludic in verse 13, "I will provide" (v.13). The promise is again reiterated in verse 14, "I will provide... with good provision;

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word 'house' ('the house of Israel', 'the rebellious house', Ezek. 12:9) Targum Ezekiel usually replaces the second word with 'people'. On a number of occasions, however, Targum Ezekiel adds to or changes the MT by inserting the expression 'the house of Israel' (Tg. Ezek. 17:4)."

<sup>92</sup> Eze. 16:6 (NRSV, 1989)

<sup>93</sup> All other versions have sing., "lamb." (The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of Ezekiel, trans. Samson H. Levey, vol. 13 (The Liturgical Press, 1990), Eze 16:6.)

<sup>94</sup> The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of Ezekiel, trans. Samson H. Levey, vol. 13 (The Liturgical Press, 1990), Eze 16:6.

<sup>95</sup> Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, Targum Lexicon (Hebrew Union College, 2004)

<sup>96</sup> Ribera, 1996, p. 114

<sup>97</sup> Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds., The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of Ezekiel, trans. Samson H. Levey, vol. 13 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), Eze 16:6

<sup>98</sup> Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds., The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of Ezekiel, trans. Samson H. Levey, vol. 13 (1990), Eze 16:6.

<sup>99</sup> Isaiah 65:1, NIV 1984

<sup>100</sup> See John 1:1-18; Col. 1:15-23

and on the *holy* mountain.” The Targum’s clarification of the *holy* mountain, which is to host Yahweh’s redemptive provision, is no doubt a reference to Mount Moriah,<sup>101</sup> bringing the reader to recall the Akedah of Genesis 22; however, in the case of TgJ Ezekiel, the sacrifice is not Isaac, or the temple sacrificial cult, but one who is to come from David.

### ***The Davidic Messiah (vv. 17-24)***

In the opening verses of 34:17-24, Yahweh is depicted as reiterating the coming judgment on the wayward shepherds. It is precisely because of the leadership’s greed that Yahweh is to “reveal himself” (v. 20), it is therefore the *revelation* of Yahweh that both judgment and redemption are brought to fruition; He promises to “judge *between the rich man and the poor man*” (v. 20b), because the people have been “*oppressed with wickedness and force*” (v.21). It is in this context of divine judgment that Yahweh is said to “redeem My people” (v.22a). The meturgeman has therefore brought the reader to the climax of his presentation and introduces the medium of both salvation and judgment: “My servant David; he shall provide for them and he shall be their leader. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David shall be king among them. I, the Lord, have decreed it by My Memra” (vv.23-24). Salvation is therefore promised to come through the Messianic office of David, making the monarchical promise both apocalyptic and theocratic.

The establishment of Yahweh’s servant, David as king, in general, has no difference in TgJ’s use of David when compared to the MT’s. Walther Zimmerli has produced one of the most comprehensive and critical studies of MT Ezekiel and identifies this passage as Messianic.<sup>102</sup> The meaning in TgJ is therefore not changed but strengthened. One significant example of this is the meturgeman’s translation of MT’s נָשִׂיאַ (prince) to מְלֶכָה (king),<sup>103</sup> emphasising the Targum’s Messianic program. Alinda Damsma notes verses 34:23-24 (and 37:24-15) “does justice to the Messianic message of the Hebrew Vorlage. All the Messianic features are preserved within TgJ’s conventions.”<sup>104</sup> The shepherd metaphor therefore builds on a rich literary tradition already present in the Tanakh, as Block writes, “Ezekiel’s identification of the divinely installed king as David is based on a long-standing prophetic tradition.”<sup>105</sup> 1 Sam. 16:11-13 informs us when Samuel the seer arrived at the house of Jesse, to anoint David as king, David was tending the flocks in the field; furthermore, Psalm 78:70-71 speaks of David as God’s chosen shepherd, imagery which presents an eschatological kingdom during a time of desperate tumult, projecting the hope of an apocalyptic kingdom into the future. The Lord’s anointed, therefore, does not refer to a temporal leader/shepherd, but an eschatological and apocalyptic figure.

### ***The Covenant of Peace (vv. 25-31)***

The closing remarks of chapter 34 are optimistically eschatological. Verse 25, coming on the heels of the Davidic promise, introduces an enteral covenant of peace that Yahweh Himself is to cut. The reference may also bring Numbers 25 to mind, where Phinehas kills Zimri, the Israelite man, and Cozbi, the Midianite woman, subsequently receiving a “covenant of peace” (v.12). It is through Phinehas’ actions—purging the land of those who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor—that the plague is stopped. In the subsequent verse, the covenant of peace is clarified as a “covenant of perpetual priesthood” (v.13). The theme of priest as mediator between wrath and salvation, or plague

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<sup>101</sup> 2 Chron. 3; Gen. 22

<sup>102</sup> Zimmerli, 1979, p. 368

<sup>103</sup> Ezek. 34:23

<sup>104</sup> Damsma, 2012, p. 529

<sup>105</sup> Block, 1995, p. 173

and peace, is a theme found elsewhere within the book of Numbers.<sup>106</sup> The priestly role of administering a sacrifice in the covenantal process has already been referenced in Ezekiel 16:60, presenting a consistent theme of atonement throughout the work.<sup>107</sup> However, it is clear, the soteriological application of covenantal fidelity is administered by Yahweh and not the priestly authority. The actions of Phinehas, therefore, becomes a typological antecedent for a true and better sacrifice to come, one that will not only stop the current plague, but render death defeated forever, ushering in a true and eternal covenant of peace.

### *The House of Israel*

In verse 34:31 the meturgeman inserts the phrase, בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (the house of Israel). There seems to be no obvious grounds for this translation, the only other change is the continued use of עַם (people) instead of the MT's צֹאֲנֵי (sheep). McNamara believes the meturgeman may be implying that Israel is the personification of Adam, of humanity.<sup>108</sup> Though I do not wish to discredit McNamara's theory, it may also be possible the eschatological nature of Ezekiel's theocratic program envisions a restoration of the twelve tribes as was the case under the Davidic dynasty.<sup>109</sup> It seems the historic monarch is again portrayed in a typological manor, providing metaphorical language to describe a future apocalyptic theocracy. The theme is vividly presented using stick imagery in chapter 37, depicting the unification of Judah and Ephraim immediately following the resurrection of the dry bones. It therefore seems the text employs a longing for Ephraim (or Israel) to return and complete the unified eternal monarch. In both TgJ Ezekiel, and the MT, Israel is the focus, with יִשְׂרָאֵל (Israel) appearing no less than 176 times in the MT,<sup>110</sup> and 134 times in TgJ Ezekiel.<sup>111</sup> This is a stark contrast when compared to the mere 13 appearances of יהודה (Judah) in the MT,<sup>112</sup> and the 15 in TgJ Ezekiel.<sup>113</sup> This parallels a similar Ephraimite emphasis in Jeremiah 31, where Yahweh is depicted as longing for Ephraim, His 'first born son.'<sup>114</sup> In 931 BCE, the Davidic dynasty was divided between the north and the south,<sup>115</sup> and in 722 BCE, Assyria

<sup>106</sup> Num. 16:46-50; Num. 21:4-9

<sup>107</sup> Zimmerli, 1988, p. 220

<sup>108</sup> McNamara, 1990

<sup>109</sup> 2 Sam. 5:1-5

<sup>110</sup> MT Ezek. 2:3; 3:1, 4, 5, 7, 17; 4:3, 4, 5, 13; 5:4; 6:2, 3, 5; 7:2; 8:4, 6, 10, 11, 12; 9:3, 8, 9; 10:19, 20; 11:5, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 22; 12:6, 9, 10, 19, 22, 24, 27; 13:2, 4, 5, 9, 16; 14:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11; 17:2, 23; 18:2, 6, 15, 25, 29, 30, 31; 19:1, 9; 20:1, 3, 13, 27, 30, 31, 38, 39, 40, 42, 44; 21:7, 8, 17, 30; 22:6, 18; 24:21, 25:3, 6, 14; 27:17; 28:24, 25; 29:6, 16, 21; 33:10, 11, 20, 24, 28; 34:2, 13, 14, 30; 35:5, 12, 15; 36:1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 17, 21, 22, 32, 37; 37:11, 12, 16, 19, 21, 22, 28; 38:8, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19; 39:2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 22, 23, 25, 29; 40:2, 4, 2, 7, 10; 44:2, 6, 9, 10, 12, 15, 22; 45:6, 8, 9, 15, 17; 47:13, 18, 21, 22; 48:11, 19, 29, 31

<sup>111</sup> TgJ Ezek. 1:25; 2:3, 10; 3:1, 4, 5, 7, 17; 4:3, 4, 5, 13; 5:4; 6:2, 3, 5, 11; 8:6, 10, 11, 12; 9:9; 11:5, 15; 12:6, 9, 10, 24, 27; 13:4, 5, 9; 14:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11; 17:2, 4, 24; 18:6, 15, 25, 29, 30, 31; 19:1, 9; 20:1, 3, 13, 27, 30, 31, 39, 40, 44; 21:15, 17; 22:6, 18; 24:21; 25:14; 28:24, 25; 29:6, 16, 21; 33:7, 10, 11, 20, 28; 34:2, 13, 14, 30, 31; 35:5, 15; 36:1, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17, 21, 22, 32, 37, 38; 37:11, 16, 19, 21, 28; 38:14, 16, 17; 39:2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 23, 25, 29; 40:4; 43:7, 10; 44:6, 9, 10, 12, 15, 22; 45:6, 8, 9, 17; 47:22; 48:11

<sup>112</sup> MT Ezek. 4:6; 8:1, 17; 21:25; 25:3, 8, 12; 27:17; 37:19; 48:7, 8, 22, 31

<sup>113</sup> TgJ Ezek. 1:1; 4:6; 8:1, 17; 21:15, 18, 25; 25:3, 8, 12; 27:17, 48:7, 8, 22, 31

<sup>114</sup> Jer. 31: 9b. Also see Jer. 31:10, 16, 18; Also see 31:31 for the new covenant bestowed on Judah and Israel.

<sup>115</sup> Block, 1995, p. 178: "Ezekiel's interest is not in creating 'a single piece of wood' (עץ אחד), from two pieces (עצים), but 'a single nation' (גוי אחד), from two nations (גוים שני), v. 22a). The preference for the term גוי over עַם ('people') is deliberate. The latter, a warm relational term, with undertones of kinship, would have been appropriate in another context, but here the concern is the restoration of Israel as a nation, which requires the use of גוי. Given prevailing ancient Near Eastern perceptions, by affirming Israel's ethnic, territorial, political, and spiritual integrity Ezekiel paints a remarkably comprehensive picture of a mature nation. Ezekiel stresses the restoration of Israel's political integrity by announcing the reversal of 931 BCE, when a single people had de facto become two nations.

desolated Ephraim, making the hope of a restored Davidic dynasty unattainable.<sup>116</sup> The recollection of this event—the judgment for Ephraim's rebellion—is seen in the book of Hosea, *par excellence*. Ephraim is mentioned in Hosea no less than 37 times, and Judah 15.<sup>117</sup> Certainly, the division of the Davidic Kingdom was a traumatic event in Israelite collective memory, a tragedy compounded by the Babylonian exile, and later, Roman occupation. It seems the seer of Ezekiel, and subsequently the meturgeman of TgJ Ezekiel, envisioned a restored, redeemed, and united eschatological theocracy.

God is therefore depicted as not only longing for a restoration of the Davidic dynasty, but of Ephraim's return and redemption. The anthropomorphism attributed to Yahweh is that of a father grieving the loss of his first-born son (Jer. 31:9). Ezekiel 34 therefore demonstrates God's heart, not only for the restoration of nations, but of the individual. One cannot help but be reminded of the parable of the Prodigal Sons (Lk. 15:11-32), or the parable of the Lost Sheep (Mt. 18:10-14), knowing the heart of God is consistently depicted as a good shepherd and loving father, longing for the destitute to be redeemed.

### Conclusion

In sum, the dating of Targum Jonathan to Ezekiel, and its Messianic program, provides a window into first-century theocratic, Messianic, and apocalyptic expectation. As we have seen through linguistic and contextual analysis, TgJ Ezekiel was most likely composed sometime in the middle of the first-century CE. The meturgeman's use of Ezekiel 34's shepherd imagery clarifies the Hebrew text, emphasizing meaning while altering syntax and vocabulary. The chapter depicts Yahweh as judge, redeemer, and restorer, granting both apocalyptic and eschatological hope that the God who shepherded David will continue to shepherd His people until He finally appears in glory. Ezekiel 34 also becomes a pedagogical instrument, instructing readers on the qualities of what makes a shepherd/leader good. As we have seen, this implies covenantal maintenance in the form of justice, grace, and mercy; sacrificial atonement; provision of perfect, anointed leadership; and the restoration of the wayward individual and the nation-state, both of which are promised to be perfected in the apocalyptic, eschatological, Kingdom of God—The eternal covenant of peace offered in the person of Jesus.

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<sup>116</sup> 2 Kg. 17:6

<sup>117</sup> For reference to Ephraim, see : Hs. 4:17; 5:3, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14; 6:4, 10; 7:1, 8, 11; 8:9, 11; 9:3, 8, 11, 13, 16; 10:6, 11; 11:3, 8, 9, 12; 12:1, 8, 14; 13:1, 12: 14:8. For reference to Judah, see 1:1, 7, 11; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 14; 6:4, 11; 8:14; 10:11; 11:12; 12:2

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## *The Shepherd in No Man's Land: Psalm 23 and Early Pentecostal Pacifism*



Dryden Demchuk<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *Though the global Pentecostal movement is not associated with pacifism or nonviolence in the contemporary era, many key Pentecostal leaders at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century expressed strong pacifist views. This paper traces the origin of these views and argues that pacifism was a necessary result of the early Pentecostal worldview for two reasons: First, the early Pentecostal church saw itself as a restoration of the apostolic movement which provided no room for violence or bloodshed in the Christian life. Second, the early Pentecostal movement saw itself on the brink of an imminent eschaton, which fixed their gaze away from the powers of this world and toward the world to come. The second part of this paper traces the pacifist Pentecostal thought of Arthur Sidney Booth-Clibborn and Frank Bartleman, using Psalm 23 as a scriptural foundation. It will be argued that these early Pentecostal pacifists viewed themselves as sojourners in the valley of the shadow of death, who sought to remain true to the peaceful, sacrificial way of Christ, their shepherd, amidst a world torn apart by violence.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Pentecost, Pentecostalism, Pacifism, Psalm 23, Nonviolence, Early Pentecostalism, Pacifism*

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### **Introduction**

The prevalence of pacifism as an early Pentecostal tenet is demonstrable among the doctrinal statements as well as theological writings of the early (pre-WWII) Pentecostal movement. This paper intends to explore this prevalence, using Psalm 23 as a scriptural basis. In the first part of this paper, it will be shown that pacifism was a necessary consequence of two central features of early Pentecostal theology, namely restorationism and millennialism. The early Pentecostal movement saw itself as a restoration of the apostolic age, which was witnessing an outpouring of God's spirit on the brink of an imminent eschaton. The imminence of Christ's return and the immediacy of his kingdom within Pentecostal thought meant that the devoted Christian could give their life only to the service of Christ himself and could not serve both the violent ways of the world and the peaceful way of Christ. Brief comment will be given regarding the decline of pacifism as a Pentecostal tenet, but this paper does not intend to explain or explore this decline in depth. In the second part of this paper, the pacifist Pentecostal worldview will be exemplified in the writings of two early Pentecostal writers, Arthur Sidney Booth-Clibborn and Frank Bartleman. Psalm 23 will serve as a suitable

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scriptural basis for the pacifist thought of these early Pentecostals, as it will be shown that they viewed the world's devotion to violence as a "valley" through which the faithful Christian ought to follow the sacrificial way of our Shepherd-Lord Christ rather than the violent patterns of our human kingdoms.

## 1. A Brief History of Pentecostal Pacifism

By the dawn of WWII, both the American Assemblies of God (hereafter AOG) and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (hereafter PAOC), the two dominant governing bodies of Pentecostalism in North America, had adopted officially pacifist positions. The PAOC issued their officially pacifist resolution in 1939, declaring their understanding of "the New Testament teaching and principles as prohibiting Christians from shedding blood or taking human life."<sup>2</sup> The PAOC's position, on paper, was opposed merely to the act of taking human life and said nothing of military service or involvement in the war effort in general. The AOG was more resolute in their declaration: "we cannot conscientiously participate in war and armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life, since this is contrary to our view of the clear teachings of the inspired Word of God, which is the sole basis of our faith."<sup>3</sup> Though the PAOC's declaration may have been ambiguous regarding military or wartime service, it is apparent that many early Canadian Pentecostals (prior to WWII) held anti-military convictions, even though Canadian Pentecostals were not given the same conscientious objector status that their American counterparts were. At least one notable story has arisen in this regard, of a young Pentecostal man who perished in Canadian government custody in Winnipeg during WWI because of his conscientious objection to military service.<sup>4</sup> The contrast between this incident during WWI and the lack of military language in the PAOC's 1939 declaration may indicate that the Pentecostal zeal for pacifism, in the Canadian context at least, was already in decline during the interwar years. Though the decline of pacifist ideals is apparent in the histories of the PAOC as well as the AOG, especially during and after WWII, the early (pre-WWII) zeal for pacifism is unmistakable in the writing and preaching of the earliest Pentecostal leaders. Pacifism was not merely an additional component or factor of early Pentecostal ethics but was a necessary consequence of the early Pentecostal worldview and self-identity.<sup>5</sup> It will be shown that two major factors in early Pentecostal theology which brought about pacifism as a necessary consequence were restorationism and millennialism.

### *Early Pentecostal Restorationism*

Early Pentecostals viewed themselves as continuing the ministry and mission of the early church. Amos Yong notes that the early Pentecostal movement was characterized, among other things, by restorationism, "involving the rejection of historical and contemporary religious life in favor of a pragmatic retrieval and reappropriating of 'the' biblical way of life."<sup>6</sup> Early Pentecostal writing features a heavy influence in returning to both the theological content and missional methodology of the apostolic age, and a denouncing of the rise of "Christendom" with the conversion of Constantine.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Pentecostal Movement and War," *The Pentecostal Testimony*, 20, (October 1939), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Bridges, "The Assemblies of God Resolution Against War," (Unpublished essay for *American Pentecostalism*, 1983), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Martin William Mittelstadt, "'Canada's First Martyr': The Suspicious Death of Winnipeg's WWI Pentecostal Conscientious Objector." *Didaskalia* 28 (2018): 129–44.

<sup>5</sup> Jay Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism* (Hillsboro: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1989), 37.

<sup>6</sup> Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 27.

There is great vitriol present in the writings of early Pentecostals towards any notion of a “Christian” nation or Christianity being defined by national identity. Reflecting upon the ongoing first world war which was turning “Christian” nations against each other in war, Pentecostal writer and preacher Frank Bartleman declares that “Christianity has not broken down, but men have failed to be Christian. The civilization of the so-called ‘Christian countries’ has been essentially pagan in all of the relations of nation to nation...”<sup>7</sup> Arthur Sidney Booth-Clibborn, a Pentecostal convert from Quakerism, admonishes the shift in tone in Christianity from the early age of the church to the Constantinianism of later centuries, wherein “Paganism and Christianity became fused.”<sup>8</sup> Bartleman and Booth-Clibborn have both been regarded as highly influential voices in early Pentecostal ideology.<sup>9</sup> Embedded in early Pentecostal worldview is the understanding that Christianity loses its authenticity when fused with worldly political power, and that the early church, pre-Constantine, was a model of authentic loyalty to the kingship of Christ. Loyalty to Christ, in the early Pentecostal view, categorically denied the world’s methods of power, including violence and warfare.

Early Pentecostal ecclesiology was characterized by an emphasis on the church as a Kingdom which is not of this world and therefore may find itself at odds with the kings and rulers of this world, just as the early church found itself in awkward tension with the civil religion of Rome. Writing of the nature of the church, Pentecostal pioneer William J. Seymour immediately defines the church by its relationship to worldly power structures: “A church constitutes a kind of spiritual kingdom in the world, but not of the world; whose king is Christ... its members must ‘submit themselves to governors’...remembering that God’s claims are supreme, and annihilate all claims that contradict or oppose them.”<sup>10</sup> Early Pentecostal ecclesiology understands the church as an institution which removes the human being from loyalty to any external state, nation, or power structures, with individual Christians “being citizens not of any earthly nation, but of the kingdom of God.”<sup>11</sup> Frank Bartleman would go so far as to declare that conversion to Christianity removes the individual from their earthly country and worldly political loyalties in the same way that one would revoke their citizenship in the United States should they move to a new country.<sup>12</sup> The early Pentecostal church saw itself as the successors of early Christianity, and thereby situated the church in a position of irrelevance to worldly power structures and conflicts in much the same way that the early church existed in irrelevance to the wars and struggles of Rome prior to Constantine’s conversion. The church, according to the early Pentecostals, was called to establish the Kingdom of God with Christ as its king, which left no room for individual Christians to be drawn in to nationalistic or patriotic loyalties which would rob Christ of the ultimate allegiance he is due.

### ***Early Pentecostal Eschatology***

The early Pentecostal church saw itself as a restoration of the early church, while simultaneously believing that they were living in the last days of the church. Emphasis was given to prophetic texts such as Joel 2:28, which is quoted by the apostle Peter in Acts 2:

‘In the last days,’ God says,  
‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Bartleman “Is Christian Civilization Breaking Down?,” *Christian Evangel* (February 27, 1915) 3.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Sidney Booth-Clibborn, *Blood against Blood* (London: Headley Brothers, 1907), 44-52.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism.” *Eastern Journal of Practical Theology* 4, no. 2 (1990): 34.

<sup>10</sup> William J. Seymour, *The Doctrines and Disciplines of Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission* by William J. Seymour. Complete Azusa Street Library 7. (MO: Christian Life, 2000), 93.

<sup>11</sup> Joel Shuman, “Pentecost and the End of Patriotism: A Call for the Restoration of Pacifism among Pentecostal Christians.” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9, no. 4 (1996): 75.

<sup>12</sup> Jay Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism* (Hillsboro: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1989), 55.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.' (NIV)

The early Pentecostal church saw itself as part of the movement by which God was pouring out his spirit on all people - a reliving of the apostles' experience in Acts 2 - and thereby saw the world around it as experiencing the last days and sitting on the edge of the eschaton. Historically, it may be observed that the early Pentecostals were living through the preliminary signs of the coming first world war, which fueled their eschatological imaginings. Bartleman wrote more than one extensive analysis on the increasing militarism of the western world - observing increases in military spending, nationalistic rhetoric, and political fervor as warning signs of the world's increasing commitment to violence, bloodshed, and oppression, and thereby signs of Christ's imminent return.<sup>13</sup> Yong notes, among restorationism, that apocalypticism and millennialism featured among the defining features of early Pentecostalism: "involving a resistance to cultural accommodation in favor of emphasis on the world to come."<sup>14</sup> The historical context of the early Pentecostal movement contributed to these apocalyptic tendencies: "The context of the Great War inspired an abundance of apocalyptic interest among these early Pentecostals, and it is apparent that the Apocalypse influenced the early Pentecostals' reaction to World War I."<sup>15</sup> Millennialist eschatology contributed to the existence of pacifism in early Pentecostalism because it placed total emphasis on the eschatological fulfilment of God's kingdom and denied any notion of worldly powers or structures progressing towards the eschaton. In the millennialist framework, the church's present role was to preach the gospel and to exist as a realized example of Christ's eschatological kingdom, which denied the possibility of violence as well as any ultimate allegiance or loyalty to worldly powers.

### ***Decline of Pentecostal Pacifism***

The collective commitment to pacifism that is demonstrable in the early Pentecostal movement can no longer be said to exist. This is demonstrable in the current absence of any clear pacifist resolution the official doctrinal literature of either the PAOC or the AOG. In the Canadian context, the first General Superintendent of the PAOC, George Chambers, was a former Mennonite and therefore a staunch pacifist.<sup>16</sup> The PAOC did not form officially until 1919, during the aftermath of WWI, however, and Chambers seems to have been the last of the PAOC's General Superintendents to promote a strict pacifism.<sup>17</sup> Scholars of the movement have debated why the pacifist leanings seem to have vanished from public Pentecostal discourse. Althouse argues that the primary reason for the shift from pacifism to non-pacifism, at least in the North American context largely lies in the shift from "sect" to "church" experienced by the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostalism's sectarian origins are evident, as Yong has argued, in its apocalyptic and millennial eschatology, as well as in its restorationist ideology.<sup>18</sup> The earliest Pentecostals had not sought to establish their own church but had been driven out of existing church structures and denominational definitions by their beliefs and practices. This sectarian dynamic forged a counter-cultural ethos wherein the wars of the world were seen as wholly irrelevant

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<sup>13</sup> Pipkin, Brian K. And Jay Beaman, ed., *Early Pentecostals on Nonviolence and Social justice: A Reader* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 39-50.

<sup>14</sup> Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> David R. Johnson, "The Mark of the Beast, Reception History, and Early Pentecostal Literature." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 25, (2016): 202

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Butler, "Blessed are the Peacemakers: Canadian Pentecostalism and Military Conflict in the Early Twentieth Century." *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 21, (2020): 74.

<sup>17</sup> Butler, "Blessed are the Peacemakers" 74.

<sup>18</sup> Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 28.

to those whose ultimate allegiance was to the kingdom of God. This is why the earliest Pentecostal writers (ex. Bartleman) spoke prophetically of the underlying economic and political systems of injustice and oppression which guised themselves under patriotic rhetoric during wartime. Althouse suggests that Pentecostalism, since its inception, “has transformed from a sect to a church. The lower-class sect has no use for a war which supports prejudiced social structures, but the upper-class church profits from these social structures, so it is willing to protect them.”<sup>19</sup> The Pentecostal movement gained respect, organization, and social status during the interwar years, and it became apparent, especially in the case of the PAOC, that though the denomination had taken an officially pacifist stance, it was a movement that was capable of attracting believers from a multitude of backgrounds, and that a universal declaration of pacifism was unsustainable, especially in the hazy ethical era of WWII.<sup>20</sup> This explanation is also put forward by Jay Beaman<sup>21</sup> and is developed by a more recent analysis done by Murray W. Dempster.<sup>22</sup> The early Pentecostal movement saw itself as a restoration of the early church. They saw themselves as the spirit-baptized believers who would recover a genuine commitment to Christ as King, in expectation of his return and eschatological reign. This conviction created not only an apathy towards the wars and conflicts of earthly kingdoms, but also a fiery zeal to see the church called away from its post-Constantinian fusion with worldly powers. War and violence were not only irrelevant to the mission of the church, but antithetical to the teachings of the New Testament, according to the PAOC's 1939 declaration, and to the eschatology reality of Christ's kingdom. In the early Pentecostal framework, then, war and violence were simply incompatible with the kingship of Christ and the Christian life.

## 2. Pentecostal Pacifism and Psalm 23

It will now be shown that Psalm 23 provides a suitable scriptural basis for understanding the pacifist views of two key early Pentecostal leaders. These leaders saw the world's times of war and violence as a “valley of the shadow of death” in which we, as followers of Christ, are called to remain faithful to our shepherd-Lord, the prince of peace. The lordship of Christ, in this context, calls us away from the powers of the world which would seek to draw us into the “shadow of death” through the allure of patriotism and nationalism, but Christ, by being both our shepherd-Lord and our sacrificial lamb, provides an example of radical self-sacrifice in the depths of the valley. This section will focus on the writings of two prominent early Pentecostal pacifists: Arthur Sidney Booth-Clibborn and Frank Bartleman.

### *War and the Valley*

Early Pentecostal writers understood war as being a realm of shadow and death, entirely contradictory to the lordship of Christ. This is nowhere more apparent than in *Blood Against Blood*, the pacifist manifesto of Arthur Sidney Booth-Clibborn written at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Writing out of first-hand experience in the Boer War, Booth-Clibborn describes war as a “deepest darkness” in which the church has no business, except insofar as it serves as an example of Christ's peace.<sup>23</sup> The machinations of war, according to Booth-Clibborn, reduce the beloved child of God to a mere cog in a

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<sup>19</sup> Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism.” 40.

<sup>20</sup> Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism.” 41.

<sup>21</sup> Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism*, 107-111.

<sup>22</sup> Murray W. Dempster, “Crossing Borders,” In *Pentecostals and Nonviolence*, ed. Paul Nathan Alexander (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012), 121-143.

<sup>23</sup> Booth-Clibborn, *Blood against Blood*, 24.

machine of death and destruction; the military force of a worldly empire takes the place of God in an individual's life insofar as it demands ultimate allegiance to the point of death. It is impossible, Booth-Clibborn would argue, for the individual to follow both Christ the shepherd-Lord as well as the machinations of a military force insofar as the individual cannot act both for the salvation of their fellow human beings as well as the destruction of their enemy.<sup>24</sup> This highlights one of the chief characteristics of war's ultimate darkness on which Booth-Clibborn reflects; war dehumanizes both the combatant and the civilian. It demands that the combatant take no heed of any commonalities which may exist between them and their enemy; it ultimately defies the call of Christ to love one's enemy and does not permit the individual to recognize God's own image in their opponent. The violence and destruction which Booth-Clibborn witnessed first-hand in the Boer War instilled in him the conviction that the death and darkness of war could not be supported by the radical call to humanity that is represented in Christ; a call that demands that we recognize God's image in the other and do not obey the world's call to ignorant violence in the face of our enemy.

Frank Bartleman, during WWI, declared: "God is not responsible for this awful war. But sin is."<sup>25</sup> Bartleman saw the powers of the world, all equally responsible of various injustices and oppressive behaviors, doing violence upon each other to no positive end. Bartleman argued for the same incompatibility between violence and the Christian life as Booth-Clibborn: "War is contrary to the whole Spirit and teaching of Christ. Any one going into war is bound to lose out. Christ's kingdom is 'not of this world'. If so, 'then would his servants fight.'<sup>26</sup> Bartleman further argued that the death of war is contrary to the death of Christ: "For here is the supreme test of a Christian, to be killed rather than to kill... He [the soldier] can never forget his participation in the war, and his betrayal of the principles of the Christ who died for all men."<sup>27</sup> Though much Christian rhetoric during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century would have glorified the opportunity to go war and fused the patriotic call to military service with Christian ethics, Bartleman saw nothing in war except the shadow of death: "Ask the boys in camp, or on the battlefield. They will tell you it is hell, from end to end. Compare it with the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>28</sup> Bartleman, like Booth-Clibborn, recognized that war was not a place for glorious Christian sacrifice as many of his Christian contemporaries would have argued, but a place of shadow and death – a place where Christ stood as a radical opposite as opposed to a participant. These writers saw the death and violence of warfare as being entirely incompatible with the nature of Christ, who gave his own life as a victim of worldly military power as opposed to participating in and perpetuating the systems of violence which placed him on the cross.

### ***Following the Shepherd in the Valley***

It is important to note that these early Pentecostal writers did not promote blissful ignorance as an alternative to participating in the world's wars. Rather, they promoted a radical path of self-sacrifice as is exemplified by Christ. The call of Christ – the presence of the shepherd in the valley – does not remove the individual from the valley, but it does provide a clear light to follow through the valley's shadows. Bartleman acknowledged that European militarism, for example, needed to be dealt with and could not be ignored, but he did deny that the genuine solution to any of the world's ills could come through violence: "We favor no country. The militarism of Germany must be broken. But it cannot be broken successfully by navalism or a greater militia. That would be changing horses only.

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<sup>24</sup> Booth-Clibborn, *Blood against Blood*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Frank Bartleman, "The European War." In *Early Pentecostals on Nonviolence and Social Justice*, ed. Brian K. Pipkin and Jay Beaman (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Frank Bartleman, "War and the Christian." In *Early Pentecostals on Nonviolence and Social Justice*, ed. Brian K. Pipkin and Jay Beaman (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 121.

<sup>27</sup> Bartleman, "War and the Christian", 123.

<sup>28</sup> Bartleman, "War and the Christian", 121.

The prince of Peace must crush it...Man cannot save himself. The Prince of Peace must do it.”<sup>29</sup> In the pacifist thought of these pioneers of Pentecostalism, war was a valley of the shadow of death from which humanity could not save itself by its own violent means – triumph over the valley required that we follow the peaceful, sacrificial way of Christ, which would not be understood or recognized by a world caught up in its own cycle of violence and injustice.

There is similar nuance in Booth-Clibborn's assessment of military service, as he recalls several anecdotes of servicemen from many different nations who found themselves able to be of service to the wounded and injured in the midst of armed conflict, though they refused to bear arms themselves.<sup>30</sup> These individuals did not flee or seek to ignore the valley, but, in Booth-Clibborn's mind, were able to faithfully follow the shepherd-Lord Christ in the midst of the shadow of death. Booth-Clibborn highlighted the need to *follow* and not just obey Christ, as the sheep would follow the shepherd: “Christ is the Leader and Commander of His people. Note the order of the titles. He leads before He commands. He led the way to Calvary.”<sup>31</sup> The act of Christ on Calvary bore great normative weight in the pacifist thought of these early Pentecostals. Their understanding of Calvary was such that, in allowing himself to be arrested, tortured, and executed by the powers of the world, Christ set an example before us which we disobey if we allow ourselves to slip into violence or bloodshed for any purpose. It is essential to recall that Christ did not flee his accusers either; Christ inhabited death, shadow, and humiliation on the cross, making his power perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). As such, the follower of Christ does not ignore the reality of the shadow of death or cowardly shield themselves from the ills of the world, but they are called, in Bartleman's startling words, “to be killed rather than to kill.”

For both Bartleman and Booth-Clibborn, to recognize the Lord as our Shepherd was also to recognize the shepherd as our only Lord. As such, the peaceful, sacrificial example of Christ required our ultimate allegiance, which left no room for patriotic or nationalistic loyalties to distract us from Christ's path of peace. Booth-Clibborn recognized the allure of patriotism as a seductive yet destructive distraction from the path of Christ: “But the very word patriotism, as used in war, is anti-Christian, for it denies the brotherhood of man, and therefore denies the fatherhood of God.”<sup>32</sup> One might suggest that patriotism, in Booth-Clibborn's argument, competes with the individual's capacity to belong to the “flock” of our shepherd-Lord insofar as it creates boundaries and borders among God's children. Patriotism and national pride divide the family of God and create separations among the flock; they cannot be the work of the shepherd. Both Bartleman and Booth-Clibborn would suggest that we know the work and nature of the shepherd because it is ultimately revealed on the cross wherein Christ took the position not of the shepherd but of the lamb. It is the blood of the sacrificial lamb, Christ, which, as Booth-Clibborn argues, denies the Christian the right to participate in violence or in taking the blood of others: “And are such men, born again of the gentle spirit of Christ, cleansed by the blood of the LAMB to be herded off to the battlefield to kill like wolves?”<sup>33</sup> The Christian, in a time of war, then, stands in the valley of the shadow of death, confident in its allegiance to the shepherd-Lord, and comfortable in its status as a lamb in the midst of wolves; it does not seek to be a wolf itself, because it belongs to the shepherd who has endured death and violence himself in order that the flock may be delivered through the valley.

In denying the place of patriotism or nationalism in the life of the Christian, Bartleman and Booth-Clibborn do not suggest general rebelliousness against the state or nation, but only the proper subjugation of all worldly powers to the lordship of Christ. In this framework, the Christian's civic duty should be obeyed, and harmony should exist between the Christian and the powers of the world,

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<sup>29</sup> Bartleman, “The European War”, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Booth-Clibborn, *Blood against Blood*, 19-21.

<sup>31</sup> Booth-Clibborn, *Blood against Blood*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Booth-Clibborn, *Blood against Blood*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Booth-Clibborn, *Blood against Blood*, 22.

but only insofar as the world powers do not require disobedience to Christ. Bartleman explains: "We are to 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.' But our lives and our souls belong to God...Caesar disputes this ownership with God."<sup>34</sup> Caesar may own a great deal, but upon conversion, Caesar is no longer the Lord we seek to follow through the valley – Caesar seems in fact to be the reason for the valley. This attitude may be said to have arisen out of a general sense of "pilgrimage" among early Pentecostals. This sense of pilgrimage, as has been argued in this paper, came about due to the eschatological reality that the early Pentecostal movement saw itself participating in as a restoration of the Apostolic movement.<sup>35</sup> The early Pentecostal movement saw itself dwelling on the edge between the present age and the next; as genuine citizens of heaven who only temporarily found themselves among a fallen and broken world, eager not to please the forces of shadow and death that currently reign but fixated on the coming Kingdom. In other words, Pentecostals did not expect to be permanent residents of the proverbial valley, but only sojourners, faithfully following their shepherd-Lord through to brighter lands beyond.

As has been argued, Psalm 23 provides a suitable scriptural basis with which we may capture the motives of early Pentecostal pacifists. These early Pentecostals saw themselves as sojourners who "walk" through the valley of the shadow of death, though they refuse to participate in the destruction and violence that they witness around them, regarding it as the result of sin and wholly incompatible with the follower of Christ. Instead, they sought true allegiance to Christ the shepherd-Lord who provided an example of peace, but also of radical self-sacrifice. To follow Christ as shepherd, these early Pentecostals proposed a radical opposition to the violence of the world which did not permit participation within worldly cycles of violence but may still require a radical inhabiting of these "valley" spaces in order that Christ, the shepherd-Lord, may be represented.

## Conclusion

The early Pentecostal movement developed pacifist ideologies for two key reasons. First, it saw itself as a restoration of the Apostolic movement, which required a faith that was unattached to any worldly power structures but was committed to the example of Christ on the cross. This example of Christ overrode any fusion of Christian faith with worldly political power or military might. The early Pentecostal movement was, rather, committed to a pre-Constantine model of Christianity wherein the church's power was embodied in weakness and sacrifice, rather than violence or bloodshed. Second, the early Pentecostal movement saw itself as an embodiment of an imminent eschatological reality. They saw themselves as the Spirit-Baptized believers who, as examples of Christ's coming Kingdom, were living in the end of this age, and had no business in the structures of violence and bloodshed that dominated the twentieth century. These pacifist ideals are embodied in the writings of Arthur Sidney Booth-Clibborn and Frank Bartleman, two early Pentecostal evangelists who fervently dissuaded their fellow believers from fusing their allegiance to Christ with any worldly obligation which created violence, destruction, and death. Psalm 23 has been used as a scriptural basis for Bartleman and Booth-Clibborn's thought, insofar as these writers saw themselves and their movement as sojourners walking through a valley of death and destruction, following the example of Christ, their Lord and shepherd, who modelled the power of peace and self-sacrifice in a world gripped by war.

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<sup>34</sup> Frank Bartleman, "Christian Citizenship," In *Early Pentecostals on Nonviolence and Social Justice*, ed. Brian K. Pipkin and Jay Beaman (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 106.

<sup>35</sup> A close study of Booth-Clibborn's rhetoric in relation to the "pilgrimage" mentality of the early Pentecostal movement has been done by Murray W. Dempster: Murray W. Dempster, "Crossing Borders," In *Pentecostals and Nonviolence*, ed. Paul Nathan Alexander (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012), 121-143.

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# Be A Good Shepherd



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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper shows how God handles bad shepherds. He comes against those who are not listening to His voice. That is why we need to be in line with Him: His voice comes first so that we can filter out all other voices. The shepherds in Israel's time were prophesying peace even though they were headed for destruction because of their sins and because of God's holiness. God is jealous for His flock and watches over what they are being fed.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Prophets, good shepherds, Jeremiah, rebellion, restoration, astray*

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## Introduction

God is not mocked by His own people, no matter their position, God will judge His people that have gone down the crooked path. Even in God's judgment of sin, His grace is always extended prior to judgment. God always looks for the repentance of His people. He does not delight in seeing His sheep lost. However, His holiness calls us to be holy. God will take the covenant that He made with His people seriously. This is shown in Jeremiah 23:1-4, where God judges the shepherds because they have not taken care of the flock. Therefore, God punishes those who do not steward their job as a shepherd.

## Historical Context

The people of Judah find themselves in quite a predicament: they have believed their shepherds that do not care and their prophets who only speak on behalf of themselves. They are headed for exile and judgment because of how they have not followed their covenant with God. This is clearly seen in Jeremiah 23:1-4. Jeremiah is proclaiming that hope can be found through accepting judgment. However, Jeremiah is among stubborn kings and prophets who do not know God through their actions and words (Mangum, 2020).

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## Literary Analysis

Jeremiah 23:1-4 is placed within Jeremiah 21-29 and labeled by Clements (1988) as addressing “the fate of the nation and its institutions” (p. 125). The people of God have been judged throughout Jeremiah’s ministry. Now, in no chronological order, the leaders are being judged. These are prophecies centered around the removal of the Davidic monarchy and the end of the political party in Judah. In verses 1-4, there is a typical chiasmic structure of a, b, c, b, a with God in the middle saying he will take care of those evil shepherds by raising new ones that will take care of His flock (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 325). This will take time, but God in His sovereignty knows when the time is right to raise them up.

There are many questions as to whether this portion of Scripture is poetry or prose (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 342). In examining the passage, it looks to be prose. There seems to be poetic elements throughout the passage which would make sense because of the particular wordplay at work (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 324).

## Detailed Analysis

### *Verse 1*

Jeremiah 23 begins with what evil shepherds have done and what God will do (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 325). The kings of Israel have repeatedly proven to be untrustworthy as leaders. They have failed multiple times and do not cease to fail. The kings are referred to as shepherds here (Huey, 1993, p. 210). The shepherds were accused of being like wild animals, destroying what they were called to protect (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 326). Usually, shepherds are to herd the flock away from wild animals. The shepherd’s task is to guard the sheep by keeping an eye out on the wolves that watch the sheep very carefully, looking for an opportune time to attack (Keller, 1970, p. 103). However, it was the exact opposite for the shepherds who were in charge during this time. They received the “warning” or “woe” as most translations put it. Other translations of the text insert “what sorrow awaits” (NLT) and “are sure to be judged” (NET). These shepherds definitely had it coming for them. They have scattered what belongs to God alone.

Adding to the scattering of God’s people were the “peace prophets” that countered Jeremiah’s prophetic messages of hard truth. Each of the “peace prophets” messages lacked references to what they were saying (Rom-Shiloni, 2018, p. 366). The prophets preached a peace that was not actually present. This was because God’s leaders were in the wrong. Their magical divinations and dreams were what they thought God was saying (Rom-Shiloni, 2018, p. 366). This only encouraged the shepherds of Israel to lead the flock astray. They had gone astray themselves. That is what led to their own destruction. The sheep became scattered and destroyed (Huey, 1993, p. 210). Like God, Jeremiah went against these “peace prophets” whose prophecies were in vain, had illegitimate prophetic traits, and were conjured by their own will (Rom-Shiloni, 2018, p. 366).

### *Verse 2*

The persistent rebellion against God and his human agent Nebuchadnezzar had left God’s people to invasion, capture, siege, and exile (Wright, 2014, p. 243). The Lord is continuing to pronounce judgment on the shepherds. The Lord comes down on them by revealing what He will do. They have not taken care of the flock so they will be taken care of by God (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 326). The words “driven away” (ndh in Hebrew) in verse 3 can mean a variety of things. It can mean to banish, outcast, thrust, scatter, or even seduce (Logos, Lexicon, 2023). The Greek equivalents could be translated as

“exile” or “apostasy” (Logos, 2023). That is undoubtedly very relatable to what God is doing to the shepherds who have scattered His flock. They have a serious accusation against them that deserves retribution. The contrast is clear in verses 2 and 3 between these shepherds that do not care for the flock and God who does care for His flock (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 326). There is typically a contrast between God’s ways and our ways. God is always better in His ways. God still will have mercy though. As Brueggemann points out, the verb “gather” in verse 3 is a precise resolution for the verb “scatter” in verse 2 (Brueggemann, 1998, p. 206).

### **Verse 3**

Finally, some restoration is presented, as is often proclaimed in Jeremiah. “Verse 3 begins a salvific oracle” (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 326). The message of judgment that was rampant in Jeremiah 21-22 is paired with a message of hope and restoration for the future (Thompson, 1980, p. 486). Craigie would agree that it is an entirely positive message that comes in verse 3 after judgment in verses 1 & 2 (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 325). The God of all hope is the one who will initiate this. As Brueggemann puts it, God will act in His divine power to cause a homecoming for His people that have been exiled and scattered (Brueggemann, 1998, p. 206). He will bring the faithful remnant home. The word remnant is named 19 times throughout Jeremiah (Huey, 1993, p. 211). This faithful remnant that God gathers will be shown the blessing of creation and Abraham (Wright, 2014, p. 243).

A conflict between verses 2 and 3 still needs to be addressed. Verse 2 states that the shepherds drove the people away from God, while verse 3 mentions how the Lord drove them away (Huey, 1993, p. 211). It happened simultaneously, it was both/and as it usually is with God. Thompson states that it was both God and shepherds that contributed to being put into exile (Thompson, 1980, p. 488). However, Harrison states that it was primarily bad leadership that caused His people to go into exile (Harrison, 1973, p. 122). I would agree with Huey in saying that it was a combination of both the Lord and His people that led them into captivity. Comparatively, in Jeremiah 21:5, God says that He will fight His own people, and the Babylonians go to fight them (Huey, 1993, p. 211).

### **Verse 4**

In verse 4, Yahweh will no longer have to visit them or take care of them in the negative sense if He has good shepherds that tend the flock as God does (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 325). Good shepherds are crucial to the wealth of the flock; God’s saying is His doing. These new shepherds will actually attend to the flock. The sheepfold will not go astray because of God and these good shepherds. The term “lacking” in verse 4 could mean that the sheep will lack no good thing with the good shepherds (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 325). The sheep can now rest in good pastures because they have good shepherds that are sent by God.

At the end of verse 4, God says that the sheep will no longer fear or panic because they have been rounded up by the shepherd (Jer. 23:4, MSG). Israel has only to rest in God because of the change that He has brought about (Craigie et al, 1991, p. 327). Since God will act, they do not have to live in fear; Judah will be close to Him who is their Good Shepherd through other good shepherds. God has been there before so He will be there again. Amidst the hope of a return to the strong political environment in which the curses of the covenant are not enacted, Judah needs to be cared for properly (Brueggemann, 1998, p. 207). Even in dire and hopeless experiences, God still offers solid hope with every promise that he brings (Brueggemann, 1980, p. 207). This promise is that all the sheep will be numbered by God and not one of them will be lost.

## **Biblical Theology**

There is an abundance of evidence about this topic throughout the Bible. John's and Paul's letters are filled with warnings of false teachings. False teaching is not only speaking but can be exemplified through living. This is exactly what these shepherds were doing. Just as Jesus said woe to the Pharisees so God was saying woe to the kings. Matthew 23:23 states it very clearly "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you, tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." They have neglected the weightier matters! This is exactly what the kings have done in leading the people astray. Jesus also mentions that they are blind guides. They led blindly. In Ezekiel 34:2,8, there are a couple of verses that mention the shepherds not feeding the sheep but feeding themselves. They did not even search for them when they went astray. They are not like God in the garden, asking, "Where are you?" to Adam and Eve who were trying to hide because of their shame. A king is to rule over what His people were doing or make reforms. If they were not doing that, these kings were not doing that. They did not act but left God to judge them through their exile.

## **Application**

The application is twofold: be good shepherds and look to the best shepherd- the righteous branch (Jer. 23:5). These two go hand in hand. It has been said that a healthy shepherd leads healthy sheep. In Jeremiah's case, there were unhealthy kings that were leading the people in unhealthy ways. There were also false prophets that prophesied according to their own will, not God's. This was proven throughout the surrounding context of Jeremiah 23:1-8. Examples like Jeremiah 23:13,25 "They prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray" and "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in my name saying I had a dream, I had a dream." To the king of Judah, he says, "If you do not reform your ways and care for the orphan and widow, then God will make the house a desolation" (Jer. 22:3-5).

For me, I must be a good shepherd I have to first follow the good shepherd. I must examine how I act as a shepherd to know what sheep are being fed. I cannot act like Jehoiakim or Coniah. To be a good shepherd is to see all the areas in which you are lacking as a shepherd and balance them out. In Acts 6, they had to branch out by building a new ministry team to make sure that the orphans and widows got their ration of food. To know the Lord is to do justice. That is God's character. I must check in my heart to see if there is any dishonest gain within my heart (Jer. 22:17). I must do regular checkups with the great physician who knows my all too deceitful heart (Jer. 17:9). I must check if the Lord is saying woe to me. If He is, then I have to make my heart right by repenting to Him. If God is against me, it would be terrible for me to continue that path. As Wright points out, "If our God's against us, then who can stand at all?" (Wright, 2014, p. 246). The first thing I must do as a shepherd is to get close to the Good Shepherd through the reading of His word and the silencing of my deceitful heart. That is the way that the church's leaders will not contribute to scattering the flock of God (Jer. 23:2).

## **Conclusion**

Being a good shepherd is necessary for the flock. We can only be good shepherds when we are following the Good Shepherd. Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd. The kings of Judah needed to rely on God so that they would not lead His people astray. Even if His people are led astray by shepherds, God is still a jealous and redeeming God. He will still have His people in His hand because of His love. Even in the judgment, His lovingkindness is everlasting to His people who have been led astray.

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## Book Reviews



Mather, Hannah R.K. (2020) *The Interpreting Spirit: Spirit, Scripture, and Interpretation in the Renewal Tradition*.

Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications. 262 pages, \$55, ISBN: 9781725273191

The roots of modern Pentecostalism can be traced to the turn of the twentieth century. From the beginning, Pentecostals have been known to stress personal encounters with God through the Holy Spirit, and they are quick to turn to the Scriptures to make sense of, explain, and give direction to such experiences. However, despite describing themselves as being “people of the book,” Pentecostals only began to engage with earnest academic discussions about the process of interpreting Scripture fifty years ago. Since then, scholars from inside and outside the Pentecostal community have explored questions related to Pentecostal hermeneutics.

Still, an important question remains to be settled: “How does the Holy Spirit work to communicate with us as we engage with Scripture?” Hannah R.K. Mather offers an insightful work with this query in mind. Mather brings the contemporary reader up to speed on a conversation that has been ongoing since 1970 between partners connected to the “renewal tradition,” a term that describes global charismatic movements and scholars, not all of whom identify as Pentecostal in an ecclesial sense. In charting the historical progression of this conversation surrounding the Spirit’s role in interpreting Scripture, Mather identifies common and unifying features. The basic uniting emphasis is an intimate relationship with God, which forms us through affects (loves/desires), ethics (actions), and cognition (beliefs) as we interpret Scripture. What makes Mather’s book unique, however, is that it is not simply an evaluation of different interpretive methods, but truly seeks to focus on the Spirit’s role in scriptural interpretation.

After articulating the project’s scope in chapter one, Mather’s next four chapters examine different time spans that contain specific developments in the conversation at hand. The first span is from 1970 to 1989. Here, Mather consults a variety of Evangelical (Arthur Pink), Charismatic (James Jones, Francis Martin), Roman Catholic (Hans Urs von Balthasar), and Pentecostal (Gordon Fee, William Menzies, Howard Ervin, Rickie Moore) scholars in turn. The primary theme from this era is that pneumatic interpretation is holistic, engaging the mind while also requiring intimacy with God.

The next time span is from 1990 to 1999. During these years, “Pentecostal Hermeneutic” became the predominant term for discussion. Perhaps because of this shift, Evangelicals and Charismatics did not continue on with the same vigor as did Pentecostals. Key writers in this phase include Steven Land, Jürgen Moltmann, Kevin Vanhoozer, Jackie David Johns, Cheryl Bridges Johns, and John Christopher Thomas. Through exploring the Spirit’s relationship with Scripture, intimate engagement with Scripture, and the incoming influence of postmodernism on cognitive frameworks, this era’s primary theme is how the Spirit reaches through Scripture and interprets us even as we seek the Spirit’s guidance in interpreting Scripture.

It was between 2000 and 2009 that full-length studies really emerged. According to Mather, the ongoing pursuit of a Pentecostal hermeneutic began to hinder discussions of the Spirit’s role in interpreting Scripture by focusing on cognitive frameworks for interpretation. Evaluating the work of Lee Roy Martin, Kenneth Archer, Frank Machia, Amos Yong, Francis Martin, and others, Mather highlights the continued stress on personal intimacy with God, which is then connected to the impact



upon the community in interpreting Scripture: The Spirit simultaneously communicates through Scripture in a personal and communal fashion.

Further full-length efforts were produced between 2010 and 2018, including works by Chris Green, Jacqueline Grey, Craig Keener, and Jack Levison. This period also yielded collections and colloquies on the subject. Mather presents two dominant schools of thought from this era, the first of which she labels the Regent School, which includes the work of Mark Boda, Jacqueline Grey, Craig Keener, Jack Levison, Kevin Spawn, and Archie Wright. This school of thought is connected to the Regent University School of Divinity in Virginia Beach. The second is the Cleveland School of Thought, named by James K.A. Smith. This thought school includes Cheryl Bridges Johns, Chris Green, Lee Roy Martin, Rickie Moore, John Christopher Thomas, and Robert Wall.

The Regent School gives more consideration to the original location of the text, while also discussing the influence of ethical conduct and pneumatic hindrance on our ability to interpret Scripture. Conversely, the Cleveland School focuses on the contemporary context of the interpreter and the early Pentecostal community, while also engaging the affective and ethical aspects of interpretation. Because of Mather's emphasis on uniting factors across different works, common ground is found between these two schools of thought in their focus on affective and ethical components, the need for an intimate relationship with God, and the development of thought on pneumatic appropriation and pneumatic hindrance. The final chapter serves as a substantial summary and evaluation of the entire conversation from 1970 to the present. Mather testifies to how her own understanding of the Spirit's role in interpreting Scripture gradually progressed throughout the project, predicting that it would continue to unfold beyond its completion.

Mather's work is a wonderful celebration of Pentecostal and Charismatic thought on the Spirit's role in scriptural interpretation, and almost functions as a graduate seminar on the subject. It is rich with footnotes and evaluations of the subject's major works from the past five decades. Undergraduate students who are just beginning to grasp concepts of hermeneutics and scriptural interpretation may find the sheer volume of works discussed in this book, as well as many of the concepts, to be overwhelming. Pastors too may find the academic discussions disengaging. However, this is a valuable resource for those who want to become better acquainted with discussions surrounding the Spirit's role in interpreting Scripture.

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## Book Reviews



Treweek, D. (2023) *The Meaning of Singleness: Retrieving an Eschatological Vision for the Contemporary Church*.

Dover Grove IL: IVP Academic. 279 pages, \$46.99, ISBN: 9781514004852

Singleness and marriage have been presented in many ways in the past. In recent history the idea of singleness has been seen as a negative and as a season of waiting until something better comes—marriage. There have been many books written on relationships but few dig deep into the theology of singleness and even fewer are written by a single Christian. Treweek looks at many aspects of singleness and seeks to, as the subtitle suggests, retrieve a vision of singleness to the church of today. She emphasizes that her book does not look at all the nuances of singleness but primarily “Western, Reformed, and traditionally evangelical in both content and context” (p.4). There are many aspects of singleness that can be addressed so it is critical to narrow in on an aspect of singleness to dig deep.

Treweek gives a theological and historical overview of singleness in the church. Part one looks at the context of singleness: how singleness has been viewed by the church and society as a whole. There is a clear pattern of singleness being the ideal and even the holier option within Church history, then marriage becoming the more favoured lifestyle in more recent history. Part two looks deeper to diagnose singleness. Singleness has been viewed in recent history as an unfulfilled life in many ways. When the church elevated marriage to the preferred and better life choice it diminished singleness and therefore diminished single people by extension. Treweek states that “today’s church increasingly regards marriage as not merely a core component of the happy life but necessary for anthropological and even spiritual fulfillment” (p. 54). This sentiment can lead to the feeling of being devalued if you are a single person.

After diagnosing singleness Treweek spends time retrieving a healthy vision of singleness in part three. She looks at church history, how the Bible views singleness, and finally Christian theology. It is important to look at where we have been before we can look at where we are going. Finally, in part four she ties everything together by defining the meaning of singleness in the church community and mission. Very little of contemporary theology on singleness has been written by single Christians (p. 217) which has led to the devaluing of singleness and has been a disservice to married Christians as well. The final chapter discusses ways that the readers and other researchers can continue the conversation. As stated in the beginning, this is limited to a specific aspect of singleness and does not look at all nuances of singleness.

Treweek gives an extensive look into the history. It is interesting to see how history has, in many senses, favoured the idea of being single, noting a large reason for marriage being placed on a pedestal in more modern days is a desire to reclaim marriage ideal that was not previously there. She is fair to all perspectives she addresses even when she disagrees with them. Overall, it is a very encouraging read for single people and can help people of all relationship statuses to see singleness in a positive way. It is also a great read for married pastors who are searching for some background in singleness. The reader needs to develop application for themselves as it is not clearly laid out for them.





## Book Reviews

Treweek puts it well when she says in her preface “the time has come... for the contemporary evangelical church to retrieve a biblical faithful and pastorally nourishing theology of singleness” for everyone. This book is a great start in the continued conversation on singleness in the church. Singleness is not meant as a time of waiting or hoping for something better but an opportunity. The church needs to support single people in their congregations as much as they support and encourage marriages. This book shows why studying singleness is just as valuable as studying marriage.

### **Reviewed By:**

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