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THE RELEVANCE OF KUYPER AND BAVINCK
TO THE CREATION-EVOLUTION DEBATE

Thiago Silva

Evolution is a challenging subject to consider in light of Scripture and biblical faith, and it is easier for Christians to deny and reject it than to engage in an intelligent dialogue about the topic. There is “a common belief that evolution and religion, Darwinian evolution and Christianity especially, are world pictures that are forever opposed.”¹ A long history of debate among scholars has taken place with the aim of reconciling these worlds.

In the Dutch Neo-Calvinism tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck had to deal with Darwin’s theory. According to Abraham Flipse, “the Netherlands can be regarded as a hotspot in the debate about creation and evolution.”² These two Dutch theologians were forerunners in this debate, and scholars have tried to follow their steps in order to develop a theological and reformed approach to this topic.³

¹ Michael Ruse, “Evolution,” *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, ed. J. Wentzel Vrede van Huyssteen (New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003), 279.

² Abraham C. Flipse, “The Origins of Creationism in the Netherlands: the Evolution Debate among Twentieth-Century Dutch Neo-Calvinists,” *Church History* 81 (2012), 104.

³ See Harry R Boer, “Evolution and Herman Bavinck,” *The Reformed Journal* 37 (1987): 3-4; Flipse, “Origins,” 104-147; George Harinck, “Twin Sisters with a Changing Character: How Neo-Calvinists Dealt with the Modern Discrepancy between Bible and Natural Sciences,” in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: 1700-present*, ed. Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 317-370; Peter S. Heslam, “Faith and Reason: Kuyper, Warfield and the Shaping of the Evangelical Mind,” *Anvil* 15.4 (1998), 299-313; Clarence Menninga, “Critical Reflections on Abraham Kuyper’s *Evolutie*

Kuyper points to all the scientific problems with the theory of Darwin, which he calls naturalistic, mechanistic, and a-teleological; instead, he affirms a providential development of creation according to God's will and intervention.⁴ Bavinck, following Kuyper's steps, also criticizes Darwin's lawless and mechanical theory of evolution, affirming God's guidance and providence in the world.⁵ Contrary to Darwin's theory, Kuyper and Bavinck believe "the divinely ordained telos of creation reveals the import and larger purpose of ongoing development."⁶

In a context influenced by Darwin, where the world is seen as a machine that works and develops by itself, Kuyper and Bavinck emerge not to completely deny the theory of evolution, but to present a world created by God which keeps evolving according to his divine providence. What is the relevance of these two Dutch neo-Calvinists in the debate on creation and evolution for the community of faith today?

In this paper, I will look at Kuyper and Bavinck's works in order to understand how they engaged in the creation-evolution debate of their own day. The purpose of this essay is to show their theological contributions and demonstrate how they can help Christians to develop a reformed and intelligent approach to the debate of creation and evolution instead of blindly denying it.

Address," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33.2 (1998): 435-443; J. C. Rullmann, W. F. A. Winckel, and Steve Van Der Weele, *Abraham Kuyper on Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Youth and Calvinism Group, 1950); Rob P. W. Visser, "Dutch Calvinists and Darwinism, 1900-1960," in van der Meer, *Nature and Scripture*, 293-315.

⁴ Flipse, "Origins," 111.

⁵ Flipse, "Origins," 112.

⁶ Vincent Bacote, "Common Grace and 'Spiritual' Stewardship: Guidance for Development?" *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24 (2003): 84.

Kuyper and Bavinck on Evolution

Rob Visser affirms that “the leading Calvinist theologians Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck provided the community of Dutch Calvinists in the beginning of the twentieth century with new perspectives on Darwin’s theory.”⁷ It is true that they opposed all naturalistic and materialistic versions of evolutionary thinking, but it is also true that, “Kuyper and Bavinck’s criticism did not lead them to an automatic repudiation of everything that was related to Darwinism as their nineteenth-century predecessors had done.”⁸ They opposed Darwin’s theory, but not evolution itself. We now look at each one of these two Dutch theologians to understand how they approach the issue of evolution.

Kuyper’s Arguments against Darwin’s Theory

Kuyper begins by saying that Darwin’s theory of evolution and Christianity are two opposite worldviews with different perspectives. He states, “the Christian religion and the theory of evolution are two mutually exclusive systems.”⁹ And he believes that, “if the theory of evolution is true, then all that mankind has thus far imagined, thought and pondered, and believed, is a lie. Then the Tree of Knowledge, on whose fruits we have lived thus far, must be eradicated root and branch. Then the most absolute nihilism must be applied to the world-and-life view current till now” (E 15). In Kuyper’s words, “Evolution is a newly conceived system, a

⁷ Rob P. W. Visser, “Dutch Calvinists and Darwinism, 1900-1960,” *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 295.

⁸ Visser, *Dutch Calvinists and Darwinism*, 295.

⁹ Abraham Kuyper, “Evolution,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (April, 1996): 15. Future citations are indicated parenthetically in the text (e.g., E 15).

newly established theory, a newly formed dogma, a newly emerged faith, which, embracing and dominating all of life, is diametrically opposed to the Christian faith” (49-50).

Kuyper is not criticizing the theory of evolution in itself, but he is arguing against Darwin’s perspective of evolution, which he calls a dogma. He says, “this dogma in principle denies all preformation, that is, the governance of a plan over the budding of life. Unfolding is an organic idea, but the dogma of evolution tolerates nothing but mechanistic action, from beginning to end” (E 16). And Kuyper goes on to conclude that, “the dogma of evolution knows of no spirit that forms, drives, or dominates. In this dogma the natural event is the only conceivable motive, and all that we honor as spirit is never anything other than a chance product or an arbitrary result” (16).

For the Dutch theologian, the main problem in Darwin’s theory is that natural selection is seen as “the only driving force of evolution” (E 36). Kuyper affirms:

It is self-evident that the theory of evolution cannot proceed from a created group of Monera, from which, by selection, cytodetes and nuclei gradually evolved as protists and whatever has gradually been constructed from them. For then the starting point would remain a mystery and the gap between the inorganic and the organic world would be absolute. Evolution, therefore, must take the position that the most primitive living organisms came into existence by chemical processes from eggwhite-like carbon combinations, or, if you will, that life came forth from the lifeless by chemical means. Countless attempts have been made to bring that discovery of all discoveries to light, but without exception they terminated in a wretched fiasco, so that the entire structure continues to lack a foundation. (37)

In his view, there is no sustained evidence that the universe formed and evolved mechanically by itself. He says, “the catacombs of the fossil world refused to furnish what they were required to give in order to support the system” (38). Kuyper raises some questions concerning Darwin’s theory: “What is the cosmos? Is it a precipitation of the spirit, or is it a sublimation of the material atoms? Must all higher organized life be pulled down to the spheres of the lower inorganic life, or must all lower existence be subsumed under the higher?” (40).

Kuyper critiques this lawless and mechanic development of the world proposed by Darwin. He says that Darwin’s theory of evolution is not only atheistic, but it is anti-theistic, because “the moral world order, the moral law that governs us, the sense of duty that binds us to that law, and the Holy One who gives us the law, fall away, and with these basic ideas we lose the correlated ideas of sin, guilt, and repentance, and the corresponding ideas of redemption and atonement.” Darwin’s theory of evolution can never produce an ethical development, but only an “accidental result of uncontrolled adaptations” (E 44). And according to Kuyper, the existence of “a spiritual Being that exists independently of the material world is death to the theory of evolution” (45). In the end, “our combined resistance to that system of the aimlessly and mechanistically constructed cosmos must be expressed. We must not merely defend ourselves against it, but attack it” (49-50).

In all of this, Kuyper does not argue against the process of evolution itself but with Darwin’s lawless and mechanic perspective. For him, “the question whether religion, as such, permits a spontaneous unfolding of the species in organic life from the cytochrome or the nuclear cell, is an entirely different question” (E 47). Belief in evolution does not need to carry an atheistic worldview. If one believes that God is the great Architect of the world, s/he need not decide how

he will create all things. “Therefore if it had pleased God not to create the species but to have one species emerge from another, through the medium of enabling a preceding species to produce a higher following species, creation would still be no less miraculous” (47). This view is completely different from the evolution of Darwinism, because “then the world would not have constructed itself mechanistically, but God would have constructed it by the use of elements that He himself had prepared” (47).

Kuyper’s Approach to Evolution

After a stand against Darwin’s naturalistic and atheistic theory, Kuyper argues that it is possible to have a theistic view of evolution. There is a big difference between “a divine evolutionistic creation from the Darwinian theory. Evolutionistic creation presupposes a God who first prepares the plan and then omnipotently executes it; Darwinism teaches a mechanistic origin of things, which excludes all plan or specifications or purpose” (48). For Kuyper, “all humanity stems from one ancestor, but from its very beginning it was destined to be sent forth in a variety of directions along different roads... In the unity of the kingdom of God diversity is not lost but all the more sharply defined.”¹⁰

Kuyper believes that there is no need to deny the theory of evolution. It is possible to affirm evolution with a theistic and biblical worldview in which God is the Creator. Scripture states, “Then God said, ‘Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.’ And it was so” (Gen. 1:11). And again: “‘Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the crea-

¹⁰ Abraham Kuyper, “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life,” *A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 35.

tures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.’ And it was so” (Genesis 1:24). Neither of these passages rules out evolution. Evolution is part of how God works; it is God’s ongoing and dynamic method of creating things.

According to Kuyper, “the scriptural document of Creation eliminates, rather than commending, the dramatic entry of new beings” (E 49). Although there are some points of contact between Darwin’s theory and a theistic belief in evolution, Christians should be aware that these two theories remain “unimpaired and irreconcilable. Man is and remains created after God’s image, and it is not the nature of the beast that has determined our human being, but contrarily, the entire lower cosmos is paradigmatically determined by the central position of man” (49). Creation develops, not naturalistically and mechanically, as Darwin believes, but according to God’s will and providence. That is the main difference between Kuyper’s and Darwin’s views.

In summary, against Darwinian evolution in which the strong conquer the weaker, Kuyper clings to Christ, “who seeks the lost and has mercy on the weak” (E 50). Against the lawless mechanisms of evolution, Kuyper puts his faith in God who created and continues to work all things according to his will. Against natural selection, which “seeks the species and neglects the individual” (50), Kuyper relies on God’s election.

Bavinck’s Arguments Against Darwin’s Theory

Bavinck follows Kuyper’s steps and begins criticizing Darwin’s theory by saying that

Darwin’s theory of development has provided the necessary means to make this process of the eternal becoming intelligible in the material world. Thus with the

change of the century there has been gradually a new world-view arisen which undertakes to interpret not merely the inanimate but also the animate creations, not merely the unconscious but also the conscious, and all this without exception independently of God, and only and alone from an immanent self-development.¹¹

For Bavinck, the word evolution “acquires the meaning of unfolding, dispersing, opening, and is used of a garment that is unfolded, of a scroll that is opened. Furthermore, it acquires the meaning of treating a subject that has to be unfolded orderly and gradually.”¹² Something must exist in order to evolve or unfold. Only in the eighteenth century was the word evolution “applied to the real becoming, the becoming of things in nature” (ERSS 105). And becoming comes from the being, not as an accidental and mechanical process, but as “guided from the beginning in a certain direction” (ERSS 106).

After Darwin, evolution received a totally different meaning, and according to Bavinck, the system proposed by Darwin is understood, first of all, in the sense of descent, where “humans originated from animals, animals from plants, plants from cells, cells from inorganic matter. All that is higher derives from what is lower” (ERSS 109). Second, what causes evolution comes from a mechanical and chemical nature. And third, “there is no room for an essence and nature of things, nor is there a plan and a goal in the process of development” (ERSS 109). Everything is accidental.

Bavinck considers Darwin’s theory a new worldview to-

¹¹ Herman Bavinck, “Creation or Development?” *Methodist Review* 83 (1901): 850. Future citations cited parenthetically (e.g., CD 850).

¹² Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres, (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Academic, 2008): 105. Future citations cited parenthetically (ERSS 105).

tally against God. For him, “the system of the development theory offers no room for a plan or a purpose” (CD 866). It is “the irreligious over against the Christian, the atheistic over against the theistic, the mechanical over against the organic, or as it has been named, the world-view of development over against that of creation” (CD 852). They are two extremely different and opposed systems, and for this reason Bavinck says, “It is our purpose to compare these two world-views at three points, as the questions are put after the origin, essence, and end of all things, in order that the comparison may establish us the more firmly in the Christian faith and may gird us with strength for the conflict which, in lesser or greater measures of fierceness, awaits us all” (CD 852).

For Bavinck, Darwin’s theory displaces God’s providence, because “evolution is the eternal law, which governs and directs everything that exists” (CD 854). He explains Darwin’s theory with these words:

By all sorts of evolutions the earth forms itself into a fit dwelling place for living things. First there is the inanimate, the formation of seas and lands, of mountains and streams, of minerals and layers of earth. Then matter organizes itself ever along finer lines and the operations of force become ever more intricate, until at length under favorable circumstances from inorganic matter the cell originates, which is the bearer of life. And when it is once again come, then in the course of centuries there develop themselves the kingdoms of plants and animals, in ever higher formation, richer variety, and greater numbers. There is no deep, broad chasm between the animate and the inanimate, but a gradual transition. There is only a more intricate construction, finer organization, a higher development. Along the same way at length man arrives upon the scene. (CD 854-55)

However, according to Bavinck, no one has ever demonstrated where, when, and how the animals became men. In history, animals have always been animals and humans have always been humans. Bavinck says, “The descendance theory of Darwin may be an indispensable link in the doctrine of development; it finds no support in facts. Man always has and still does form a distinct species in the world of creatures” (CD 859).

Thus, Darwin’s mechanical and naturalistic worldview fails to account for the origin, the essence, and the end of things (ERSS 111). Darwin’s theory “is more a matter of wishing and believing than of knowing. It is not proved by the facts, but demanded by the system” (ERSS 116). For Bavinck, “not only in biology and anthropology but also in inorganic nature we will not find our way without an almighty and omnipresent power by which God sustains and governs all things” (ERSS 116). Together with Kuyper and the biblical tradition, Bavinck raises his voice against this naturalistic view of the world, affirming that there is a God who is the Creator of heaven and earth and who calls all things into being.

Bavinck’s Approach to Evolution

Yet Bavinck also believes, as Kuyper does, that it is possible to have a theistic view of evolution, different from Darwin’s view. He says, “development does not stand over against creation, but is only possible upon its foundation and belongs to its confession” (CD 866). According to Bavinck, “development is given an opportunity only when by almighty creation existence is given to beings who by way of organic growth must become what in germ and principle they already are” (CD 866). For him, “evolution is organic and teleological, and for that reason it has a progres-

sive character” (ERSS 106).

Development has to do with thoughts, purposes, and law, thus it needs to follow the doctrine of creation. Evolution cannot produce anything of itself because it is only a form of motion, so it finds its place in the doctrine of creation. As Bavinck says, “development stands between origin and end; under God’s providence it leads from the first to the last and unfolds all the riches of being and of life to which God gave existence” (CD 866). Therefore, everything created by God was created with a nature, and lives after its law. For Bavinck, God is “the source of all being, the origin of all life and light, and the overflowing fountain of all good, who exhibits his virtues in the world and fills it with his glories” (CD 867). Such a theory of evolution is vastly different from that of Darwin.

Bavinck says, “Christianity did not replace or dispute this idea of development but took it over and enriched it” (ERSS 106), because everything happens according to God’s thought, plan, and purpose. Scripture presents creation and humanity as a story of “development that proceeds from a certain point and moves toward a specific goal, progressing toward the absolute ideal, toward true being, toward eternal life” (ERSS 107). Christianity does not offer an objection to the notion of development or evolution, but as Bavinck says, “it is creation alone that makes such evolution possible.”¹³

For Bavinck, Darwin’s theory fails to explain the development of organic entities by natural means. In his words,

Scripture, on the one hand, recognizes the truth that inheres in evolution when it has plants and animals come forth from the earth at God’s command (Gen. 1:11, 20, 24). On the other hand, however, it says that the earth

¹³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004): 513.

could only bring forth these organic entities by a word of divine omnipotence, and that these organic entities existed side by side from the beginning as distinct species, each with its own nature (Gen. 1:11, 21).¹⁴

Furthermore, “that evolution exists, provided it is not limited to mechanical motion and chemical connections and division, is after all proved throughout the history of peoples and humanity by every organism that comes into being and perishes... Provided that evolution is not understood in a mechanical sense, there is, therefore, no antithesis between creation and development” (ERSS 117). Development implies a plan and a law, directions and goals, and “for that reason it can only receive its full due on the basis of creation, which grants the world its being and which at bottom and in principle is what it has to become... There is becoming only if and because there is being” (ERSS 118). As Bavinck states, “the theory of evolution forces us to return to creation as Scripture presents it to us.”¹⁵

Conclusion

For Kuyper, Darwin’s theory of evolution is a struggle for life where the weak must be destroyed and the strong must conquer in order to reach a higher development. It is a mechanical and naturalistic worldview. For Bavinck, in Darwin’s theory lacks purpose for the individual, for humanity, and for the earth. According to these two Dutch theologians, Darwin’s theory of evolution is drastically opposed to God and Christianity. As Clarence Menninga affirms, “the basic foundation for our human moral behavior is found in our responsibility toward God, our Creator, and in our God-ordained responsibility toward our fellow humans and the rest

¹⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 517.

¹⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 520.

of creation.”¹⁶ Darwin’s theory leaves no place for that.

Although Kuyper and Bavinck deny and fight against Darwin’s theory of evolution, they do not deny evolution of a sort. In God’s creation there is place for development according to the will and providence of the Creator. The difference between the Christian and Darwinian worldviews is this: in the Christian worldview there is a Creator who ordains and governs all creation; animals have always been animals, plants have always been plants and humans have always been humans, each one developing according to God’s plan and purpose throughout history.

Kuyper and Bavinck promote thoughtful engagement in the creation-evolution debate. Christians are to bring a biblical worldview to bear in many areas of society, including science and culture. There are many Christians today who quickly oppose not only Darwin’s theory but also everything relating to evolution. In doing so, they may be throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Kuyper and Bavinck open the door for Christians involvement in scientific debates by saying that there is no need to deny evolution itself, because if God is the Creator, he can sustain and govern his creation by means of evolution. God’s creation is an ongoing and dynamic creation because God is dynamic and creative.

Kuyper and Bavinck demonstrate how to develop a reformed and an intelligent approach to the debate of creation and evolution, instead of quickly and blindly denying it. They teach that there is room for evolution in God’s providential development of his creation in the Christian worldview, while still opposing Darwin’s naturalistic, lawless, and mechanical theory of evolution.

¹⁶ Menninga, “Critical Reflections,” 436.

HEBREW WORD STUDIES

The following word studies were presented during Fall 2015 intensives by the students of Hebrew 301-D, taught by Sarah Schreiber. In addition to technical observations, these studies also include pastoral applications and prayers which rightly draw out the connection between “academics” and ministry.

אָרֶץ – earth, land, territory

The word אָרֶץ is used over 2,500 times in the Old Testament with a range of meaning that spans both figurative heights and literal depths and can be grouped into five main categories. The first way that it is used in the Bible is in the cosmological (or cosmic) sense. “God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1)—meaning literally everything. Here earth and heaven mark all that is. It is also used in this cosmic sense when God is described as “Creator of heaven and earth” in Gen 14:19, or when heaven and earth are called as witnesses (Isa 1:2; Deut 30:19, 31:28).

אָרֶץ can also be understood to delineate territory or a region like the “land of Egypt,” “land east of the Jordan,” or “land of Canaan.” It is also translated as “territory” as in the *‘erets* of Gad. *‘Erets* can also be defined in relationship to a person or group like “land of your fathers,” “land of their possession,” or “land of captivity.”

Another use of אָרֶץ is to mean simply the ground. The ground is the place that produces plants, crops, and abundance as in Gen 1:11, “let the earth put forth/sprout vegetation,” or else can be unfruitful, dry, and weary (e.g., Ps 63:2). It may also refer to the ground under one’s feet, plowed ground, the place where blood can fall, or where mourners sit (Job 2:13).

The word *‘erets* is also used when describing the under-

world or netherworld as in the “depths of the earth” or even “land of forgetfulness” or when the dead are said to go “down into the earth.”

The last category is the theological where land is shown as belonging to God—as when the land of Canaan is called the land of Yahweh. Or in Leviticus 25 where God’s promises and blessing regarding the land can only be properly understood if God is the owner of the land. Israel was a “landed” people. God’s blessing included land, physical ground, territory and it is all His.

Let’s go back to that opening line in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” and dig just a little deeper into what it tells us. As stated above, here *‘erets* is used in the cosmic sense. That means this opening line is not saying that God merely created the sky and the ground, but that God created everything (heavens and earth). He created all that is, including all that you see and don’t see (Gen 1:1, *The Message*). Genesis 1:1 does not say “this is *how* God created the planets and animals.” No, in order to rightly understand the universe and our place in it, we need to hear, that in the beginning, God created everything. He stands outside of the creation and it is he who did the creating and therefore it is his. This is reiterated in Psalm 24, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” It is with this understanding, then, that we read the rest of the Bible. Without this correctly placed first step, understanding the rest will be much more difficult.

This beginning phrase in a way also sets the stage for all the other 2500 uses of the word אֶרֶץ throughout the OT. I am not saying that they are all referring back specifically to Genesis 1 or its meaning. But what gets lost in the English translation is the fact that it is the same word (אֶרֶץ) that is used throughout the OT. We lose this visual echo when we translate a single word in Hebrew with different words like

land, territory, ground, and earth. Just the mere fact of this visual repetition echoes Genesis 1:1, reminding the reader ever so slightly that God created the heavens and the earth, עָרַץ. God calls עָרַץ to produce vegetation, he promises Israel blessing on עָרַץ when they love the Lord God and serve him with all their heart and soul (Deut 11:13). And in Isaiah 65:17 it is promised a new heaven and new עָרַץ. The echo even makes its way to the New Testament in John 3:16, that God so loves the cosmos, understood as the universe, all creation or “the heavens and the earth” that he sends his only Son into this creation to redeem all who believe. Understanding this opening line as describing the cosmic action of God sets the foundation for all that comes next in the creation and redemption story. It is the foundation.

Robb Keizer

עָרַץ – to create

I still remember my Pastor’s words ringing in my ears as I contemplated coming to seminary in the spring of 2014. “Kathy, maybe just start with a class or two, see how you like it.” Concern filled him as a father for his daughter. He continued on, “It’s just that, well, once you dive into all of this, you can’t go back again. The innocence of your child-like faith can no longer be.” Those words rang true while taking Intersections of Faith and Science this past summer. I will never look at Genesis 1 and 2 the same again; my Sunday school faith will no longer sustain me.

While that science course shook my basic understanding of how God brought all things into being, the study of the word עָרַץ in the Hebrew once again shakes all that we can understand about our God. Learning about this word brings great joy to understanding how Almighty our Creator God truly is.

While I was excited to have chosen a word that I could

easily pronounce, **אָרַץ** has a greater meaning than originally meets the eye. While it translates into words like creating, shaping, forming and transforming, the power in it is that it is used exclusively for the way in which God fashions something new and pristine.

The word “create” works so well here because when we use that word, we think of an artist or a potter creating or sculpting something beautiful by the work of their hands. Art Prize just finished here in Grand Rapids and previous statistics show that over 400,000 visitors come to Grand Rapids in 19 days to see the artwork on display. People use words like “masterpiece” or “a work of art” as they wander the streets of Grand Rapids. These words are reserved for works that are awe inspiring.

So, too, the biblical writers reserved this word exclusively for divine creation. We only see this word 48 times in the Old Testament—in the basic stem some 38 times, and in the passive stem ten times, mostly in the exilic period and later on. Already in Genesis 1:1, we read, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God is creating the majestic universe and all that is in it—good and perfect.

Later on, we see it used again as God is establishing his people Israel. Isaiah 43:15 reads, “I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.” Here God is reserving a people of his own, the descendants of Abraham.

A third way we see **אָרַץ** used is when God is transforming a quality in someone and making it new. Isaiah 65:17-18 reads, “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.” The prophet Isaiah uses these words for the people to remind them of what God *has* done and what he *will* do.

What is striking in this last passage is that God does not just reserve **אָרַץ** for a former, perfect creation but also in-

cludes his broken, sinful people in this word. We, even today in our brokenness, are part of the masterpiece he has created. His divine creation will one day be renewed. He calls all that he has created, including us, his בְּרֵא and he is coming once again to transform all that he has created. While many times in our seminary life and in the years to come afterwards we may feel less than worthy to be wearing the sandals of one who proclaims God's Word, we can be reminded in this word that we are set apart exclusively to be a part of his divine creation. And so we pray:

Lord, at times, these sandals on our feet feel so clumsy. They don't seem to fit right. We grow weary of wearing them. They may feel tight and we start to doubt if they belong on our feet. But, we know that you have established us as your people and it is your renewing and transforming work that is creating something new within us. Remind us day by day Lord, in your Holy Name. Amen.

Kathy Vana

בְּרֵית – covenant

The word בְּרֵית appears over 280 times in the Old Testament. In nearly all of these instances the word signifies an agreement of some kind struck between two parties. We see in a number of passages the idea of a partnership or treaty established between two men or groups of men. Perhaps the most significant usage of the word arises from its usage as a covenant between God and his people. Here the word comes to us in the form of a divine promise, often signed and sealed in some way.

While the origin of the word is somewhat unclear, there are parallels to be found in contemporary dialects that imply the covenant idea is part of its original meaning. One of the ways we find בְּרֵית used is in conjunction with the Hebrew word meaning “to cut.” Much like we might say in modern

times “cut a deal,” the usage could be simply idiomatic. However, when we look at the various passages in which this particular construct is used we can see examples where physical signs were present to signify the establishment of the covenant. One of the best examples of this is found in Genesis 15. Abram is struggling with the idea that he will really someday possess the land that God has promised him. God commands him to take three animals (a cow, a goat, and a ram) and cut them in half. That night Abram witnesses a smoking pot and a torch passing between the halves of the animals. It appears from the text that it was through this sacrifice and the passing between the halves that the covenant was sealed.

God had already spoken his promise to Abram; an oath to bless him and be his God had already been established. The ceremonial act of the sacrifice and subsequent passing between served as a symbol of the deal being struck between the two parties. The ceremonial aspect of covenant making also has its parallels in the cultures surrounding the early Hebrew people. We can see from these examples that *how* these covenants were made was almost as important as *what* they signified. These were not empty promises just made on a whim, but a serious contract being entered into by both parties. Covenants require something to be given up, something to be sacrificed. For Abram and the Hebrew people we know the sign of the covenant was to be circumcision. Since covenants are sealed by both parties, what can we say about God’s end of the bargain? God is truly steadfast and His love endures forever. God will never, can never go back on His part of the covenant, and indeed see that time and again in the OT. God goes on to establish more covenants with Moses and David. In Jeremiah He establishes the New Covenant with Israel. He has pledged Himself to be the God of Israel for all eternity, despite their shortcomings. Traditionally, when one party breaks a covenant it renders the

whole null and void, yet God continues to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel, and ultimately our God.

Norm Underland

גֵר\גַר - stranger, to sojourn

You've seen the footage of the flimsy rafts crowded with Syrian refugees, floating onto European beaches. You know the faces, dirty, tear-stained, wide-eyed. It's these faces I picture when I think of the Hebrew word *ger*.

Ger, a noun used about 90 times in the Old Testament, is translated variously as *foreigner*, *alien*, *resident alien* or *resident foreigner*, *sojourner*, *one residing outside his native land*, even once or twice as *immigrant* (Mal 3:5, NET) and *hired help* (Ex 23:12, NET). I will focus on the noun *ger*, but the related verb, *gur*, is used also about 90 times and is translated as *dwell*, *sojourn*, *abide*, *reside*, *stay*, *live*. *Ger* is never translated “refugee,”¹ but the plight of refugees today is consistent with the biblical understanding of *ger*. A *ger* is someone from another place who sojourns in a foreign land, i.e., dwells there for a while. One may become a sojourner due to famine (e.g., Jacob's family, Elijah, Ruth's in-laws), military encounters, a preference for the nomadic life (see Jer 35:7; or think of Abram, called by God to become a *ger* [Gen 23:4]), or individual distress and bloodguilt (e.g., Moses). Clearly, not every *ger* is imbued with the same pathos as a Syrian refugee, but the fact remains that because *gerim* live among non-relatives, they rely wholly on hospitality for status and privileges.²

D. Kellermann says that a *ger* could be thought of as a

¹ The actual Hebrew word for refugee, used only a couple of dozen times in the OT, connotes more the sense of “fugitive” and “escapee.”

² *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 443 (hereafter in text as TDOT 443).

“protected citizen,” one who occupies an intermediate position between a native and a foreigner. Many references to *ger* are in the Books of the Law (especially Leviticus and Deuteronomy), which clarify first of all that a *ger* is to be given protection and respect. Often grouped together with the poor and needy and/or orphans and widows, *gerim* are not to be oppressed. Conversely, a *ger* is also expected to adhere to Jewish law. Many of God’s commands stipulate specific behaviour for everyone—“whether a native citizen or a *ger*”—and list strict consequences for disobedience. In short, a *ger* is to be treated fairly, included in Jewish community life and expectations. *Ger* also occurs frequently in prophetic books, especially Ezekiel and Jeremiah. These references are primarily in the context of judgment: Israel has been oppressing the *ger* and for this reason, among others, will be punished.

What has become most meaningful for me as I reflect on this Hebrew word is a phrase used in Ex 23:9, *nephesh hagger* (נֶפֶשׁ הַגֵּר), the soul of a stranger. “You shall not oppress a *ger*, since you yourselves know *nephesh hagger*, for you *also* were *gerim* in the land of Egypt.” Or hear the word of the Lord in Lev 19:33-34: “When a *ger* resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The *ger* who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God” (NRSV). You know what it feels like; you have the soul of a stranger! Mary Donovan Turner calls us to reflect on times when we were new to a city, a church, a country; when language and customs were unfamiliar or not understandable; when life seemed risky or hard or lonely. “Out of the memories of these experiences, hospitality is born,” she writes.³

Our hospitality towards the *ger* must arise out of more than specific memories as an outsider, however. Our very

³ Mary Donovan Turner, *Old Testament Words*, 41.

posture as created beings means that we know *nephesh hagger*. After the Israelites have brought forward precious materials for the temple, David addresses the Lord: “But who am I and who are my people, that we should be in a position to contribute this much? Indeed, everything comes from you, and we have simply given back to you what is yours. For we are *gerim* and nomads in your presence, like all our ancestors; our days are like a shadow on the earth, without security” (1 Chronicles 29:14-15).⁴

Turner shares that according to Jewish rabbis, Job had doors on all four sides of his house, so that the poor and those travelling could enter his home from any direction. In another rabbinic story, Abraham’s hospitality is praised further, because he goes out to find prospective guests. When thanked for his hospitality, he says simply that he has given his guests that which belongs to God, not to himself. Let us, too, remember that we have *nephesh hagger*, hold loosely to what God has given and, whether thinking of Syrian refugees, newcomers to our church, or neighbors on the street, seek out ways to love them as we love ourselves.

Creator God, everything we have is yours, and we dwell here on earth as your permanent guests (Psalm 61:4, NET). Help us to live with nephesh hagger, the soul of a stranger, reaching out to extend your hospitality and grace to all around us. Amen.

Cara DeHaan

נָטָה - to miss (a mark); to wrong, offend, sin, be culpable, to bear the loss; to cleanse from sin, purify, make a sin offering

We can only take comfort in a relationship with God if we

⁴ Cf. Leviticus 25:23. As he outlines the requirements of the Year of Jubilee, God reminds his people that they all are *gerim*: “the land belongs to me, for you are *gerim* and sojourners with me.”

understand the depth of our sinful condition and how we are freed from it. Sin (חטא) is a persistent theme throughout Scripture.

The Hebrew word for sin carries a variety of meanings, but the most common explanation of חטא is that it means “to miss the mark.” That, of course, implies that there is a mark to begin with. The mark we continually fall short of is God’s law that requires us to love him above all others and to love others as ourselves (cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord’s Day 2).

But sin is not only a matter of missing the mark. For that might leave room to suggest that humans naturally harbor good intentions to hit the mark, but just need a little help to do so. No, sin at its core is always ultimately about an offense to God. This sense of offense is captured when חטא is translated as “do wrong,” “err,” “offend,” “indict,” etc. And the way in which חטא is judged, the way in which the mark is hit, is the story of how our relationship to God is made right.

Psalm 51, a psalm of lament written by David after his sinful acts involving Bathsheba, contains several of the different facets of meaning and context surrounding the word חטא. We can get some sense of the nuances involved with חטא by looking at related words in the psalm. In the 19 verses of the psalm, the word “sin” or a related word is used about 15 times. In the opening verses of the psalm, for example, David cries out to God to blot out his *transgressions* (פשע), wash him from *iniquity* (עון) and cleanse him from his *sins* (חטאת). In verse 4 David acknowledges that his *evil* (רע) is ultimately an offense to God, that he *sinned* (חטא) against God and God alone. And in verse 5 David describes his natural fallen condition by stating, “Behold, I was brought forth in *iniquity* (עוה) and in *sin* (חטא) did my mother conceive me.”

As good Protestants, and especially as Reformed types,

most of us are very familiar with the word sin and the concept of sin; it is essentially the first petal on the tulip, after all. Our recognition of sin unfolds our understanding of the gospel, and rightly so.

Although חטא is most often identified with our human failings, there is still something embedded in the word that is powerfully redemptive. In other contexts, the word is also translated into English as “bear the blame,” “cleanse,” “bear the loss,” and “purify.” And here, interestingly, in Psalm 51:7 we see חטא is translated as “purge”: “*Purge* (חטא) me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

At first glance, one must wonder why David would be asking to be cleansed with a hyssop, a shrub. How, exactly, can someone be washed with a shrub? The answer is that the hyssop branch was used to sprinkle blood during the Passover rituals as a means of purification (Ex 12:22). The greatest salvific event in the history of the nation of Israel hinged around the Israelites preparing themselves to leave Egypt. God passed over the Israelites after they sprinkled their doorposts in blood with hyssop.

David committed the sins of adultery and murder, two sins for which the Israelite law had no means for ritual purification. David is not just asking to be literally purged with hyssop according to Israelite purification laws. He is pointing to the redemptive work of a God who rescued a people from slavery. David is pointing to the blood that will purge him of sin from which he cannot be ritually cleansed.

As good Reformed Protestant types we probably have healthy reminders of how we regularly miss the mark in life. But, we must never forget that God has not left us in our fallen state. He has redeemed a people and rescued them from the slavery of sin. Embedded in our relationship with us he has provided a mediator who atones for our sins, a mediator who *does* hit the mark on our behalf. And through

this mediator we are not left in sin, but are given a clean heart and a right Spirit.

Many of us are familiar with Psalm 51, or at least some of David’s penitent phrases. Through Christ our mediator we can join with David in asking God to cleanse us from any sin:

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Jonathan Cady

רַחֲמִים - steadfast love, kindness

The word רַחֲמִים is like an onion. At first the explanation seems pretty straightforward and simple: “steadfast love.” But when you begin to peel back the first layer, then the second...then the third...and then the fourth, etc., you realize that there is a depth and nuance to רַחֲמִים much like the word *shalom* (which means much more than mere “peace”).

Essentially, רַחֲמִים does mean “steadfast love.” But more than just being lumped into the “love” category, the applied meaning of רַחֲמִים includes goodness, grace, and kindness shared between two parties, most appropriately between husband and wife, parent and child, kin, friends, etc. In this context, we see that רַחֲמִים is about giving love, attention, care, and your resources for the wellbeing, protection, encouragement, provision, and edification of the recipient. As this is done in relationship, the act of רַחֲמִים establishes a deepening fellowship and understanding in that the one who receives רַחֲמִים can be expected to return רַחֲמִים if the giver is ever

in need. For example, in 1 Samuel 20:8, 14, Jonathan shows David דָּוָה by protecting and loving him despite the fact that his father hates David. While this is established, Jonathan asks that David would show דָּוָה for Jonathan and his family line in return as a sign or covenant of their דָּוָה relationship. Other examples of דָּוָה in this category include Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 20:13), Laban and Isaac (Genesis 24:49), and Rahab and the spies (Joshua 2:13-14). Being used 245 times in the OT, דָּוָה is about a steadfast love that offers, hopes, and works for the best for the other with faithfulness and vigilance. It is about establishing and growing in permanence, certainty, and lasting validity that preserves and promotes life, stands for justice and righteousness and demonstrates friendship and piety (in a manner that honors and glorifies God). דָּוָה pursues what is good and righteous while actively shunning what is evil. In this, דָּוָה is an integral part of the justice and righteousness of God's people in reference to Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To *act justly* and to *love mercy* and to walk humbly with your God."

Ultimately, God calls us to practice דָּוָה because God is honored and glorified when the people of God live in accordance with the righteousness of God. This is a broad definition that encompasses many ideas and contexts including (take a deep breath): generosity, hospitality, consideration, understanding, respect, familial friendship, a "for one another" attitude, mercy, compassion, intercession, defending, redeeming, provision, care, concern, encouragement, empowerment, creative engagement, wisdom giving, discerning, etc. But in all these potential expressions of דָּוָה , there are three primary facets that must be present for דָּוָה to truly be דָּוָה . First, דָּוָה is *active*. It is more than an attitude or mere hope without movement. It is an act that preserves and promotes life. It is an act on behalf of someone who

suffers misfortune or distress. It is a demonstration of friendship and compassion. Second, רִצּוֹן is *social*. It has to do with relationship and the other and cannot be established or had by one's self. Third, רִצּוֹן is *enduring*. It recognizes that close and intimate community requires waiting, enduring, and persevering in reliable love and faithfulness. Without these three things, רִצּוֹן is not and cannot truly be רִצּוֹן .

Consider Ruth 1:8-9: "Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you *kindness*, as you have shown *kindness* to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.'" This text shows the social nature of enduring love as Ruth reveals her heart for Naomi as they live in mutual "give and take" in looking out for the best for one another. Naomi, having lost both her sons, tells her daughters-in-law to return to their hometowns in order to find new lives and husbands. This is not a harsh rejection but a loving and compassion-filled blessing. Naomi is alone, widowed, and old. What would or could she do without sons, let alone her daughters-in-law? This is self-relegated destitution and suffering! But she is compassionately and lovingly looking for the best for her former daughters rather than her own benefit. She is thinking of their futures, their lives, their comfort, their well-being and their preservation out of kindness and what little generosity she has left to give. She not only gives them release but blesses them with God's providence that He would watch over and provide for them as only God can. This is active, social, and enduring רִצּוֹן . But what I really love about this text are two things. First, Naomi recognizes that it is not about *her* ability to love, bless, and preserve them, but it is only through God alone! She does not bless them with her own words, but she intercedes on their behalf as she releases them from any familial duty in asking that

God Himself would show them kindness (as they had shown to her as daughters-in-law) and that God Himself would be the source of their lives and security in providing them with husbands to guard them. Second, it shows the mutual aspect and rhythm that אָהָבָה necessitates. Naomi accepts Ruth and Orpah as her daughters-in-law, and in turn, they are kind to her and treat her well and are good wives to her sons. Then Naomi releases them with God's blessing after her sons are tragically lost, but Ruth swears her allegiance to Naomi in one of the most beautiful examples of loyalty and faithful covenants in Scripture (1:16-18). Though brief, we catch a great example of אָהָבָה.

When I think about אָהָבָה and the powerful all-encompassing nature of what "steadfast love" is supposed to look, sound, and smell like, I am so moved and thankful...but I am also daunted and hesitant. I am the latter because I immediately begin to wonder, "How in the world am I going to practice and do this type of love? I am incapable of anything close to this type of love!" But I think that this is where the true foundation and beauty of אָהָבָה shines through: אָהָבָה is first and foremost championed and perfected in, by, and through *God's love* for humanity and creation. God is the source, definition, model, and provider of אָהָבָה. God sends, God remembers, God commands, God shows, God causes, God makes, God keeps, God satisfies, God intercedes, God surrounds, God delights, so that in all things, God is at the heart and center of it all! So when Esther finds favor and blessing in her life in spite of the world falling apart for God's people around her, this is not done by what Esther has done but what the power, providence, and presence of God establishes for her (Esther 2:9, 17). We are unable to fully establish and practice אָהָבָה, but we pursue it and practice it because God calls us to it. And in submitting and pursuing it, like a father watching his child mimic what he does, it brings the Father joy and glory.

Thus, as we practice **דָּוָה** and grow in our love and knowledge of God in every step we take after Him, He is honored, glorified, and worshipped. The ultimate act of **דָּוָה** is God's redemption of humanity through Christ on the cross for us. Humanity was condemned to an eternity apart from the righteousness of God. We were in need and destitute, and the gracious love of God moved into action to reestablish and reconcile Creator and creation by inviting us back to Him in faith. His love for us endures through all things as the definition of godly love is established in Psalm 126 ("His love *endures* forever," in line with **דָּוָה**).

All of life and love is out of God and established by God for the salvation of His people despite their wretchedness in order that He would be glorified. **דָּוָה** restores and reconciles creation to Creator and calls us to reciprocate what we have received from our heavenly Father. All of existence, all of time, all space is the stage where the drama of God's **דָּוָה** is played out. Thanks be to God.

Paul Shim

יָרָא – fear

We live in a time in which everyone wants to be happy, powerful, and successful. An emotion like fear is regarded as something that needs to be managed and overcome to make a more positive self. However, in the Bible the Hebrew word **יָרָא**, which means fear, plays a crucial and positive role in the relationship between God and His people.

The root **יָרָא** occurs 435 times in diverse forms in the Old Testament. The root appears 333 times as a verb, 45 times as a verbal adjective, and 57 times as a nominalized form. When **יָרָא** adopts people or situations as its object, it can be understood as a natural emotional response of humans to threats, but this type of fear is rarely used. In almost 80 percent of "fear" related passages, God is its object.

Fear of God is different from fear of things or situations because this fear is rooted in God's holiness. The Bible shows that fear is a natural reaction of imperfect humans when they encounter God's absolute holiness and perfection. For example, Exodus 3:6 says, "Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God."

The Bible shows how the fear of God impacts His people. People who fear God's absolute holiness and immeasurable power try to walk in the way of the righteous. Exodus 1:17 says that Egyptian midwives saved the lives of Hebrew newborn boys because they "feared God." In Job 1:8 fearing God is the equivalent of being upright.

Another important meaning of "fear of God" can be found in its importance in worship. In many places of the Bible, the fear of God is related to a decision of mind to only serve one holy, powerful God. It is natural for humans to serve and worship what they fear. When the Israelites were terrified by various situations and enemies, they created idols and worshiped them, hoping that those idols would save them, but God constantly commanded them to only fear and worship Him. Deuteronomy 6:13 says, "Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you..."

Exodus 20 shows the purposes and roles of the "fear of God" for his people. When God gave His commandments to the Israelites through Moses at Sinai, the people "trembled with fear" (v. 18) because they witnessed the presence of God through events like thunder, lightning, and the sound of a trumpet. Then Moses said to the people in verse 20, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." God knew what weak creatures humans are. Even though they had just received God's promises and commandments, they needed something to keep them from straying away from the prom-

ise that they just made. By showing them who He is, God helped them to commit to worshipping Him only and keeping the commandments that He had presented before (20:1-18) and after the scene (20:21 ff).

Fear of God is an ironic concept because only the true fear of God can overcome all false fears. In Proverbs, the “fear of God” is a beginning and important element of wisdom. Unlike the modern understanding of “fear”, the fear of God is something that needs to be pursued because it is the first step for a rich and profound relationship with God.

Youri Lee

לב or לבב – heart

In both Judaism and Christianity, the *Shema* is a well-known and often-cited passage in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Moses puts a great emphasis on engaging God with our heart, soul, and might. Moses’ call to love God was meant as more than a personal inclination and/or affection towards God; it required the Israelites’ wholehearted commitment to God.⁵ Therefore, “Loving Him was to be wholehearted (with all your heart) and was to pervade every aspect of an Israelite’s being and life (soul and strength).”⁶

Why is the word “heart” so important in the Bible? What is the role of the heart in spirituality? The heart, according to G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Riggren, is “the *locus* of God’s influence” (TDOT 7:425). לב may be understood as referring to the “inner man, mind, will, [or] heart.”⁷

⁵ Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 138.

⁶ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 274.

⁷ William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Edward Robison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 524.

The word לֵב is used to describe personal identity as “the heart functions in all dimensions of human existence and is used as a term for all aspects of a person: vital, affective, noetic, and volunative” (TDOT 7:412).

For this reason, Scripture urges us: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov 4:23 ESV). Guarding one’s own heart is a matter of life and death because the source of life is the heart.⁸ This notion of the heart is also found in other Ancient Near Eastern literature. For instance, Egyptians believed that “the heart is the focus of the individual—body, spirit, soul, and will—the center of the entire personality and its relationship with God. But the heart as the vital center... is not identical to the individual; it can forsake its owner, enter into dialogue with him, but also forsake him.”⁹

If the heart is the place where God reigns, how crucial is it for us to remember the words of Scripture and vigilantly guard our own hearts? It is irresponsible for Christians to think that our effort has no place or role in God’s plans. The Triune God, who made Adam out of the earth, created him in God’s image. God bestowed upon Adam the ability to think (intellect) and act (free will). Therefore, we must guard our hearts from selfishness, sinful desires, and temptations. By the work of the Spirit, God has made us new in Christ and renewed our hearts so that once again He could dwell within us and reign over the world that He created. New creation is rooted in the heart by loving God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

“My heart I offer to you LORD
sincerely and promptly.” – John Calvin

Se Youn Moon

⁸ Bible Sense Lexicon, Logos Bible Software 5.

⁹ Botterweck and Riggren, 402.

Our personal understanding of God, his providence, and his dealings with us exists somewhere on a continuum between two basic characteristics of God, mercy and justice. On the surface, sometimes we find it hard to reconcile a God who is kind and compassionate but also just. It seems like one would cancel out the other. A close study of the word *mishpat*, however, helps us to understand more fully this aspect of God's character.

Mishpat is a noun derived from the Hebrew word *shaphat*. According to the TWOT, *shaphat* has the primary sense of the “exercise of the processes of government.” Ancient Near Eastern thought did not divide up the judicial, legislative, and executive branches. Thus, *shaphat* and its derivative, *mishpat*, carry much more meaning than can be rendered in one English word, just as there are a diversity of tasks and roles within these areas of government. *Shaphat* really refers to decisive action and is used of punishment, deliverance, vindication, and condemnation.

Mishpat is often translated “judgment,” but TWOT points out that “justice” is a better rendering because “justice” takes into account not only the judicial application but also the executive and legislative. It can also be rendered ordinance, custom, or manner. In its judicial sense, *mishpat* may alternately refer to a case, place, process of litigation, or a decision issued by a magistrate. In its executive aspect, *mishpat* takes on the connotation of “ultimate authority” and speaks to the sovereignty of God in his government. The most common usage of *mishpat* in the OT relates to the legislative aspect of government—where it addresses correct civil and moral legislation.

When you read these texts a common theme emerges: *Mishpat* is associated with the needy, the poor, the widows, and the orphans. God is serious about the plight of the op-

pressed. Zechariah 7:9 reads, “Dispense true *mishpat* and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother.” When we read texts like this suddenly God’s justice doesn’t seem so bad—God’s *mishpat*, while associated with punishment of the wrong-doer, is also the answer to the poor treatment of the weak by the strong. *Mishpat* is inextricably linked with kindness and compassion. It should not surprise us, then, that prophetic utterances of the Messiah in the OT speak of the *mishpat* he would bring to this world: “I have put my Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth *mishpat* to the nations. ... A bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth *mishpat*. He will not be disheartened or crushed until He has established *mishpat* in the earth” (Is. 42:1-4).

The call for God’s people to practice *mishpat* for the oppressed is a constant staple throughout the Old Testament. It is most commonly found in the book of Deuteronomy when Moses was giving the people his final instructions before they were to enter Canaan; as one might expect, it is all over the wisdom literature of Proverbs and the cries of help and despair in the Psalms; it finds prophetic expression in the prophets where Amos says: “Let *mishpat* roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” In the 1960s, during the civil rights crisis in America, Martin Luther King exhorted the crowd with these same words during his “I Have a Dream” speech.

The judgment and justice of God—His *mishpat*—is a good thing if only we’re on His side. It is a good thing, because as we have seen, it refers to the care, protection, and deliverance of the oppressed. We’re all oppressed at times in our daily lives, but especially when we take up our own crosses and follow Him. Ultimately, we’re all weak and oppressed by our involvement in sin.

Everyone must face God’s justice at some point. Some Christians are afraid of it, or at least have no opinion about

it. Why? Scripture tells us that Jesus is our judge—all authority has been given to him to judge. It also says that Jesus is our advocate, our lawyer. If you were sitting in a courtroom, charged with a crime, and discovered that your defense lawyer was also the judge, would you be worried? You might actually be pretty excited because it should have hit you pretty quickly that there was no way you were walking out of that courtroom with a guilty verdict. But the American justice system--where the right defense attorney can get you off even if you're guilty--is not like God's. We are guilty. Praise God, then, that he is not only the judge and lawyer, he takes on our penalty as the criminal. Now that is some "crazy" *mishpat*. God's *mishpat* gives us a good reason to boast about God:

Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not a mighty man boast of his might, and let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands me and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises loving-kindness, *mishpat* and righteousness on earth, for I delight in these things, declares the LORD." (Jer. 9:24).

Derek Nutt

תקדש – righteousness

Righteousness is a familiar word to Christians, and we often take it for granted that everyone knows what we mean. However, it can be difficult to explain to someone exactly what righteousness is. So what do we mean when we speak of God's righteousness, or someone being righteous before God?

In the Old Testament, the root word occurs 523 times, while the word *tsedaqah* specifically is found 157 times.

Most of these occurrences are found in the prophets and wisdom literature. In Hebrew usage, the word can connote a legal status with a standard or norm, such as God's law. However, it is also a relational term between two entities, between us and God (TDOT 244). Mary Donovan Turner calls it an "ongoing process of understanding and growth" because it is about maintaining our covenant relationship with God.¹⁰

Different word pairings with *tsedaqah* can emphasize the different aspects of its meaning. In the Psalms, righteousness is contrasted with wickedness. Righteousness is what God loves, wickedness He hates. When paired with the word *shalom*, it becomes an expression of harmony with God's created order. Salvation (*yesha*) with *tsedaqah* shows God's saving work as an expression of His righteousness. Yet by far the most common parallel is *mishpat*, often translated as justice, occurring 80 times. According to Turner, we can think of righteousness as being in right relationship with God and people, and justice as seeking the well-being of the helpless.¹¹

The word *tsedaqah* is also distinct from *tsedeq* in Old Testament usage. *Tsedeq* refers to the proper order, while *tsedaqah* is the appropriate behavior within that order (TDOT 256). So in one sense, we can think of righteous action as the appropriate way to live correctly in God's created order of the world. The prophet Hosea calls God's people to sow righteousness (*tsedeqah*) that the Lord might rain righteousness or deliverance (*tsedeq*) upon them (Hosea 10:12). Yet as one commentator puts it, God is equally associated with both terms. "He is not only the guarantor of the principle of *tsedeq*, he also actively intervenes and implements *tsedeqah*" (TDOT 25). Because God is involved in both the order and also the fulfillment of that order, God's

¹⁰ Turner, 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

righteousness can be seen as a positive intervention by God in humanity.

The prophet Amos (5:21-27) shares the Word of the Lord with the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. Although they have offered sacrifices, celebrated feasts, and brought forth songs, it is not enough in God's eyes. What the Lord desires from them is righteousness and justice. Understanding the nuances of righteousness, God isn't just looking for Israel to have right standing with Him legally; He also wants them to be in right standing in their covenant relationship with Him. Because God is both the origin of right order and implementing righteous living, we need God's righteousness to know how to live in right standing with Him, but we also need His righteousness in order to do so.

Understanding God's righteousness for us as His people should remind us of two things: first, God's salvific work becomes righteousness for us if we receive it. Second, receiving it calls for a proper response. Scripture encourages us to declare and praise the righteousness of the Lord. Psalm 145:7 says, "They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness." As we read, study, and meditate on the Word of the Lord, let us too offer our praise for the *tsedaqah* (the righteousness, justice, and deliverance) of our God.

Adam Umbarger

רוּחַ – spirit, breath, wind

"This is the air I breathe, your holy presence living in me..." This song reminds us that even in English we have a number of ways to understand what we think of when we think of the 'spirit of God'. In English, we understand this concept in a number of ways, much like Greek and here in Hebrew. The word רוּחַ has at least three meanings or aspects of meaning: (1) the actual presence of God with his people, as

in the song above and when the Psalmist asks, “Don’t take your holy spirit from me” (Psalm 51); (2) the creative power of God, as seen in the opening of Genesis 1, with the spirit hovering over the waters; and (3) the in-filling leading of the spirit, a prompting for one to hear something, write something, or do something, as found with the prophet Ezekiel.

רוח is commonly translated *spirit*, but also *breath*, as in the “God-breathed-ness” of Scripture. This word can also be translated *wind*, or even understood to be the effect of wind, for wind itself, like breath, cannot be seen. To understand רוח is not to see רוח; it is more a presence that is felt, the silent voice whispered and heard, or the power of רוח that can be traced by watching it have an effect of the things it touches.

As Christians and particularly Christian leaders, sometimes it is expected that the pastor will not have doubts about the unseen things of God. We can learn by this word, though, that there are qualities of God that may remain unseen, but still give us the confidence to trust in the Spirit of God to be with us, as he promised he would. Maybe it is in this way the Scriptures encourage our faith to be like that of children, who see the invisible all around them, as they imagine and are “in-spired” by what they see around them. Professor Rottman likes to joke of the “Footprints” poem, that though we may doubt the times when we do not think Jesus is walking with us, there are times that two long marks are seen on the sand—when God drags us kicking and screaming in our faith. Though unseen, the power of God in creation, the inspiration that comes in his leading, and the sheer presence of God amongst us is not something that is always empirically verifiable. Instead, we need to trust the God of the Gusts:

A small dirt road in a sullen town
Is where the man slowed and found
A little boy, who climbed a fence—
Not there to make a difference—
Simply there to fly his kite,
And so he tried, with all of his might.

The lad stood in the barren field,
The man's old truck finished its yield
And on the side of the big, bright hill
The man watched the boy until,
After many tries and many fails,
The kite he held, with motley tail,

Continued to flutter and to faint.
Yet, the boy tried with no complaint,
To put to air his new-made kite
Alas— no wind seen, not a sight!
Not north, nor south, nor east or west,
And so, the man began to protest:

“Boy, there's no wind here, can't you tell?
A wind-less kite don't fly so well!”
Turning now to see the man,
The boy just smiled as again he ran
To try to lift the heavy toy.
“What a silly— what a simple boy!”

he remarked as he climbed the fence,
what he saw just made no sense.
“The kite can't fly without the gusts
of wind. It— well, it gets no thrust!”
“That's ok, said the boy,
as again he went to lift the toy

and set it out again to air
without a worry- without a care.

“Boy!” he said now a bit irate,
“You can’t fly in this breeze-less state!”
The child looked down, gathered it in,
Turned to the man with a sheepish grin,

and said, “Sir, I know the wind can’t be seen
and this is how it’s always been,
but I have faith”, said the boy,
as he turned his fix back to the toy.
The man, surprised at such a word,
thought, “This boy’s faith is just absurd!”

“You can’t see it!” was all he said,
at which the little boy turned his head.
“I can’t see the wind, it’s true,
but I know when it blows, just like you.
You see as trees sway side-to-side—
It’s the power of wind that cannot hide.

Just like the windows in my home,
I trust them to work in a storm.
Certainly, I can see right through,
But they are real— like me and you.
It’s just like God, who you can’t see,
But you see him like wind through the trees,

You can trust in all his mighty power,
‘cause he *made* the trees and he *made* the flowers.
So I trust more than just my sight—
I have faith the wind’ll hold my kite.”
With this he turned, the brave, wise boy,
went back to running with his toy.

And wouldn't you know, as the man turned round,
There came a quick and rushing sound
Of wind— in the trees and everywhere!
As that faith-filled kite took to air
And as the man turned to his ride,
He could not help but feel inside

that God had spoken, to his heart,
through the wind, through a kite's first start,
that though sight confirms *some* of life's things,
it doesn't tell of *everything*,
that sometimes we need the faith to trust
that God is there— if just in gusts,

that all His power and protection
are always present and His selection
of windy days and days of want
is just His love being vigilant
that though we long for days of rain,
days of sun and wind again,
God is there whatever our sight:
So, have faith that He holds your kite.

Joshua Friend

שׁוּב – to return

The Hebrew word שׁוּב is the twelfth most commonly used verb in the Old Testament.¹² In general, שׁוּב means “to return.” In many narratives it is simply a physical return, to leave someplace and then come back to that place, or to leave a person and then come back to that person. In other places it may be a return specifically to do something (TDOT 403). Less frequently it may be a return from some-

¹² Turner, 108.

one, something, or someplace. Interesting too is that one of the most common subjects for שׁוּב is anger, usually meaning that someone, including God, has turned from anger to a previous state (TDOT 474). But the word's most theologically interesting use is when it is referring to repentance. In fact, of all the words in the Old Testament used to describe repentance, שׁוּב is the most common.¹³

When שׁוּב is used to describe repentance it means far more than a bad feeling, an outpouring of guilt, or a call to confession; it is a coming back, an intentional movement away from evil towards God.¹⁴ In the New Testament we may even think of it as a return to our identity in Christ, going back to God and the community—the prodigal returning home. With שׁוּב, action is implied.

Such action did not occur in the book of Amos, and so God judges His people for social injustice. In Amos 4 we see numerous instances where God disciplines the Israelites so that they will return to Him. But in spite of God doing things to get their attention and turn their hearts back to him, five times He says, “Yet you did not return [שׁוּב] to me” (Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). Because the people would not repent, because the people would not come back to God, God then declares in Amos 4:12 that he will go to them in judgment.

As Christian readers, we know that we have been saved from judgment through the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet we are still being sanctified in this life. Sometimes we recognize our sin and properly repent and return to God. At other times we don't. But God doesn't quit on us. In fact, “the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” so that we may “share His holiness” (Hebrews 12:6, 10). In other words,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 109.

just like the readers of Amos, God will send us trials in order to revive us.

So often we think that God has abandoned us, or perhaps we even doubt the existence of God when troubles come our way. Might it be better to assume that God is trying to get our attention so that we may return to him, that these hardships are due to his love? Perhaps we should be more concerned when bad things don't happen to "good people" because it is an indicator that the Lord is going to bring judgment. And if we claim to be Christians, and never face such discipline, perhaps we are not who we think we are. Hebrews 12:8 says, "If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." Additionally, we shouldn't get so caught up in the worldly concern about when "good things happen to bad people." In these cases the Lord has stopped the discipline process and the person is resigned to judgment.

The greatest way that God can show his love for us is by causing us to return to Him. He is the only source of fulfillment and happiness. A little temporal chastisement is hardly a payment for eternal reward and earthly blessing. Once God has our attention, we will, for our own good, need to actively turn away from evil, change our mind and our actions, while perhaps even making recompense for the injustices we have committed.

The pinnacle of God showing his love for us is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ so that we can come to the Father. And once we have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and "שוב-ed" to God, we should recognize the bliss of staying there. There is no doubt we will wander, but like every good shepherd God will שׁוּב us to the safety of His presence and to the rest of His flock.

Matthew Wunderlin

שלום – peace; to give back; wholeness, friendliness, reconciliation, welfare; greeting; tranquility

Consider the following statements: “We don’t want war, we want peace.” “Hello! I come in peace.” “Sleep in heavenly peace.” In each example, peace has a different meaning. The first sentence uses peace as anti-war. The second one is a greeting and uses peace in the sense of friendliness. The third one, from the song Silent Night, uses peace in the sense of tranquility.

We understand the Hebrew word *shalom* to mean peace. The actual meaning of *shalom* is much harder to define, as the following cases make clear. In Deuteronomy 23:7, Israel is forbidden to promote *shalom* toward the Ammonites and Moabites. Here, *shalom* means friendship, and Israel can’t give it. In 2 Samuel, David asks about the *shalom* of Joab and his troops. Here the word *shalom* means wholeness or well-being. Isaiah 9:5 says that the rule of the Prince of *shalom* will bring endless *shalom*. Here *shalom* is the total divine order of the world. In Isaiah 27:2-5, the Lord says he will destroy Israel’s enemies unless they seek his protection and make *shalom* with him. In this case, *shalom* is the result of turning to the Lord—putting a meaning of salvation or deliverance in the word. The psalmist (Ps. 120) cries out that he is tired living with people who love war because he is for peace! Here, *shalom* is the opposite of war.

It is generally accepted that there are simply no English words that can accurately express what *shalom* means. We can only look at the different ways it is used across 237 occurrences in the Old Testament to give us better semantic insight. *Shalom* is good and we all want it. As a matter of fact, we crave it. Psalm 34:14 says, “Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” *Shalom* is not something that we just receive mysteriously all the time. *Shalom* is something to be pursued. To be sought out. To be

made.

Shalom is linked to the way that we live. We are called to turn away from evil and do good. As chosen children of God, we are called to live righteously. To do justice is to seek peace. This seems like an oxymoron. I'll say it again: doing justice is synonymous with seeking peace.

The following is a blessing that God gave to Moses, which Moses gave to Aaron and the Levites, which they in turn gave to Israel. This blessing is still used today by the pastors of our churches to bless God's children:

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you his *shalom*.

So let it be...

Hilary Smith

שמעו – to hear

“*Hear O Israel...*” We as a class have been reciting this passage every week, recalling the call for the people of Israel to listen to the word of the Lord. The word *shama* appears 1,157 times (or 1,159 times, depending on the count) in the Old Testament, thus making it a very common word—and a common theme. In some cases, the word simply means the basic act of perceiving sound. In this case, one is hearing but there is no particular emphasis on a need to respond. There is evidence, in both biblical and extra-biblical sources, of persons of lower social rank entreating those above them using *shema* to gain a hearing; they are not demanding a favorable response, but simply asking for a hearing. The response is certainly desired, but it cannot be demanded in this case. There are even cases where it im-

plies that one should enjoy music that they are hearing.

As any parent in the room could attest, however, simple hearing is rarely enough. In many cases, the call to hear in Scripture does not only ask one to listen, but to give assent and obey as well. God's call in Deuteronomy 5 with the retelling of the law is not simply for the people to hear the law, but to hear, remember, and diligently obey. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 6, they were called to hear and meditate on the fact that the Lord is one, and in response they were called to love God with their all. God often calls people to task for failing to hear (and obey) His word delivered through the prophets, and promises judgment for their disobedience unless they repent. At times (e.g., Micah 6:2) God calls the creation itself to hear the judgment He has passed against His people for their disobedience! It's almost as if, in a metaphorical sense, if the people won't listen, then creation itself will!

Fear of punishment, however, is not the primary reason given for one to listen. God often talks of the blessings that will accompany obedience of His voice. The book of Proverbs links listening with wisdom as well, and tells of the good things that will come because of it.

Thankfully, however, *shema* is not limited to God's command to people, but there are many instances in Scripture where people call God to hear them as well. At times, the psalmists often call out to God to hear their cry, knowing that He will not only hear, but will answer as well and rescue them from their trouble. At other times, they write in remembrance of when He did hear and detail how He helped them. We can take comfort in the fact that God hears His people. He heard their prayers offered in the temple in Jerusalem, but He also heard their cries by the rivers of Babylon. Not only is His ear inclined to us, but His heart is as well.

In 1 Kings 3:9, Solomon asks God for a *lev shomea* – a

hearing heart. This passage is often interpreted as a request for wisdom, or for an “understanding mind” (e.g., ESV), but I really love the literal translation here. He wanted a heart that was attuned to the words of God, voice of God, and ultimately, the heart of God. This certainly did manifest itself in wisdom, but it also manifested in a concern for justice, and for beauty. Sadly, as he became more successful and more powerful, the hearing of his heart became dull as his heart wandered after foreign women and military might.

In the end, that is my prayer for all of us—that we might have hearts that hear. That we might both hear and obey the word of the Lord, and that we might even hear the cries of those around us as well, but that we will also keep our hearts with all diligence and wisdom so that we will not go astray like Solomon did. And ultimately, God Himself is the one who can keep us from stumbling, so we need to cry out to Him to help us. And we know that He *will* hear us, and He is faithful to keep us until the end.

Christopher Zak

תּוֹרָה – instruction, teaching, law

The word *torah* is used many times in the Bible. In particular, Psalm 119 emphasizes the word by using it twenty-five times.¹⁵ The word *torah* is translated as instruction, teaching, or law, but it has such a deep, complex meaning that is used differently within the Bible depending on circumstances. *Torah* can refer to specific laws related to things like offerings, e.g., Exodus 12 contains the *torah* or law for Passover.¹⁶ Mary Donovan Turner in her book *Old Testament Words* argues that in Deuteronomy Torah developed into an analysis of our motives, our attitudes, and

¹⁵ Turner, 117.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 118.

our hearts.¹⁷ She extrapolates this logic to conclude that God speaks to every generation through the law and that the law is adaptable and relevant for people today.¹⁸ This resonates very well with Jesus' response to the Pharisees when they asked him which was the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus replied, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt 22:37-39). Jesus' summary of the law certainly indicates the importance of our motives, our attitudes, and our hearts in his time as well as for us today.

If you are anything like me, thinking of biblical law may bring to mind Leviticus, which contains a multitude of laws to cover just about every facet of life in the ancient world. You might even conclude that *torah* only applies to these specific laws and others like them, and these rules may seem foreign and irrelevant to our lives today. If so, why do modern Jews express such love for *torah*? Why would someone like Rob Bell preach entire his first year on the book of Leviticus? More importantly, what did Jesus say about the law? Matt 5:17-18 records Jesus' words, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (ESV).

So what can we conclude about the law for us today? Psalms 1, 19, 26, and 119 are considered *torah* psalms, and most scholars agree that the law should not be confined to the Pentateuch. Instead, we should interpret *torah* as the whole revelation of God (TDOT 15:628-629). This concept of law would certainly include the complex legal laws in the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 119-120.

Pentateuch, but, contrary to what many people conclude, the law extends further to the full revelation of God from Genesis to Revelation. Passages like Psalm 19 make much more sense when we consider that the law includes the broad scope of God's redemptive work in history.

Psalm 19:7-10 reads, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshes the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.”

Gold is both valuable and symbolic. Gold is used to make jewelry, in electronics, and as a form of currency. Wars have been fought to acquire it, and huge expeditions have been funded to find it. Its beauty, malleability, and resistance to corrosion have made gold universally valuable around the globe through all of human history. For these reasons, we should not be surprised that David used gold in this psalm. However, David is not praising gold, because his sights are on something more valuable. Similar to the value of gold, honey is one of the sweetest foods in nature. Just describing the slow, thick drizzle of honey on your cereal or peanut butter sandwich likely makes your mouth water. Yet David yearned for something more sweet.

Ask yourself, given the choice between mountains of gold or the knowledge and wisdom to understand God's Word, which would you choose? Would you prefer a stomach full of the sweetest foods or a Bible in your hand? The writer of Psalm 19 is salivating after God's word. Just the thought of it overwhelmed him with a sensation that he could only describe as sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. David spent countless hours meditating on *torah* and writing most

of the elegant poems that make up the book of Psalms.

David ends Psalm 19 by saying, “May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” David is drawing attention to this value, this sweetness in the Bible, which has a transformational quality that influences the things which we say and the things that we feel. This is part of the value, part of the sweetness, part of the hope and joy that only Christ Jesus and His beautiful Word can provide.

Zach Hackman

JEREMIAH 23:1-8: THE RIGHTEOUS BRANCH

Emily Sajdak

¹ *“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD.* ² *Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD.* ³ *Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.* ⁴ *I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.*

⁵ *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.* ⁶ *In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’*

⁷ *“Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’⁸ but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land.” (ESV)*

Exposition

23:1-2. This passage in Jeremiah is centered around judgment of the monarchy and leadership of Judah and the promises God has for the remnant to come beyond the exile.

This pericope continues the discussion in chapter 22, which lists indictments against the “house of the king of Judah” (Jer 22:1 ESV). The first four of these verses are a metaphor of the rulers and leaders of Judah as sheep and the people as shepherds. This metaphor is a common biblical one and is often used in context of the promise to David and the Lord’s role in shepherding the people of Israel. The first verse of Jeremiah 23 begins with הִנֵּה, which is a particle that introduces a judgment speech. Jeremiah warns the shepherds that the Lord will attend to them for their evil deeds based on their destruction and scattering (מֵאַבְדִּים וּמִפְצִים) of his people (Jer 23:1).

The proclamation against the shepherds can also be found in other chapters of Jeremiah and other prophetic texts. In Jeremiah 2:8, Jeremiah prophesies against three specific groups of people: the priests “who handle the law” but “[do] not know me”; the shepherds (or rulers) who “transgressed against me”; and the prophets who “prophesied by Baal” (Jer 2:8). Jeremiah 10:21 is another explicit use of the shepherd metaphor in reference to Judah’s corrupt leadership: “For the shepherds are stupid and do not inquire of the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered.” Ezekiel also utilizes the shepherds and sheep metaphor from Jeremiah, but extends it in chapter 34. However, unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel not only addresses the wicked shepherds, but also the sheep.

23:3-4. The next section in 23:3-4 is the first of the promises made to the people of Judah. This promise, as well as the others, is introduced or concluded with יְהוָה נֹאם. In verse 3, God promises that he will gather the remnant of his flock out of all the countries where he has driven them. This idea of gathering (קָבַץ) stands as a reversal of the scattering that the shepherds are responsible for in the verses that immediately precede this. This gathering that Jeremiah speaks of is a promise of the end of the exile, which is found in other

parts of Jeremiah and other prophetic literature. For example, Jeremiah 31:8 sounds very similar to 23:3: “I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth...they shall return here” (Jer 31:8).¹ This is also echoed in Ezekiel 34:13, which strengthens the connection between these two passages: “And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land” (Ezek 34:13).

Verse 4 of this chapter promises new leadership over Israel. The end of the exile will be God’s action as a shepherd of his people, but human shepherds will also be reinstated. Walter Brueggemann sees that the “double tension of Yahweh as shepherd and of human shepherd reflects a tension concerning the role of the Davidic dynasty in the Exile and beyond.”² Brueggemann argues that there would have been an argument over whether or not David’s line would be crucial to the return from exile and the restoration. He then states that the real hope for the restoration of the remnant lay with God and his ability to create a new reality on the other side of the impending exile.³

23:5-6. The next promise, found in 23:5-6, is explicitly Davidic and God promises to honor the covenant he made with David in 2 Samuel 7.⁴ Jeremiah makes reference to a

¹ See also: Jer 29:14; 31:10; 32:37; as well as Ezek 11:17; 20:41; 28:25; 36:24; and 37:21.

² Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 206.

³ Brueggemann, 207.

⁴ Cf. 2 Sam 7:9-16: “And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house...And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your

righteous Branch that will come from David's line and reign as king. This is paralleled in Jeremiah 33:15: "In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land" (Jer 33:15). Both passages in Jeremiah refer to the Branch as one who will execute justice and righteousness and show that God has not forgotten about his promise to David that his throne will be established forever. Brueggemann frames this discussion as being part of the restoration of public life for Judah and Israel. "One can see here exilic anticipations that the Christian community has found in Jesus of Nazareth. The new shepherd of the Davidic line is to implement a very old promise to 'dwell securely.'"⁵

The emphasis on justice and righteousness can also be seen in the preceding chapter 22. In 22:3, the Lord declares, "Do justice and righteousness...For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David" (Jer 22:3). However, Jehoiakim did not listen to the Lord and instead "[built] his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice" in direct contradiction to what the Lord commanded (Jer 22:13-14). This is in contrast to what Josiah—and David—did: "Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness?" (Jer 22:15). This ideal king to come will rule in justice and righteousness, as David did.⁶

The idea of this Davidic king to come dispensing justice is also addressed in Isaiah 11 where Isaiah also makes reference to "a shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Isa 11:1). Isaiah also discusses the characteristics of this good and righteous

throne shall be established forever" (ESV).

⁵ Brueggemann, 207.

⁶ Cf. 2 Sam 8:15: "So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people" (ESV).

king in greater detail. This description of the qualities of the Branch is followed by Jeremiah giving the Branch a name: יהוה צדקנו or “The Lord is our righteousness.”⁷ צדקנו can be translated in a number of ways: “vindication” as in legal contexts like Job 6:29,⁸ “deliverance” or “salvation” in exilic contexts like Isaiah 58:8,⁹ and ruling or judging in justice as in Leviticus 19:15¹⁰ or Isaiah 32:1.^{11, 12} The use of this name for the king to come, F.B Huey, Jr. explains, was the message was likely communicated during the reign of King Zedekiah and “the name of the new ruler was intended as a repudiation of Zedekiah.”¹³ This can be seen more clearly by considering the Hebrew text of Zedekiah, which is צדקיהו, which roughly translates to “Yahweh is righteous.” Zedekiah, however, fails to live up to his name and he is ultimately the last king of David’s line before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The king as prophesied by both Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as other prophets, will live out a genuine righteousness “at a time...when all the people will

⁷ “The Lord is our righteousness” is found in the ESV. The name has also been translated “Yahweh is our righteousness” (Brueggemann), “The Lord Our Righteous Savior” (NIV), or “The Lord has provided us with justice” (NET).

⁸ “Please turn; let no injustice be done. Turn now; my *vindication* is at stake” (Job 6:29 ESV).

⁹ “Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your *righteousness* shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard” (Isa 58:8 ESV).

¹⁰ “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in *righteousness* shall you judge your neighbor” (Lev 19:15 ESV).

¹¹ “A king will reign in *righteousness*, and princes will rule in justice” (Isa 32:1 ESV).

¹² Material adapted from footnotes to Jeremiah 23:6 in *The NET Bible*, netbible.org.

¹³ F.B. Huey Jr, “Jeremiah and Lamentations,” in *NAC* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 212.

acknowledge the Lord as the only source of true righteousness.”¹⁴

23:7-8. Most of verses 7-8 of chapter 23 can also be found in 16:14-15. God asserts in both passages that the return from the exile to Babylon will far surpass the Exodus from Egypt. Brueggemann makes a connection between what Zedekiah says in chapter 21, “Inquire of the Lord for us...Perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds,” and this passage (Jer 21:1). Chapter 21 uses negative language to refer to the Exodus: “I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath...For I have set my face against this city [Jerusalem] for harm and not for good, declares the Lord” (Jer 21:6-10). However, Brueggemann states, the “wonderful deed” Zedekiah makes reference to will indeed come to pass as it is prophesied in chapter 23. “There will be a new wonderful deed which will displace the Exodus memory...The land so grieved (22:29) now is a functioning homeland again.”¹⁵ The idea of a new and greater exodus is also prophesied by Isaiah: “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old...I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”¹⁶ (Isa 43:18-19).

Theme of the Text

The general theme of the book of Jeremiah could be stated like this, “God promises his people a new covenant beyond the necessary exile.”¹⁷ This idea of a new covenant beyond the exile is readily apparent in this passage as Jeremiah

¹⁴ Huey, 212.

¹⁵ Brueggemann, 208.

¹⁶ See also Isa. 11:11-12, 15-16; 43:16-21; 49:8-13; 51:1-11.

¹⁷ Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 95.

makes explicit reference to new life to come on the other side of the exile to Babylon. For example, verse 6 states, “In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely” (Jer 23:6). Brueggemann also makes reference to the newness to come in Jeremiah 23: “Notice that the blessings announced are not guarantees of continuity. Rather, they bear witness to the deep discontinuity and imagine that God has power and will to assert the newness again, newness un-derived from what has gone before.”¹⁸ Thus, the theme of 23:1-8 is that *the Lord will raise up for Israel a righteous Branch who will govern wisely and execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

The name יהוה צדקנו is critical to a full understanding of this theme. The judgment aspect of the shepherd and sheep metaphor that opens this passage is a set up for the prophecy of restoration to come with a truly righteous king. Isaiah 9 can also helpfully illuminate this passage: “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore” (Isa 9:7). The important aspect to remember, though, is that the Lord is the one enacting the righteousness. God provides justice to his people by raising up the righteous Branch and giving the safety, security, and wellbeing that result from his rule.

One thing that might be puzzling when this passage is considered by itself is the sudden shift of metaphor that occurs between verse four and verse five. Verses 1-4 are focused on the sheep and shepherds metaphor and verses 5-8 shift to a prophecy about the righteous Branch who will reign as king. In this case, it is helpful to consider the passage in light of its references to Davidic lineage. David himself was a shepherd before he was king over Israel. In 2 Samuel 5, the Lord says to David, “You shall be shepherd

¹⁸ Brueggeman, 208.

of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel” (2 Sam 5:2). B. Dale also states, “Shepherds are not owners of the sheep; but their office is to feed and govern: no more are kings proprietaries or owners of the people...The office of kings is to govern, maintain, and protect people.”¹⁹

This idea of a shepherd-king also extends more broadly to the ancient Near East context of the biblical narrative. The prologue and epilogue of the Laws of Hammurabi both make reference to the king as a shepherd of his people. He calls himself “the shepherd of the oppressed and of the slaves” in the prologue, and in the epilogue he states, “I am the salvation-bearing shepherd, whose staff is straight.”²⁰ A number of the Psalms also make reference to God as the shepherd of his people. Psalm 23 states, “the Lord is my shepherd,” while Psalm 80 says, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock” (Psalm 23:1; 80:1). The reference also appears again in Jeremiah 31: “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock’” (Jer 31:10).

Ezekiel 34 also bears similarity to Jeremiah 23 when it refers to God himself as the shepherd. In verse 11 and following the Lord says, “I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out...I will rescue them from all the places they have been scattered” (Ezek 34:11-12). Like in Jeremiah, Ezekiel’s prophecy shows God undoing the evil the shepherds inflicted on the people in a post-exilic context. Later in Ezekiel 37 he says, “My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd...They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob...and

¹⁹ B. Dale, “The Shepherd King,” *Bible Hub*, 2010, http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/dale/the_shepherd_king.htm.

²⁰ “The Code of Hammurabi,” trans. L.W. King, *The Avalon Project: Yale School of Law*, 2008, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp>.

David my servant shall be their prince forever” (Ezek 37:24-25). This passage, like the others, again makes reference to a shepherd-king like David.

The contemporary situation of this passage is a difficult one. From the beginning of chapter 21 to this passage, Jeremiah confronts Judah’s kings for their covenant breaking and prophesies the exile to come. Judgment against the kings occurs in chapter 22 and only redeemed people will be a part of the remnant that will return to the land given to Israel and Judah. The contemporary circumstances happening around Jeremiah would only serve to strengthen the message, even though the leaders and people refused to repent. During the time of this prophecy, Babylon had already begun to take the first exiles from Judah into captivity in Babylon. As it is likely that Zedekiah was king during the time, based on the play on words with יהוה צדקנו in 23:6, Jehoiakim’s rebellion failed and Jehoiachin was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar to make Zedekiah king. At that time, Nebuchadnezzar again took people of Judah into captivity in Babylon.

Careful study of the intricacies and details of the Hebrew text of Jeremiah 23, particularly the name יהוה צדקנו shows that the Lord alone is the one who can save and justify his people. This passage in Jeremiah, as well as other Old Testament texts, provide helpful evidence to trace the theme of the Lord as his people’s righteousness through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. The metaphor of the shepherds of Israel is a critical one for the theme of righteousness that is found throughout the Bible. In Jeremiah 3, God promises that he will give his people “shepherds after his own heart” (Jer 3:15) and in Ezekiel 34, he specifically names that servant as David. By the time Ezekiel prophesied, however, David had died. Therefore it seems logical to assume that Ezekiel is referring to the same Branch that is prophesied in Jeremiah 23.

This shepherd that will come is also the righteous Branch and king, a shepherd king in the house and line of David. A similar prophecy can be found in Isaiah: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit” (Isa 11:1). This reference can also be found elsewhere in Jeremiah: “But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them” (Jer 30:9). David is also referenced in Ezekiel 37, “My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd” (Ezek 37:24), and Hosea: “Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.” (Hos 3:5) Although these references do not make specific mention of the person and work of Christ, they all do make mention of David or the Davidic line from which Jesus Christ will come.

Other passages of Scripture offer additional specifications regarding the king to come, such as Zechariah 9:9: “Your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” While this passage does not make specific reference to a king who will come from the Davidic line, it does reference the king riding on a donkey, which is also found in the gospels in the Triumphal Entry narrative. There are also more general prophecies to be found that give much less descriptive comments on the coming king: “a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice” (Isa 32:1). This statement hearkens to the way in which the king will rule, but does not focus on his royal lineage.

Fulfillment in Christ

The descriptions and prophecies that are found in the Old Testament describe a type of king that is fulfilled in Christ.

Romans 15:4 states, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4). Thus, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is that people and ideas (types) in the Old Testament do find their fulfillment—their antitypes—in the New Testament. As can be seen in the gospels and the ministry of Christ, Jesus is the antitype to the righteous king in David’s line who is prophesied in Jeremiah and the other prophetic texts. This can be evidenced in a variety of New Testament texts from both the gospels and the letters.

This ideal was set forth by David in 2 Samuel 8:15, “David administered justice and equity to all people,” and David also wished for his son Solomon: “Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice!” (2 Sam 8:15; Psalm 72:1-2). This again connects back to the name the king is given in Jeremiah 23: יְהוּדָה צְדִיקוֹ. The justice and righteousness that Jeremiah refers to here in this passage can only be found in obedience to God. A soteriological connotation can be made by looking at 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, which makes reference to Christ in connection with this righteousness: “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” (1 Cor 1:30-31).

Of the gospels, Matthew makes early reference to Jesus as king. In chapter 2 when the wise men come to visit Jesus, they ask, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him” (Matt 2:2). Luke also makes early reference to Jesus’ kingship: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of

his father David” (Luke 1:32). In Matthew’s genealogy, “son of David” is the first familial description we have. All of these verses refer back to the messianic prophecies of the king to come who will be from David’s line and restore the kingdom to Israel.

This idea of righteousness is one that is critical to understanding Jeremiah 23:1-8 and is additionally significant because of the king’s name. Jesus’ ministry also focuses around the importance of justice and righteousness for the wellbeing of the land. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew makes numerous references to δικαιοσύνη, or righteousness. When John baptizes Jesus in Matthew 3, Jesus says, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15). Jesus’ baptism is not only the beginning of his ministry on earth, but it also refers to “God’s saving activity prophesied throughout the Old Testament,” including Jeremiah 23.²¹ Righteousness and justice are critical aspects of Jesus’ earthly ministry, which is evident in his teaching and actions as documented in Scripture.

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is one place where Jesus makes numerous references to righteousness. In the Beatitudes, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied...Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:6, 10). Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness recognize that God is the source of all righteousness and that this righteousness is an important aspect of the way of salvation. In the next chapter, Jesus says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt 6:33).

In relation to the extended metaphor that appears in the initial verses of Jeremiah 23, Jesus does make use of the same

²¹ Michael J. Wilkins, “Matthew,” in the *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane T. Dennis et al. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2007), 1824.

shepherds and sheep metaphor in Matthew 18 and Luke 15 when he tells the parable of the lost sheep. These parables in Luke and Matthew use the image of a sheep in different ways, but both depend on many of the passages found in the Old Testament for this metaphor to have weight. Throughout his ministry, Jesus has concern for and interest in the lowly, hurting, and marginalized people groups. In Mark 5, Jesus heals two women—a woman who has a bleeding disease that makes her ceremonially unclean and Jairus’s daughter who died. Jesus also welcomes the little children to himself. A good portion of his ministry relates to bringing the marginalized back into society. This fits with the description Brueggemann gives of the king in Jeremiah 23: “In the days of this promised king (23:6) there will be a royal obedience which will make public life possible. One can see here exilic anticipations that the Christian community has found embodied in Jesus of Nazareth.”²²

Jesus very clearly reflects the prophecy Jeremiah provides in chapter 23. The fact that one of the first things Matthew chooses to note about Christ’s genealogy is that he is the son of David makes a clear connection to the prophecies of the righteous king and a restored Israel. However, just as Jesus fulfills Jeremiah’s prophecy, he also fulfills the prophetic office by representing both God and his community, which he does in a number of ways. One of these ways is by his words as he addresses the meanings of the laws of the Old Testament; however, “Jesus goes far beyond the prophetic task of *speaking* the words of God; he has become nothing less than the embodiment of the Word of God.”²³ Jesus also perfectly represents God through his actions as he combines preaching with healing. He does not simply talk,

²² Brueggemann, 207.

²³ Michael Williams, *The Prophet and His Message: Reading Old Testament Prophecy Today* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2003), 143.

but he acts on the message he preaches. He also represents God emotionally when he displays emotions like compassion, love, even anger—in fact, he represents God with his whole person. These ideas are visible in the way the king’s actions are described in Jeremiah 23:6. This king will act wisely, do justice and righteousness in the land, and lead the people to dwell in safety.

At the same time, someone who fulfills a prophetic role also needs to be able to perfectly represent his or her community, which Jesus also does. As the Son of Man, it was necessary that Jesus be a member of the community he was sent to represent and redeem. Just as Jesus represents God through his words, actions, emotions, and whole being, he also represents humanity in a similar fashion. Jesus prays on behalf of humanity in John 17 and his suffering is such that those who follow him can also expect to experience the same. To apply this to the passage in Jeremiah 23, the emphasis can again be drawn to the name given to the Davidic king: יהוה צדקנו, “The Lord is our righteousness.” The words and actions of Jesus as God’s representative in the role of Davidic king lead to a public life for Judah that allows the people to “dwell securely” in their own land.

As a representative of humanity, Jesus in the role of the Davidic king leads the people through his words, actions, and whole being to represent the new covenant and work toward the secure and righteous existence that the Lord will provide. The actions of the king in verses 5-8 are also visible in Christ during the final judgment and consummation. In fact, it is at this time that justice, righteousness, and dwelling securely can be truly realized.

Significance for the Church

Jeremiah’s prophecy in chapter 23 is significant for the church in that it can be understood as a warning against the

leaders of Judah in the first four verses. He proclaims judgment against them because they have scattered the flock and have not attended to their needs. In John 10, Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who came “that [his sheep] may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). The leaders of the church today should be careful to follow the example of Christ, the good shepherd, and avoid the potential pitfall of the situation the shepherds of Judah found themselves in. Instead of protecting the sheep, the shepherds in 23:1-4 have abused their power and neglected the sheep. Ezekiel provides a more detailed description of these shepherds:

Ah, shepherds of Israel...You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. (Ezek 34:2-6)

Leaders of the church should heed this judgment oracle of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and be careful not to be swept up into our own thoughts and ideas pertaining to the kingdom of God and Christ.

Brueggemann states that “the shepherds have been remiss, because they have been preoccupied with themselves and their own well-being.... Mismanaged royal power is the single cause of the exile.”²⁴ The relationship between the leaders and the people of Judah is inherently one built on a power dynamic. Leaders in the church have a large degree of power and authority when determining the direction that a church might take. Thus, church leadership should be careful to follow Christ in all things—keeping in mind that

²⁴ Brueggemann, 206.

“the Lord is our righteousness”—lest they be counted among the “hired hands” Jesus also mentions in John 10: “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd...sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees...He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep” (John 10:11-12).

The second half of the passage (verses 5-8) that describes the Davidic king to come focuses on the king’s rule over the people of Israel and Judah. During his reign there will be justice and righteousness. Just as Jesus Christ is the king of which Jeremiah speaks and the fulfillment of the prophetic office, so the church is called to conform to the likeness of Christ. In this conforming, Christians should seek to speak, act, and behave in a way that points people to the kingdom of God in the already but not yet. It is interesting to note that Jeremiah’s prophecy in chapter 23 is during an in-between time. The Lord has spoken about the coming judgment and exile to Babylon, but it has not yet come to pass. In the same way, the church today is also waiting, like Judah, for the return of Christ.

During this time, the church is called to communicate the good news of the new covenant and what both sides of the covenant should look like. The church represents God, and the God-man—Christ, as well as the new humanity. However, as the church effectively fulfills this role, the two representative functions merge. As we represent humanity as God intended it to be, we also represent God. This passage focuses on what the world will look like after the coming of this king and his kingdom. The foretaste of which became visible with the coming of Christ as recorded in the gospel texts, but in this time the church is also waiting for the second coming of Christ. The church participates in the beginning of this new community, but it has yet to be realized in full.

To more fully understand how this passage applies in specific situations for the church it is important to look at the terms of “justice” and “righteousness” that occur in Jeremiah 23:5. These words flow off the tongue quickly and easily in talking about how the church should act and what the church should do. They are also related in meaning, but they do have different connotations. Righteousness communicates the idea of being moral right or justifiable—living in a way that is pleasing to God and in keeping with his kingdom—and justice encompasses the idea of returning to a way of righteous living.

Again, the name “The Lord is our righteousness” gives a template for understanding how the body of Christ should function within the church structure and within the world. Christians are not their own righteousness and they cannot arrive at a place of righteous living of their own doing. Salvation and the kingdom of Christ are brought through the Lord’s work, in which Christians are invited to and do participate. Fundamentally, the the work of the church is different from the call of the world. Christians are called to be distinctly countercultural and often the work is small scale that in time leads to greater outcomes. This can be seen in the gospels in the way that Christ communicates the message of the gospel and proclaims the kingdom. The parables Jesus tells are about small things that represent the kingdom: a mustard seed, the leaven in a loaf of bread, or a fine pearl. These seemingly small things are used to great effect.

Brueggemann relates the work of Christ to “anticipations for a restoration of public life,” which can also be helpful in considering how to look at this passage in relation to righteousness and justice.²⁵ The church’s prophetic role in this reality is to represent the new humanity, which can be done in the day to day by looking for ways to enact justice and righteousness in daily life—not just words, but also behav-

²⁵ Brueggemann, 207.

iors and actions. One area of life to consider is the way Christians treat the people around them. It is easy to think highly of the people who are closest to a person or those they might be in a position to receive something from. The true test is how they treat those who are different from them or those who are not in a position to give back to them in return for the kindness.

For example, Christians should consider their behavior in relation to those who serve them—whether they work as waiters, retail workers, mechanics, or some other customer service position. It is easy to become self-focused in these kinds of situations and current American culture is one of expediency and wanting things now. When Christians walk into a Meijer, a Starbucks, or an Olive Garden, they should treat the people around them in a way that exemplifies righteous and just living—modeling the life the Lord calls his followers to live. The same thing is true in the seminary. How do faculty, staff, and students interact and live with those who come from different cultures and speak different languages? The church as represented in the seminary community should strive to emulate this just and righteous living by welcoming and treating each other in the way we see Jesus treating the outcasts and marginalized in the gospel narratives.

Ephesians 2:13-18 can be a guiding passage in seeking to be a part of the work of the new humanity:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one

body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (Eph 2:13-18)

Christians in the church are fellow citizens called to assist in creating this community that will be free of hostility. The church is also called to communicate this in a prophetic way to the unbelievers around us with the whole being—actions and words. In considering the people outside the community of faith, it can be more difficult to proclaim the Word through speech, but proclamation is important to consider in relation to behaviors and actions. Both are necessary to fulfill the prophetic task.

In current context, welcoming Muslim Syrian refugees or Latin American immigrants is one way to effectively communicate the new humanity to others. Present American culture is not welcoming to these groups of people, but the church's call to execute justice and righteousness so that the people might dwell securely is inherently countercultural. As more Christians and churches live in a way that shows this to the world, the church becomes a greater witness to the work of God through Christ and his church.

Verses 7-8 of chapter 23 make clear reference to a coming out of exile even greater than the Exodus from Egypt. Jeremiah prophesies that the “liberation from Babylon will be so overwhelming that liberation from Pharaoh will be superseded and therefore not remembered or spoken of.”²⁶ He also states that these verses serve as a response to Zedekiah's question in 21:2 in relation to the “wondrous deeds” he has done. Liberation from exile will result in a renewed and restored homeland for both Israel and Judah.

²⁶ Brueggemann, 208.

The coming of the kingdom will be realized fully in that the victory over sin and death will be completed. What began with Israel in the Old Testament, and continued with Christ's death and resurrection into the New Testament, will finally find its fulfillment. Thinking about the passage within the larger context of God's redemptive plan leads to an even greater fulfillment with the second coming of Christ. The second coming—and the time to follow—are the even greater thing to come. Brueggemann puts it this way, "Now God will work a newness...[the blessings announced in verses 7-8] imagine that God has power and will to assert the newness again, newness underived from what has gone before."²⁷

²⁷ Brueggemann, 208.

ORIENTING HOPE

Cody Hinkle

Abstract: Christians are no less a people of hope than a people of faith. Many recent discussions of Christian hope, such as N. T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope*, incorporate non-Christian hopes for this world as well. Wolfhart Pannenberg provides a corrective to this by identifying Christian hope as distinctively faith-based and eschatologically oriented. Yet he articulates his position in a way that retains active involvement on the part of Christians in the betterment of society. In his framework social activism is a natural consequence of faith, rather than a constituent element.

Christians are constantly at risk of inverting priorities between this world and the one to come. Max Weber, for example, observes an inverse relation between material wealth and spiritual wealth which motivated ascetic religious practices within Protestantism.¹ Another place where this is frequently evident is in the various social gospels which have grown increasingly common in the past century.² One might criticize that such gospels have become so earthly minded, they are no heavenly good. Presentations which replace Christian eschatological hope with a worldly hope are justifiably opposed.³ There are also writings advocating for justice and peace which emphasize this world to the neglect of God's heavenly kingdom, though they stop far short of abandoning the heavenly kingdom. Ironically, these texts often ground their agendas in the very heavenly kingdom

¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), chap. 5.

² See, e.g., Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Gospel in A Rauschenbusch Reader: The Kingdom of God and the Social Gospel*, ed. Benson Y. Landis (New York: Harper, 1957), 1-72.

³ Here and throughout, I speak of worldly hope not in a pejorative sense, but as this-worldly hope in contrast to other-worldly hope.

which they are accused of neglecting.⁴

Much of this is a reaction to the opposite tendency of some Christians who have become so enraptured with the next world that their gospel becomes merely an escape from the everyday struggles of the present life. This excessively individualized gospel lacks transformative power for the present order, and is thus regarded by many as lacking.⁵ The distinction ought to be made, however, that in this case at least the foundation is retained, whereas in the former case the very basis of worldly hope is at risk of being forgotten.

Perhaps no one has provided a better framework for balancing these tensions than Wolfhart Pannenberg, who understood the Christian eschatological hope as both grounding and limiting worldly hopes.⁶ This is an expository paper on Pannenberg's concept of hope as it relates to the task of the church in this world. It thus considers a variety of related themes in Pannenberg's theology (eschatology, anthropology, and ecclesiology), but always with an attempt to bring Pannenberg's theology to bear on the contemporary issue of Christian social ethics.

Christian Hope

Pannenberg's concept of hope is heavily influenced by the traditionally Pauline texts of the New Testament. Paul lists

⁴ See esp. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) and N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

⁵ See Wolterstorff's critique of medieval Christianity as "avertive" in *Justice and Peace*, chap. 1.

⁶ A concise explanation may be found in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 3:179-181. See also Pannenberg, "Faith and Disorder at Bangalore," *Worldview* 22.6 (1979): 37-40; and *The Church*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), chap. 10.

hope in the triad of theological virtues: “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love” (1 Cor. 13:13). As a theological virtue, hope is a salvific work of the Spirit in the heart of each Christian. It consists primarily in a sense or feeling of expectation beyond what one’s experience might warrant. Thus, Abraham “hoped against hope” for a son from Sarah, despite a century’s experience of barrenness and the obvious biological implications of old age. And as Paul makes clear in the same passage, Abraham’s hope rested on faith, viz., his knowledge of and trust in a God who stood above the biological processes which barred any natural expectation. Quite clearly in this example, hope pertains not to some general end of the world but to the individual.

Yet hope is not restricted to the individual; Christian love extends hope to the good of one’s neighbors. This might be tied in with the example of Abraham, who was promised that all the nations would bless each other using his name (Gen. 12:3). Whether Abraham’s hope involved only his own progeny or adequately incorporated this global aspect of God’s promise is a matter of some discussion, but at the least his two-fold intercession pertaining to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 15 and 18, both involving his nephew Lot) ought to leave open the possibility. Regardless, the location of the Abraham cycle after the table of nations (Genesis 10) communicates that God’s hope for the world extended far beyond Abraham’s immediate family. So Pannenberg contends that the linking of hope with love allows Christians to hope for not only their own good but also that of their neighbor. That is to say, Christian hope is not merely an egotistical escapism which is worthless or irrelevant to the rest of the world.

This relates well with a final aspect of hope, namely, that it finds ultimate fulfillment not in this world but the next. In a word, Christian hope is eschatological. Pannenberg emphasizes no text of Scripture more than 1 Corinthians 15.

Here Paul insists that apart from the resurrection, the Christian worldview has nothing to offer. Indeed, if there is no resurrection, then Christians are to be pitied above all other people (v. 19). This text more than any other ought to put to rest the various proposals that Christians should be primarily invested in the bettering of this world. In addition, however, one might turn again to the account of Abraham, this time in Hebrews. Here we read that Abraham waited expectantly for a city having foundations whose architect and builder is God. If this is not clear enough, the text goes on to say that Abraham died in faith, not receiving the promises but seeing them from afar (11:10, 13). In light of these texts, one could scarcely imagine a construal of Christian hope which consisted exclusively or even primarily in the betterment of this world.

Thus, Pannenberg clarifies three elements which are basic to the Christian hope. (1) Christian hope consists in some sense of the individual expectations which each Christian holds in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. (2) Yet Christian hope is not therefore an escape from the ties to this world, but is shaped by love so as to include hoping for other individuals. (3) Christian hope can in no way consist in a this-world utopia, but must rather anticipate a new creation ushered in by God at the end of this first creation. All of this comes together nicely in Pannenberg's discussion of Colossians, where Paul speaks of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27). He writes, "According to Col. 1:27 God's saving plan, his *mysterion* that is now revealed, consists of the fact that 'Christ is in you, the hope of glory.' But Christ is the Messiah of the people of God and also the Savior of the world of nations. Hence Christ is not only the hope for this or that individual but the riches of the glory of the divine plan of salvation among the peoples."⁷ One hears in "the hope of glory" a reference to the eschaton; in "Christ" the

⁷ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:179.

reference to one who brings salvation for the nations; and in the phrase “in you” the significance of each individual in the eschatological kingdom. This distinctively Christian hope must serve as both the foundation for our lesser, worldly hopes and the limiter of these hopes.

Hope in Anthropology

In order to understand Pannenberg’s formulation of the relationship between Christian hope and lesser hopes, one must also understand the place of hope in anthropology.⁸ All humans are born with the capacity to hope. Secular people hope every day for mundane things such as a fast commute, and at least some hope for grander things such as an end of poverty or hunger. What distinguishes such hopes from the Christian hope outlined above? The distinctive aspect of Christian hope for Pannenberg is its basis in faith. This basis is what enables Christian hope to reach beyond rational conclusions one might draw from human experience, as in Abraham’s hope for a son. Non-Christian worldly hopes have impermanent and unstable grounds outside of God, and consequently lack the certainty of Christian hope.⁹ Although the distinct basis of Christian hope results in radical differences in comparison with non-Christian worldly hopes, both occupy the same sphere in anthropology.

Consequently, the irruption of Christian hope in a human being might be expected to have some effect upon non-

⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 226ff.

⁹ The phrase “non-Christian worldly hopes” is somewhat cumbersome, but refrains from placing such hopes in an antithetical relationship with Christian hope. There are at least some arguing that “secular” ought not to have an anti-Christian connotation, though they have certainly not taken the field (e.g., Robert A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, Blessed Pope John XXIII Lecture Series in Theology and Culture [Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006]).

Christian worldly hopes. A number of possibilities might be considered at this point. For example, Christian hope might be expected to supplant non-Christian worldly hopes by displacing the need which people have for a fulfillment of life in this world. This option will be countered more clearly in our discussion of eschatology, since the eschatological future is made present by our union with Christ *while we remain in this world*. Given this proleptic presence, one must attempt some conciliatory relationship between the spiritual and physical aspects of life. Alternatively, Christian hope might invigorate non-Christian worldly hopes by securing their ultimate realization in the eschaton. This might be described as a redeeming or transforming relationship. To some degree, of course, the effects depend on the nature of the non-Christian worldly hopes and whether their objects are compatible with or contrary to God's eschatological future. The essential question in this section is how do Christian worldly hopes compare with non-Christian worldly hopes?

A fundamental difference is in the primacy of non-Christian worldly hopes. Christian hopes for this world occupy a secondary place rather than a primary place in anthropology. Christians could (theoretically) expect the worst in this life without any relief apart from death and still find joy in the hope of a blissful eternity. For example, Sarah Edwards, wife of American theologian Jonathan Edwards, during a period of spiritual ecstasy concluded that even if her husband were to horsewhip her and subject her to the worst abuse (he did not), she "would so rest {in} God that it would not touch {my heart} or diminish my happiness."¹⁰ Such egotistical escapism is not at all basic to Christian hope, as was observed above. Nevertheless, theorizing a contrary-to-fact circumstance in which one might be found

¹⁰ George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 246.

devoid of worldly hope, Sarah concluded that joy would be not just present but even dominant. Such a mentality coincides with reality in the testimonies of countless martyrs throughout history who joyfully endured painful and humiliating deaths in final conformity to Jesus (cf. Heb. 11:36-12:2). Both of these instances point to the secondary nature of hopes for this world in the Christian faith.

In contrast, a secular person is frequently reduced to despair on account of the instability or deficiency of their non-Christian worldly hopes. We have already observed Pannenberg's emphasis on the human destiny of fellowship with God. In light of this destiny, the secular person who senses that there is more to life than what this world has to offer may fall into despair even if (or perhaps especially if) his/her hopes are realized. Because the secular person's hopes attempt to fill a space designed for an other-worldly hope, they are often discovered to be insufficient even when fulfilled. The other difficulty with secular hopes is that there can scarcely be any certainty of their fulfillment. The examples of a fast commute or relief to world hunger are obvious enough, the first of which is uncertain and the second of which is so improbable in light of human sin alone that many consider it impossible. Both the uncertainty and the insufficiency of non-Christian worldly hopes indicate that they cannot satisfyingly occupy a primary space even for the secular person.¹¹

Yet the primacy of the Christian hope need not diminish or displace worldly hope in any way. Pannenberg describes the change like this: "Eschatological hope casts its light already on the present life and protects it against despair but also against an illusory overvaluing or even absolutizing of

¹¹ This observation grounds the despair apologetics of, e.g., Søren Kierkegaard (*The Sickness unto Death* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941]) and Blaise Pascal (*Pensées*, trans. Honor Levi [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995]).

finite goals of hope. This applies both to hopes of individual fulfillment of life in this world and to hopes of bettering the social order and its institutions. In both spheres it makes sense to strive for better conditions of life even if we take into sober account the limits of what is feasible.”¹² Thus, the Christian response to the sin of the present world order is not despair. Instead, serious assessment of the situation is coupled with a confidence in the irruption of God’s kingdom against which the very gates of hell shall not prevail. This confidence is the Christian hope which both supports and confines worldly hopes.

The Eschaton

The eschaton consists in God’s unresisted rule over his kingdom. He writes, “Because God is the Creator of the world, where he reigns his creatures attain to the goal of the destiny that is constitutive of their nature. This is true of individuals, whose restless demands first find peace in fellowship with God. But it is also true of human society, in which the common destiny of individuals takes shape. Only in common praise of the Creator does the free fellowship of human beings with one another find a basis.”¹³ Human destiny, for Pannenberg, consists primarily in fellowship with (even participation in) the Triune God and secondarily, by implication, in a just and peaceful human society.¹⁴ Both aspects are important to Pannenberg, and receive significant exposition.

The obvious image of the first part is Jesus Christ, as the incarnate Son of God. No greater union of God and humanity can be imagined. He is both Son of God and Son of Man. His identity as the former is found especially in his constant

¹² Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:180.

¹³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:580.

¹⁴ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:202-231.

communion with the Father; his identity as the latter culminates in his death on the cross in full obedience both to human mortality and the curse of sin.¹⁵ By fully accepting the human lot, Jesus becomes the first human to enjoy the ultimate fellowship with God for which the rest of humanity may only hope.

Yet there is a sense in which humanity may proleptically enjoy the same fellowship with God as Jesus does. By our union with Christ through baptism and the Eucharist, Christians submit vicariously to the curse of sin. Instead of hiding from God or passing blame as Adam did, Christians expose themselves for judgment in the sacraments and confess their radical alienation from God. By faith, they are united with Jesus who took upon himself judgment and alienation, but not only in his death. They proleptically experience for themselves fellowship with God as their Creator and Redeemer. That is, they enter through the sacraments into the eschaton while still living outside of it.¹⁶

¹⁵ Mortality is a basic element of prelapsarian humanity for Pannenberg. Thus, Jesus becoming “obedient to death” indicates full acceptance of his human identity. Yet fallen humanity was not destined merely for natural death. Sin had resulted in a curse, for which reason Jesus as Savior was required to die a particular death, namely, “death on a cross.” Thus, this greater obedience indicates Jesus’ solidarity not merely with humanity but even with fallen humanity. Pannenberg writes, “Although [Jesus’] obedience perhaps had a different content from that required of Adam, yet there is an antithetical correspondence between his act and that of Adam inasmuch as the obedience springs from the mind of Christ that does not seek to be like God but accepts distinction from God in subordination to him. We may thus say that in Rom. 5, too, Christ sheds light on the original situation of Adam and therefore on our human nature and destiny in relation to God” (*Systematic Theology*, 2:296).

¹⁶ The linking of the sacraments with the eschaton is not without biblical warrant. In Matthew, for example, Jesus speaks at the Last Supper of a day in his kingdom when he will again eat with his covenant people (26:29). Thus, Pannenberg says, “the celebration of the Lord’s Supper...continues Jesus’ practice of table fellowship as an anticipation

If there is a proleptic experience of the human destiny of fellowship with God, a natural question to ask at this point is what effects does this have for society? On the one hand, it seems that humanity ought to experience a measure of justice and peace due to their union with God, at least within the sacramental community. For example, in Colossians Paul gives various injunctions for communal life as a natural implication of their destiny. Because we shall appear with Christ in glory, we must put off all manner of sin and put in its place virtues of mercy, kindness, and forgiveness (3:4, 12-15). The social essence of these virtues is obvious. On the other hand, the question needs to be asked whether living into our destiny of fellowship with God results in justice and peace outside of the sacramental community. This is a more difficult question to answer, and will need to wait until we have considered Pannenberg's ecclesiology.

Pannenberg, of course, is not unique in connecting his eschatology with social ethics. To offer just two recent examples, consider Nicholas Wolterstorff who in his book *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* appeals to the claim of another author that "as soon as one has asked the question How ought I to live? seriously and with all its implications, the reply is already implicit: by situating one's life inside an eschatological or historical whole in which it inserts itself by faith."¹⁷ Assuming Wolterstorff's agreement with this claim suggests that for him not just Christian social ethics but all of ethics in general is essentially related with one's eschatology. Without eschatology, there can be no ethics at all. Another modern work connecting eschatology and so-

of human fellowship in the saving future of God's rule that a banquet symbolizes" (*Systematic Theology*, 3:31).

¹⁷ Wolterstorff, *Justice and Peace*, vii. The text quoted is Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, trans. Philip Thody (1964; repr. New York: Routledge, 2013).

cial ethics is N. T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope*.¹⁸ He writes,

A proper grasp of the (surprising) *future* hope held out to us in Jesus Christ leads directly and, to many people, equally surprisingly, to a vision of the *present* hope that is the basis of all Christian mission. To hope for a better future in this world—for the poor, the sick, the lonely and depressed, for the slaves, the refugees, the hungry and homeless, for the abused, the paranoid, the down-trodden and despairing, and in fact for the whole wide, wonderful, and wounded world—is not something *else*, something extra, something tacked on to the gospel as an afterthought.¹⁹

It is the inauguration of the eschatological future which grounds the hopes of the church for this world. Wright's emphasis on the inauguration of God's kingdom in the ministry of Jesus has pervasive effects on his social ethics. Significantly, both of these works emphasize only the strengthening aspect of the relationship between Christian hope and social ethics.

Meanwhile, a more nuanced relationship is found in Panenberg. His particular formulation of the church's task in light of eschatology is shaped by the previously discussed contours of Christian hope as well as his assessment of human destiny. The church's task in this world must value both individuals and society as a whole. Social justice is therefore a legitimate task of the Christian church. Yet the chief end of humanity is fellowship with God, and only secondarily with each other. Therefore, social justice cannot be the ultimate task of the church. Furthermore, since social justice is dependent upon inaugurated eschatology, the primary means of promoting social justice is in the clear proc-

¹⁸ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, part 3.

¹⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 191-192.

lamation of the gospel which enables humanity to proleptically experience the eschaton.

Church and Kingdom

A final contour of Pannenberg's relationship between eschatology emerges in the distinction between the church and God's eschatological kingdom. The church is not merely a piece of God's kingdom existing in the present. "We are not to view the church even as an incomplete form of the kingdom."²⁰ Rather, it is a sacrament of the kingdom, a sign for the present age which sheds light upon the mystery of the eschatological kingdom. It signifies this mystery both internally by the relationships of its members (both individual and corporate) and externally by its proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus and his eschatological reign.

Distinguishing the church from the kingdom of God prevents a host of errors regarding the church's mission in this world. He writes,

If the church fails to make this distinction clearly, then it arrogates to itself the finality and glory of the kingdom, but by the poverty and all too human character of its own life it also makes the Christian hope incredible. As Jesus in his earthly proclamation humbly distinguished himself from the Father and the future of his kingdom, so the church must distinguish its own existence from the future of the kingdom of God. Only in the spiritual poverty and humility of this self-distinction is it the place at which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the eschatological future of God's lordship is already present and at work for human salvation. Only as it renounces exclusive claims for its own specific form can it plainly be a sign of the universality of the kingdom of God and

²⁰ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:30.

an instrument of the reconciliation of human beings with one another and with God, transcending all the differences that separate people from one another and from the God of Israel.²¹

The church which considers itself a part of the kingdom is at remarkable odds with the testimony of its own character. In contrast, the church which renounces this claim finds for itself the ability to point clearly to the kingdom which remains a future reality. Indeed, God uses the church as a means to actualizing his kingdom in the present world. Yet when the future kingdom arrives in its fullness, the church will not be said to be fulfilled but rather nullified.

A contrast must also be drawn between the kingdom and political authorities. The political authority of the kingdom of God is clearly God himself. All of humanity exists strictly as subjects of the kingdom, and can in no way be regarded as administrators of it. If the church is merely a sign of the eschatological kingdom rather than a piece of it, it has no proper capacity to replace worldly political authorities or categorically reject them in submission to a heavenly authority. Worldly political authorities are established by God while they simultaneously stand in contradiction to the egalitarian society of the kingdom. "For such orders, even with democratic legitimation, are still orders of human government and express a regulating of the rule of some over others. The result is that there are concrete limits set for the justice that may be achieved, or is achieved, on this basis."²² The existence and necessity of government, not only in the world but also in the church, certifies the impossibility of God's kingdom finding consummation in the present world order.

In light of these distinctions between the church, God's

²¹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:32.

²² Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:55.

kingdom, and the kingdoms of the world, what are the moral responsibilities of Christians toward the rest of the world? Where do “matters of town planning, of harmonizing and humanizing beauty in architecture, in green spaces, in road traffic schemes, and ... in environmental work, creative and healthy farming methods, and proper use of resources” stand? Is N. T. Wright correct to say that these issues are “not an extra to the church’s mission,” but rather “central”?²³ Pannenberg’s description of the church suggests that Wright has generated a false dichotomy. The central mission of the church is to point to the eschatological hope of the kingdom. The primary element of the kingdom is not a just and peaceful society; its primary element is fellowship with God. A just and peaceful society exists as a consequence of this vertical union. To call such a mission “central” elevates the fellowship within the created order to an equal status with divine fellowship, which is certainly contrary to Pannenberg’s assessment.

Thus, when comparing other-worldly hope with worldly hopes, Pannenberg does not place the two on equal footing. In reflecting on the Bangalore document of 1978 which sought to unite Christians on worldly hopes as a way forward for ecumenism, Pannenberg writes:

We see here the consequences of giving precedence to supposedly more pressing this-worldly goals of hope over the eschatological hope of Christians. In setting such goals the special interests of specific groups often

²³ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 265-266. Cf. the recent *Banner* article which argues, “The hope and promise of salvation are centered in a renewal of creation, not an escape from it” (Daniel Boerman, “Heaven on Earth,” *The Banner* 150.11 [December 2015]: 33). The dangerous shift is reflected in the common notion of a this-worldly “center” of the Christian hope, suggesting that human beings were made not to glorify and enjoy God forever but rather to glorify God by enjoying the earth forever (contra Q&A 1 of the Westminster Catechism).

come to expression. The various forms of hope come into conflict with one another and there results the danger of extenuation on the one side and defamation on the other. Only the eschatological hope unites all Christians. Even for the sake of Christian unity it is necessary that we should subordinate these various this-worldly goals of hope to the eschatological hope and measure them by it.²⁴

The first and most obvious element of this critique is the priority of eschatological hope over worldly hope. Yet an additional element is also observed in the clashing of worldly hopes. Speaking to issues of town planning, architecture, parks, transportation, the environment, farming, or consumption requires specialized knowledge in the field and a good bit of worldly wisdom to which Christians have no special claim. Even when two Christians share, for example, a detailed knowledge of economics, they are likely to disagree regarding the manner in which the Christian eschatological hope ought to come to bear upon consumption of resources. There is perhaps a greater likelihood that the two would condemn the same practice, but a positive unity in worldly hopes is far less likely than a unity found in the eschatological hope.

Conclusion

Pannenberg has kept separate what Wright and so many others have joined. Worldly hopes remain distinct from Christian hope. It is true that Christian hope will influence worldly hopes, but there is no need (nor is it fitting) to baptize one's worldly hopes by identifying them as constituent elements of the Christian hope. To conflate these risks losing the distinctive foundation of Christian hope, its central

²⁴ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:181.

interest in fellowship with the Trinity, and its potential for unifying the global church under the single banner of Christ. Nevertheless, Pannenberg retains a place for such occupations within the church. Worldly hopes may be pursued so long as they are considered Christian only to the extent that they have been measured by the eschatological hope of fellowship with God in his kingdom. Even so, Christians and the church must always be united by their first and central mission of proclaiming God's reign in this world.