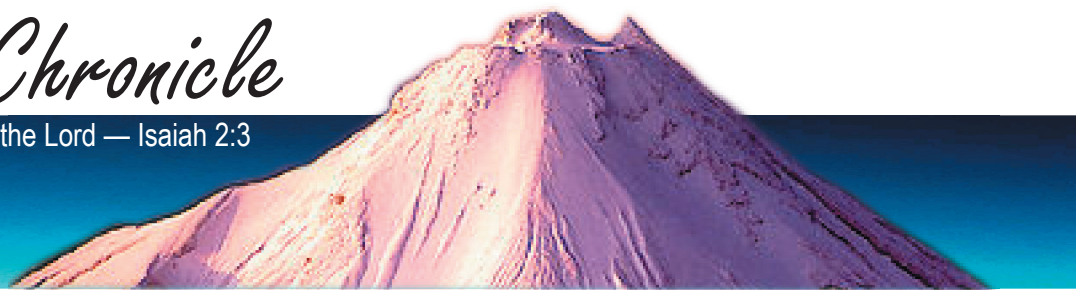


The Summit Chronicle

Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord — Isaiah 2:3



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Scripture of the Month

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

—Romans 8:28, 38-39

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WHEN LOVE GROWS COLD

by Wayne Jackson

Near the end of his second missionary campaign (ca. A.D. 52), Paul, in company with his working companions, Aquila and Priscilla, came to the city of Ephesus. This magnificent metropolis of some two hundred to three hundred thousand souls was the capital of provincial Asia, located in west Asia Minor, just off the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea. Here the apostle reasoned with the Jews in their synagogue. After a while, he sailed for Jerusalem, leaving behind Aquila and Priscilla.

Obviously some converts were made, for later on, after the incident involving Apollos, the missionary team, in company with "the brethren," encouraged the Alexandrian brother to go westward to Achaia; they even on his behalf wrote a letter of commendation (Acts 18:27).

After Paul embarked on his third missionary journey (ca. A.D. 53; see 18:23ff), he eventually came back to Ephesus (19:1). He there encountered a dozen men who had been taught the "preparatory" gospel advocated by John the Baptizer. After they were corrected regarding their doctrinal misconceptions, these men were immersed by the authority of Christ for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). They were members of Christ's church. Whether the remnant of Christians mentioned earlier (18:27) were still in Ephesus, Luke does not reveal; at any rate, there was a church here from this point onward.

Paul labored in this great city for the

following three years (cf. 19:8, 10, 22; 20:31). His discourse to the church's elders (20:18-35) is a striking commentary on the level of dedication the apostle pursued in developing their spiritual growth.

THE LETTER

During his first Roman incarceration (Acts 28:16ff; ca. A.D. 61-63), Paul wrote a letter that (in most Greek manuscripts) begins: "To the saints that are at Ephesus . . ." (1:1). There is some controversy about the matter. Without going into detail, two principal views are entertained by conservative writers: (a) The epistle was intended as a circular letter for various churches in provincial Asia, but since it likely was disseminated from Ephesus, that name became attached to the document (Thiessen 1955, 243-244). (b) The letter was written to and for the Christians in Ephesus, but Paul framed it in a rather generic format that would make it adaptable to neighboring churches, perhaps "daughter" congregations that resulted from Ephesian evangelism (Hiebert 1977, 260ff). Radical critics doubt that Paul even penned the document. Carl Holladay contends that "there are enough structural, stylistic, and theological differences from Paul to raise substantial questions about its Pauline authorship" (2005, 412).

The book of Ephesians has two major divisions. In chapters one through three, there is emphasis upon God's eternal plan for human redemption, as implemented by his Son, Jesus Christ, and manifested through the church (cf. 3:8-12). Then, in chapters

four through six, there is practical instruction for godly living. These saints were to be united (4:1-16), holy (4:17-32), loving (5:1-6), separated from ungodliness (5:7-14), wise (5:15-6:9), and vigilant (6:10-20). The letter makes it clear that it is important as to what one believes, and how he behaves.

But we are not finished. There is space to be filled—between the Epistle to the Ephesians, and Jesus’ note to this church more than thirty years later.

THE OMINOUS PROPHECY

It is interesting that in this epistle there is no hint of trouble festering in the Ephesian congregation. Hiebert observed that the purpose of the document “was not polemical” as evidenced by “the fact that it contains no definitely controversial elements” (266). Harold Hoehner stated that “no particular problem is raised in the book” (1983, 614).

On the other hand, one cannot but recall the prophecy uttered by Paul in his final recorded meeting with the elders of the Ephesian church:

Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, to feed the church of God which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:28-30).

Were we to never read another inspired line regarding the church at Ephesus, we would know that rough times were ahead for this community of believers.

**PAUL’S LETTERS TO
TIMOTHY**

The apostle Paul penned two letters

to his young friend, Timothy. Data in both epistles reveal that Timothy was living at Ephesus at the time. In the first letter the apostle encourages his friend to “tarry” (establish residence) in Ephesus (1:3). Then in 2 Timothy 4: 7, there appears to be an idiom known as the epistolary aorist, i.e., a statement written in anticipation of the arrival of the second letter, to be conveyed by Tychicus to Timothy in Ephesus.

One can gather, therefore, evidence from these communications as to the nature of potential trouble brewing in the Ephesian church. The following points are worthy of reflection. (Note: For a greater expansion of these matters, see my commentary, *Before I Die: Paul’s Letters to Timothy and Titus*).

(1) Some were inclined to teach a “different doctrine” from the pure gospel. There was the temptation to give heed to “fables” and “endless genealogies,” i.e., theories without historical bases, along with fictional tales, likely pertaining to Jewish ancestors. Such ideas merely generated useless controversies. Some already had swerved aside as a result of the empty speeches of those who professed to be teachers of the law, but who were void of understanding. Some who claim to know the most, in reality know the least (1 Timothy 1:3-7).

(2) The importance of holding tightly to “faith and a good conscience” was paramount, but some, notably Hymenaeus (cf. 2 Timothy 2:17) and Alexander, had thrust these from themselves and had “made shipwreck” concerning the faith (vv. 18-20). Paul had “delivered unto Satan” (i.e., exercised a disciplinary process; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5) these rebels so that they might be taught the danger of their blasphemy. Is it possible that the Ephesian brethren had been “selective” in their disciplinary procedures? Did they censure “false apostles” and the

Nicolaitans, but let others slide by?

(3) There was a problem in the Ephesian church that was female oriented. Clearly some women wanted leadership status, which Paul forbade upon the ground of the divine order of gender roles as first revealed in creation events, as well as man and woman’s initial responsibilities in the human rebellion (1 Timothy 2:8-15). Paul’s restrictions upon female leadership earned him the undeserved appellation of being the “eternal enemy of women” (George Bernard Shaw).

(4) The apostle was able to divinely see (via the Spirit) an impending apostasy at which point some would “fall away from the faith” (1 Timothy 4:1-4)—a clear affirmation of the possibility of apostasy (contra Calvinism). These apostates would give heed to “spirits” (i.e., false teachers; cf. 1 John 4:1) who would seduce them away from the truth with false theories concerning demons. These religious leaders would be hypocrites whose consciences had been seared as with a hot iron, perhaps beyond feeling (cf. Ephesians 4:19). They would be given to asceticism in such matters as forbidding marriage and the abstention from meat, not to mention yielding to “profane and old wives’ fables” (1 Timothy 4:7a).

(5) There was a master-slave conflict (1 Timothy 6:1-2), along with the persistent agitation of some who were not content to stay within the bounds of the “sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Such ones were puffed up, and in their ignorance addicted to disputes over meaningless matters, attempting even to enhance their financial resources by means of their doctrinal chicanery (vv. 3-10).

(6) There were quarrelsome folks who “subverted” certain disciples, not “handling aright the word of truth.” Their “babblings” were void of sacred content and produced only ungodliness.

These false teachers had “erred concerning the truth” and overthrew the faith of some, by such silly theories as the allegation that the resurrection of the dead was past already (2 Timothy 2:14-18). They probably “spiritualized” the resurrection in some fashion, as those of the modern radical preterist sect do. These errorists claim that the resurrection of the dead occurred in A.D. 70! (see also vv. 20-26).

(7) There were “personal workers” of mischief. They crept into houses and took captive certain silly women who were burdened with sin and enslaved by various desires. They professed to be diligent students, but never could come to a knowledge of the truth; rather, they withstood it. These false teachers were “reprobate” concerning the truth (2 Timothy 3:6-9; cf. v. 13; 4:1ff). (For a more detailed study of what has been called, “The Ephesian Heresy,” see Mounce 2000, lxixff.)

THE EPILOGUE

To frame a metaphor from the world of modern technology, let us now “fast-forward” to the concluding book of the New Testament, composed by the apostle John on the island of Patmos, and written about a third of a century after Paul’s Ephesian letter (ca. A.D. 96). In chapters two and three, there are seven brief letters to representative congregations in provincial Asia, one of which was located in Ephesus. The review is mixed and limited.

Praise – The Ephesian Christians could not “bear” evil men, specifically those who feigned apostleship but did not possess the credentials to support their arrogant claims (Revelation 2:2; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:11; 11:13). As then, so now, there are those who profess to be apostles of Christ, but are not (for instance, Mormonism).

In addition, the Ephesians hated the “works of the Nicolaitans,” which

incurred the Savior’s disdain as well (2:6). Some of the post-apostolic “fathers” contended that this sect was founded by Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the seven servants appointed to manage the care of Grecian widows (Acts 6:5b); supposedly, Nicolaus fell away from the faith. Others contended that the faction arose as a result of a misunderstanding of the brother’s teaching. The history is too shrouded to draw firm conclusions. The parallel reference in 2:14, coupled with the “Balaam” metaphor, may suggest an attempt to infiltrate the Ephesian church with semi-paganism and sexual looseness.

Censure – There were matters, however, that the resurrected Lord held against the Ephesians. For instance, they had left their “first love” (2:4). This seems to allude to the quality of love that they once embraced, but since had abandoned. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of a time in Israel’s history when the Hebrews had loved the Lord as one who loves his bride-to-be; but that love faded (Jeremiah 2:2). Since love is the motivating drive behind obedience, how dangerous it was to have left that zealous love (cf. John 14:15; Galatians 5:6).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul, guided by the Spirit of God, had focused on love, perhaps sensing a weakness that needed strengthening. The noun form for “love” (agape), and the cognate verbal form (agapao) are collectively found nineteen times in Ephesians—approximately one-sixth of the apostle’s employment of these words in all his letters combined (Hoehner, 614).

As a result of this waning love, the Ephesian family had “fallen” (2:5a), i.e., experienced a loss of status before the Lord (Danker et al. 2000, 815). The perfect tense form suggests the state had become fixed. Concrete hardens. It is possible for love to grow “cold”

(Matthew 24:12).

They thus were charged to “repent and do the first works,” i.e., the zealous works that characterized them initially. If they refused to respond to the Savior’s plea, the Lord would “move [their] candlestick out of its place” (5b). Since the “candlestick” was the church itself (1:20b), the significance is this: they would be disowned as one of Christ’s congregations! Can Christ disfranchise a church? Indeed he can! Those who labor under the illusion that doctrinal “orthodoxy” is paramount, but attitude is irrelevant, are a universe away from spiritual reality!

CONCLUSION

It is not difficult to discern that there were forces working in the church at Ephesus that led eventually to the sad condition sketched in Revelation 2: 1-7. When love for Christ grows cold, bitter fruit inevitably follows. Not all “Ephesian” churches have passed into oblivion!

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SALVATION IN ONE BODY (PART 2)

by Rex Banks

Life in the Local Church

When Paul addresses letters to the “church” at Corinth (1 Cor 1:2) the “churches of Galatia” (Gal 1:2) and the “church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1) he uses the term “church” to speak of a community of Christians in one location. He also has these local communities in mind when he uses expressions such as “churches of Christ” (Rom 16:16) and “churches in Judea,” as does Luke when he mentions “every church” (Acts 14:23) and Jesus when He speaks of “the seven churches”. (Rev 1:11) Thus while scripture uses the term “church” to speak of the one universal church, it also uses the term to speak of local communities of Christians in different areas which make up that universal church.

The importance of observing the Biblical distinction between the universal church and the local church is easily illustrated. For example as we have seen the universal church came into existence on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, but local churches did not exist in a particular town or city until the gospel had been preached in that town or city (e.g. Philippi [Acts 16]; Thessalonica [Acts 17]). Paul’s own case illustrates another distinction between the universal and local church in that he was added to the former by the Lord at the point of baptism (Acts 9:18) but was not immediately acknowledged as a member of the latter by the Jerusalem church when he came to that city. (Acts 9:26) Again, whereas scripture speaks of but one universal church it speaks of many local churches.

Another important difference between the church at the universal level and the local level is this: whereas at

the universal level the church has no earthly organization, at the local level the church described in the New Testament did indeed possess a formal structure and government, and some of her corporate activities conformed to a pattern which was laid down by inspired men. We can only touch the hem of the garment, but consider the following points:

When fully “set in order” (Tit. 1:5) local churches possessed a simple yet distinctive organization. Not long after the establishment of the church in Acts 2, we read of “elders” in the church at Judea (Acts 11:30) and a little later we learn that Paul “appointed elders ...in every church” (Acts 14:23) while in Galatian territory. We read of elders in the churches at Jerusalem (Acts 15:2) Ephesus (Acts 20:17) Philippi (Phil 1:1) and other places (Jas 5:14) and we find that Titus is left in Crete to “set in order what remains” by appointing elders in every city. (Tit 1:5) Elders are to “shepherd” and “guard” the “flock” (1 Pet 5:2; Acts 20:28) and to “take care of the church of God”. (1 Tim 3:5) They are to be able to “exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict” (Tit 1:9) and are described as “exercising oversight”. (1 Pet 5:2)

In some English translations the word “elder(s)” is rendered “bishop(s),” (e.g. Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1 [K.J.V]), and other terms like “pastors” (Eph 4:11) and “overseers” (1 Tim 3:1 [N.A.S.V]) are used to speak of this same office. In 1 Tim 4:14 a local group of elders is referred to as “the presbytery.” These different descriptive terms all describe the one office. In every instance we find a plurality of elders in the local church (never simply one elder), and scripture sets forth detailed qualifications for those holding this

office. (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9) For example the elder “must be...the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2) and is to have “children who believe”. (Tit 1:5) It is the local church which is “allotted to...(the elders) charge” (1 Pet 5:3) and their “oversight” did not extend beyond that local church. Each local church maintained its autonomy, and no organic tie bound one church to another.

A group of men possessing specific qualifications and known as “deacons” (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13) served under the elders, as did other Christians who functioned as teachers and evangelists. (2 Tim 4:5) In all matters elders were to hold fast to the “word”. (Tit 1:9) In conclusion then we note that while the church universal has no scripturally authorized organization upon the earth, the local church does.

The local church worshipped as a body. Christians do of course worship individually, but it is also clear from scripture that the Lord meant for the local church to worship as an assembled body. (The word *ekklesia* is also used to speak of the assembled church.) The Lord’s Supper, inaugurated by Jesus on the night before He died (Matt 26:26-29) was observed by the local church in an assembly setting on the first day of the week (1 Cor 11:17-34; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2) the “Lord’s day” (Rev 1:10) the day upon which Jesus rose from the dead. (Matt 28:1) Christians were instructed not to “forsake...(their) own assembling together”. (Heb 10:25) Assembled to worship God “in spirit (i.e. from the heart) and in truth” (i.e. as divinely directed), (Jn 4:24) first century Christians also praised God and taught one another by way of “psalms hymns and spiritual songs”, (Col 3:16) they offered prayer to God (Acts 2:42;

1 Tim 2:1, 8), they preached and were edified by the word (Acts 20:7; Col 4:16; 1 Tim 4:13) and contributed to the common treasury according to how they had prospered. (1 Cor 16:2) Leadership in the assembly was always male. (1 Tim 2:8-15; 1 Cor 14:34, 35)

THE WORK OF SERVICE

Christians have been called to serve as Christ served (Jn 13:15) and since the Lord's greatest work involved the salvation of souls (Matt 18:11; Lk 19:10) this must also be the primary focus of the Lord's church. Yes, Jesus did indeed cure the sick, raise the dead and restore sight to the blind, but His foremost mission was not the healing of bodies but the healing of souls. Christ's chosen were sent out, not as social reformers but as disciple-makers, and they fulfilled their commission by "baptising" those who responded gladly to the gospel, and then "teaching" them the ways of Jesus. (Matt 28:19, 20) Thus we are not surprised to find the Jerusalem church under the leadership of the apostles teaching constantly the gospel (Acts 2:42, 3, 4, 5) or to find the church at Antioch supporting Paul in his missionary journeys. (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26, 27; 18:22, 23) Evangelism, reaching the lost with the gospel of Christ, was the great work of first century churches like Jerusalem and Antioch, and it must continue to be our great work.

Following on from and complementing the work of evangelism is the work of edification and edification is an important matter because there are only two classes of Christians, namely those who grow and mature in Christ and those who leave their first love. The local church is to do all that it can to strengthen, equip and nurture the

spiritual lives of their members so that their faith remains strong and vibrant. To this end local leaders are (among other things) to "shepherd" and "guard" the flock (1 Pet 5:2; Acts 20:28) and to "exhort in sound doctrine". (Tit 1:9) In the local assembly Christians are to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:22, 25) and to edify by way of instruction. (1 Cor 14:4, 5, 12, 17, 26) When, through weakness and frailty, a brother or sister is "caught in any trespass" or "strays from the truth" he or she is to be restored by spiritually-minded brethren who have a deep concern for God's children. (Gal 1:1, 2; Jas 5:19, 20)

EDIFICATION, KEEPING THE SAVED SAVED, IS AN IMPORTANT WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Benevolence is also pictured as an important work of the first century church, notwithstanding the emphasis upon meeting man's spiritual needs. When Paul urges the Galatian churches to "do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith," (Gal 6:10) this serves to remind us that Christians are God's workmanship "created in Christ Jesus for good works". (Eph 2:10) This is why the Macedonians gave "beyond their ability" when the need arose (2 Cor 8:3) and why the church at Antioch responded so promptly and generously to the Judean crisis. (Acts 11:27-30) James tells us that along with holiness, "pure and undefiled religion" involves visiting orphans and widows in their distress, (Jas 1:27) and Luke gives us an example of such religion in action in the Jerusalem church. (Acts 6:1ff) Since God delights in giving good gifts, (Matt 7:7-11; Jas 1:5) His people will

also want to bless the lives of others as they have opportunity to comfort the afflicted and to help the needy.

Many other matters relating to the local church could be discussed, but enough has been said to make the point that at the local level the New Testament church possessed a specific organization, a clear pattern of worship and a definite mission. It is in this context that we will make a few comments about what is often termed "the restoration plea."

THE RESTORATION PLEA

In the city of Hamilton, throughout New Zealand and the rest of the world there are many Bible believers who are united in the conviction that it is possible today to be a member of the church which we read about in scripture, just as this was possible in the apostolic age. In our view such non-denominational Christianity is not merely possible, but is a requirement of scripture. This conviction grows out of and is grounded upon certain principles taught in scripture, namely:

a) Scripture is an all sufficient spiritual guide. When Paul told Timothy to "preach the word" (1 Tim 4:2) he grounded this instruction upon the fact that all scripture is inspired by God and thoroughly furnishes a man unto all (not some) good works. (2 Tim 3:16, 17) What Paul declared to the Ephesian elders was "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) not part of that divine counsel. Peter declares that "everything (not some things) pertaining to (spiritual) life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3) has been granted to Christians. The apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit not to some spiritual truth but to "all the truth". (Jn 16:13)

b) Scripture, our all-sufficient spiritual guide, sets forth a definite, identifiable, universally-binding pattern of teaching in matters of faith. According to Paul, Christians were “freed from sin” because they obeyed “from the heart that form (pattern) of teaching to which ... (they) were committed”. (Rom 6:17, 18) Obedience to a pattern of teaching then enabled them to appropriate the gift of life. In correcting the Corinthian abuses Paul reminds the brethren there that what he teaches them he teaches “everywhere in every church”. (1 Cor 4:17) In “all the churches” Christians are to walk as Paul directs the Corinthians to walk (1 Cor 7:17) and in the worship assembly there are practices none of “the churches” engage in (1 Cor 11:16) and practices which “all the churches” adopt. (1 Cor 14:33) The apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42) was a definite, identifiable body of truth which did not vary from church to church.

c) Since scripture will never pass away, this definite, identifiable, universally-binding pattern of teaching set forth in scripture will never pass from the earth. In unambiguous language Jesus affirms that His words will not pass away. (Matt 24:35) Peter assures us that the “living and abiding word of God” which was “preached” to first century Christians, enabling them to be “born again,” will never fade like the grass, but instead “abides forever”. (1 Pet 1:22-25) Since the word is imperishable so too is the pattern of teaching which scripture sets forth.

d) Since scripture is understandable, this identifiable, indestructible pattern of teaching set forth in the Bible is available to all in every age through diligent study of the Bible. The inspired writers of scripture certainly did not subscribe to the view that the word of God is a closed book to all but a select group (e.g. “the clergy”). Scripture does contain “some things

hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16) but if it is handled accurately (2 Tim 2:15) God’s message can indeed be known and obeyed (Eph 3:3, 4; 1 Tim 3:15) and a blessing is pronounced upon those who “hear” and “heed”. (Rev 1:3) Inspired writers of the New Testament epistles expected the recipients of their letters to understand the instructions therein, and the latter were held accountable for failure to obey these instructions. (2 Thess. 3:14; 3 Jn 9).

On the eve of His death, Jesus prayed that His followers in every age would be united (Jn 17:20) and such unity exists when, (among other things) Christ’s followers are of the “same mind and ...same judgment”. (1 Cor 1:10) Such scriptural unity can exist only among those who share the conviction that the Bible is the full and final authority in spiritual matters. As non-denominational Christians, our plea is simply this: let us speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent; let us abandon the human traditions and the creed books which usurp the authority of Christ; let us eschew all man-made names titles and designations and wear only those names found in scripture (e.g. “Christians” [Acts 11:26] “saints” [1 Cor 1:2] “brethren” [1 Cor 2:1] “disciples” [Acts 11:26] “churches of Christ” [Rom 16:16] “church of God” [1 Cor 12] “the church” [Eph 1:22] and other terms found in scripture). In short let us in all things “speak... the utterances of God... so that in all things God may be glorified”. (1 Pet 4:11) With these basics in place let us then grow in love for God and man until He comes to take us home.

Rex Banks resides in Hamilton, NZ. He has been instrumental with the work in Hamilton and he is one of the original contributing writers for the Summit Chronicle.



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The Secret

*Rejoice in the Lord always,
again I say rejoice!*

*Let your forbearing spirit be
known to all men. The Lord is
near.*

*Be anxious for nothing but
in everything by prayer and
supplication with thanksgiving let
your requests be made known to
God.*

*And the peace of God which
surpasses all comprehension
shall guard your hearts and
minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally brethren whatever is true,
whatever is honorable, whatever is
right, whatever is pure, whatever
is lovely, whatever is of good
repute, if there is any excellence
and if anything worthy of praise,
let your mind dwell on these
things.*

*I know how to get along with
humble means, and I also know
how to live in prosperity; in any
and every circumstance I have
learned the secret of being filled
and going hungry, both of having
abundance and suffering need.*

—Philippians 4:4-8, 12

THE DIVINE VIEW OF DEATH

by Wayne Jackson

In a psalm that is designed to emphasize the love of God for his children, an inspired writer declares: “Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints” (116:15).

The word “precious” is of considerable interest. The Hebrew expression (*yakar*) is used to depict a variety of things in the Old Testament. For example, the term describes the precious stones the queen of Sheba brought to Solomon (1 Kings 10:2). It refers also to the excellent reputation that David obtained as a youth (1 Samuel 18:30). It was applied to the value of God’s word during the childhood days of Samuel when there was a sparseness of divine revelation (1 Samuel 3:1).

In Psalm 116:15 the word clearly suggests the worth God places on his people, even in death. Some believe that the thrust of the passage is this: God “does not take lightly” the death of his saints (Yarchin 1997, 525). This could serve as a warning to any who would threaten or treat harshly the Lord’s people.

On the other hand, the most common view is that the death of his faithful is a truly “precious” thing to the Creator, equivalent to the value one would place upon a treasured thing. What magnificent measure of comfort there is in this affirmation. Just why would the Lord treasure those who have surrendered to his will?

For one thing, they have assessed the power of his creative ability, the genuineness of his benevolent love, and the blessedness of the hope he

provides beyond the grave. Hence, in faith, these have determined to cast aside all impediments in order to serve him—no matter what the consequences. Such are rare qualities in the masses who generally are ambitiously self-centered and obsessed more with time than eternity.

We must observe in passing that the text would have no meaning if: (a) there is no existence after death, or (b) there is not a distinction between the death of a “saint” and one who is not.

Another Vantage Point

On the other hand, to those who languished under the rigors of Babylonian captivity as a penalty for their sins, the prophet Ezekiel, speaking for God, declared: “As I live, says the Lord Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezekiel 33:11). The Lord is not a “sadistic ogre” who finds pleasure in watching the wicked die (Block 1998, 247).

Our Maker has “no desire” (NEB) to see the wicked pass from this life lost, because when one dies in sin, he cannot be henceforth with his Creator (Luke 23:43; John 8:21; 2 Corinthians 5:8). It is appointed unto humanity once to die, and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27). There is no post-mortem plan of redemption—the various theories of paganism (e.g., reincarnation) and the corrupt ideologies of “Christendom” (e.g., the dogma of Purgatory, the notion of “baptism for the dead,” or the idea of a “second-chance salvation) to the contrary notwithstanding. Neither is there “universal salvation” as

some imagine.

Accordingly, through his prophet, the Lord pled: “Turn back, turn back from your evil ways” (11b). Note the intensity of the plea. In essence, this is the biblical significance of “repentance.” How deceived are the multitudes who labor under the impression that they are secure in the deliberate continuation of their wickedness because God is too tolerant to hold them accountable for their sustained rebellion. The prophet’s admonition flies directly in the face of Calvin’s “once-saved, always-saved” teaching.

Further, the modern notion that repentance is merely saying, “I’m sorry,” but then maintaining the status quo (as in adulterous “marital” unions; cf. Mark 6:18) is far from the truth. Jehovah will pardon what we “have been,” if we conform to what we “ought to be.”

When the prophet speaks of the “death” of the wicked, he reaches beyond the moment of physical death, for all suffer the pangs of fleshly death, the common “enemy” that stalks Adam’s offspring until the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:26). Rather, “death” (which always implies a separation of sort) is here extended to estrangement from God, especially the eternal separation of divine abandonment (see Matthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 [especially here note the phrase, “from the face of the Lord”]; Revelation 20:14).

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LET NO ONE IN ANY WAY DECEIVE YOU

by Dave Bell

In Acts 17:22-34, Paul stood with the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens and proceeded to enlighten them as to whom their “unknown God” was. Paul wanted them to know that although they were religious they were being deceived by their idolatry.

In Colossians 2:8 Paul again admonishes Christians to: “see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

We have just had the honour of a series of lectures refuting evolution given by Brad Harrub and they have been given in the same way Paul used to refute the thinkers of his day. These lectures have indeed fortified my faith and I am sure they have done the same for every Christian who listened to intently and took in the material given. It is a comfort to know that the church still has “giants of the faith” whom can put forth the truth on topics often beyond the ken of many.

When you think about it Paul is right when he says we are to “see to it.” This implies we are to put forth a sustained and genuine effort to come to grips with the prevailing mood of culture and philosophy that is prominent in our time. We are to avoid being “taken captive,” by them since they are “empty deception according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

We live in a time when the so-called learned people of the world are taking our children captive. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many of us Christian parents do not know how to answer those who are teaching our children and grandchildren.

Evolution is indeed an empty

deception, a tradition of men, and it is according to the elementary principles of the world (of origins), and it is against the teachings of Christ. Evil men have got worse and worse and more strident in their teaching of this godless theory as a “fact.”

If we think for just a moment we see that Christ endorses the creation account and the miracles that are recorded in scripture.

(Matthew 19:4), “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning, MADE THEM male and female?”

(Luke 17:32), “Remember Lot’s wife.” What is there to remember about Lot’s wife? Only that she “looked back and became a pillar of salt.” Now on the face of it we can say “so what,” but think about this. If Christ lied about this then He could not be the Son of God. Why not? Because you just cannot have a lying Son of God. The same can be said if He were ignorant of the facts concerning creation or the miracles. You simply cannot have an ignorant Son of God.

As Brad pointed out, the argument that C.S. Lewis employed in his “Mere Christianity,” Christ was liar, lunatic or lord. That is a strong disjunction for He surely was not all three of them.

We have the truth (John 17:17) that truth sets us free. (John 8:32). Further we can know if that word or teaching is from God by being willing to study it and to do God’s will. (John 7:17). The problem with the evolutionary theory is that it denies in one fell swoop the Divinity of Christ, the truth of His word, the existence of God, the creation account and the inspiration of the Bible.

Evolution is firmly in the category of “empty deceit and the philosophy of men.” It has nothing going for it at all. The question asked is if this is true

then why has it got so much traction? One answer is plain money (filthy lucre) a rather apt term for it too. We know that in (I Timothy 6:10) that the love of money not money itself is the root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the truth and pierced themselves with many a pang.

Make no mistake about it evolution is a vested interest. Its poisonous fruit pays many careers as university professors’ lecturers and such like. Again we need to think, if evolution is true then why does the classroom next door in the university teach “human rights?” Doesn’t that seem like an oxymoron to you? As for the “pangs” many will not know them until judgement, but we know them as our children leave the faith having been tainted by the poison. That should alert us to whom the father of this lie really is Satan is his name.

We must never be cowed by these “men of letters” Paul certainly wasn’t neither was Christ that is why we are to see to it that this satanic speculative philosophy does not take our children or us captive.

THE HYPOTHETICAL SYLLOGISM OF EVOLUTIONISTS

- Major premise: If evolution is true then God does not exist.
- Minor premise: Evolution is true
- Conclusion: Therefore God does not exist.

This argument is in fact valid but it is not sound. Why? Because none of the premises have been proven to be true. (This is why evolution is theoretical). Despite evolutionists that cry to the contrary they cannot prove their premises. *Continued page 10...*

THE END OF THE CHURCH?

by Rob Sparks

It is an election year in the U.S., and with it our nation's Christian pundits have come out to play. I cannot say what sort of political sway Christendom can realistically hold over our post-Christian nation, but I do know this - the politically-motivated of our number certainly think they can make some noise. Political action groups are gearing up. Old sermons about social responsibility are being dusted off. And the talk around the water fountain in the lobby on Sunday morning is leaning more and more towards November. Ah, it is that time of year.

When it comes to politics, I have learned to keep my head down, my mouth shut and I pretend to laugh, like people are joking, when they ask me how they should choose a presidential candidate. It is, after all, perhaps safest that way; I believe Scripture allows adequate freedom to allow participation in the affairs of government - at least, for the vast majority of us. Why get into disputes over opinions?

But, I have increasingly noticed something in recent campaign cycles that is more than opinion. For me, it started with passionate Christians in my congregation who were aggravated at the apolitical stance of others. It then moved to some of the more esoteric publications and radio broadcasts, both in and out of our brotherhood. Then, with our current election, I began to notice it in widely read (and respected) publications amongst us. The claim is that if we do not begin to take our place in

the political process, that process will destroy the church. And they are serious.

To give you one example among many, one writer - who will remain nameless; let's focus on the issue - lamented the apathy of many American Christians, citing low voter turn outs in recent elections. After referencing a series of political "losses" suffered by the American Church, he concludes that Christianity will no longer be an "option" in the future if we continue our current course of so-called political apathy.

Now, let me be clear. We are not discussing post-Christian America's current state of depravity. On that note, I agree with a good many of the loud voices crying from within and without our brotherhood. Nor is this a discussion of the Christian's responsibility to vote. I always encourage hearty philosophical and religious debate on social responsibility and encourage every Christian to act according to their convictions on the matter. Third, this is not a discussion of apathy. Indeed, there are many in the church who are apathetic - whether that is expressed in voting or not, I cannot say.

However, I must take issue with the increasingly common notion that a liberal, post-modern political agenda can bring an end to the church. If we, God's church, buy into this idea, we are guilty at two very dangerous points. First, we must accept we have made politics an idol to the extent we actually

believe it can destroy the church. Second, we must accept a complete lack of faith in God to accomplish his will on earth over against the heartiest of man's rebellion. If either of these be true, "Christianity" can be destroyed - but only because it is not God's.

When Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about his statue, he was told the kingdom of God would be both eternal and indestructible (Daniel 2: 44ff). When Peter confessed Jesus as the son of God, Jesus assured him that his church would be victorious even over death, much less the state (Matthew 16:18). In Romans, Paul writes, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8: 35-39). And when John wrote to the churches of Asia in Revelation, his entire message was one of victory over the oppression of the Roman Empire.

Throughout God's dealings with mankind, he has protected and empowered his people. He brought Joshua to victory over Jericho and gave Gideon the same over the Midianites. He gave Elijah the strength to stand in the face of Jezebel's oppression and Elisha

chariots of fire to protect him from his enemies. He delivered Hezekiah from the Assyrians and walked with Jeremiah as he spoke to the corrupt powers of his day. He promised the churches of Asia victory over the Roman empire, even as they faced martyrdom.

And his people have survived through it all! Even today, the gospel is proclaimed and the kingdom is present in the Middle East, in China and other such places. God has done all of this - and much more - for his people. Can we seriously believe the likes of John McCain or Barack Obama will frustrate God's purposes?

It's time to put down our newspapers, turn off our televisions, tune out talk radio, and unplug from the internet for just a moment. We have to reorient ourselves with some very basic truths. God controls history; the kings, queens, presidents, justices and prime ministers of our world do not (Daniel 2:20-22; Habakkuk 1:1ff; Amos 1:1-2:5, et al). In Christ, God has defeated the "rulers and authorities" of this world, bringing them to open shame, and they stand no chance of victory over those in Christ (Colossians 2:15). God delegates authority to the rulers of this world - including the progressively liberal government of the United States of America (Romans 13:1ff). As such, we cannot allow ourselves to believe any government gives us the right "to be Christian" or "to worship as we want." Nor can they take them away.

The church will survive the liberal onslaught of a post-modern and post-Christian America. The most recent evidence of this is the

church's survival of the equally sub-Christian onslaught of conservative American modernism that began to give way to post-modernism in the 1950's. Of course, things may change. We Western Christians could very well reach the point where we lose our tax exemptions, our legal standing as congregations, our buildings and many of the other trappings we hold dearly to. However, the church has flourished under hardship for centuries. In a time when many of our brethren are more concerned with their parking lots than they are with being the church, losing our trappings may be exactly what we need.

Either way, we must have faith in God to provide and care for us - regardless of the form our government takes or the circumstances we find ourselves under. This faith will lead us to spend less time lamenting the homosexual agenda and motivate us to look for ways to serve and bring Jesus to homosexuals, whether their relationships are called "marriages" or "civil unions." It will lead us to be a little less concerned with what we can no longer display in the public square and realize crosses and stone tablets have always been poor substitutes for Christ-like people engaging their communities. It will cause us to spend less time worrying about Roe v. Wade and activist judges and more time looking for real, meaningful and Christ-like ways to help women in our community.

We must believe what God has spoken to us. He has assured us his church is everlasting, and our nation's politicians and lobbyists and activists can do nothing about

that. Rather than cower under a spirit of fear, worry and doubt, we should pray that God may be clearly seen in our lives as we strive to be more like the Christ.

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We do not have to prove that evolution is false as our only defence. We must hold evolutionists to proving that God does not exist since the onus is on them to prove that premise true. The difficulty they have with it is this: they must prove a universal negative proposition viz "No God exists", or "No God has ever existed."

The problem is here that in order to prove beyond all doubt that no God has ever existed, one needs to be omniscient, one must know beyond all doubt that no God has ever existed in all of earth's history. Given their prevaricating language as far as evolution is concerned their task has just become impossible to say the least.

Let us then stay strong in our convictions and study ourselves so we can give an apology against these godless men and women who are being used by Satan to upset the faith of many. Also let us thank God for men like Brad Harrub who have taken the time to look into these false teachings and give them our support and most importantly to learn from them how to combat the gainsayers.

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THE NEW CREATION

by Rob Sparks

GOD'S INTENTIONS AND MAN'S REBELLION

The early chapters of Genesis represent an encapsulated view of God's intentions for his creation. On four of the six days, God finishes his creative work by pronouncing it, "good." On the last day, he pronounced his finished effort to be "very good." Chapter three - pointing backwards, prior to sin - paints a picture of intimate fellowship with God we have yet to experience in our time. This was a creation, free from the mar of man's rebellion, in which all things operated according to God's purposes.

Man was the apex of this idyllic creation. He was made in the image of God. Creation was his gift and he was to have rule over it: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth," (Genesis 1:28). Later, David alludes to this dominion in Psalm 8, one of a handful of "nature" psalms. While reflecting on the splendor of creation, he says, "What is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?... You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all the sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea" (vs. 4, 6-8). He is amazed God would give man dominion over the immensity and grandeur of his creation.

While David meant "man" and "son of man" as generic terms, the Hebrews writer would later find something more in the notion (Hebrews 2:6ff). For him, the dominion spoken of in Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8 represented more than merely lording over the

physical creation. Rather, this blessing, taken along with its original setting, comprised the "short form" of what it means to be human. And where David speaks of men holding dominion, the writer speaks of one man: Jesus.

While man was expected to steward over God's gift, he had failed at doing so. His dominion was incomplete and flawed - "At present, we do not see everything in subjection to him" (v. 8). Although man still made attempts at, and sometimes accomplished a limited dominion, his sin consistently left him short of God's intentions. Passages like Genesis 3 and Romans 1:18ff speak amply to the degradation and decay man's sin has brought to the created order.

In contrast to this failure, however, the writer makes a case for Jesus having fulfilled God's intention. In coming to earth, he became as we are - he took on flesh and blood, because we are flesh and blood; he tasted death because we taste death; the writer is even able to say that Jesus was human to the extent that, "he had to made like his brothers in every respect" (v. 17). But in this humanity, the writer presses one point above all others; Jesus was tempted as we are (cf. Hebrews 2:18, 4:15). In understanding his temptations, we come to grips with the full import of the writer's discussion: In the beginning, God set forth his perfect intention for us - which is encapsulated in the idea of man's dominion (Genesis 1:26, 28; 9:1-2; Psalm 8:4-8). Yet, it is precisely in our sin we forfeit these intentions and the attendant blessings of being fully, genuinely human. It is in succumbing to temptation we yield to sin. Whereas we speak of humanity as something weak and depraved - "I am only human, after all!" - Scripture teaches sin makes us less human.

But Jesus did not fall to temptation, and in that he led the only genuinely

human life. In refusing to become less, he fulfilled God's intentions for humanity. He refused to be cowed into submitting to the rebellious powers, values, desires and expectations of his age (cf. Matthew 4:1-11). In this, he "got it right." Because he was genuinely human, he is qualified as our high priest and mediator (v. 17). Because he was genuinely innocent, he is qualified as our propitiation (v. 17).

NEW CREATURES IN A NEW REALITY

The implications of Christ's humanity are far reaching and have roots in the Old Testament. In Genesis 3:15, on the coattails of sin, God tells Satan, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." God's poetic depiction describes a time when Jesus would "roll back" the damage Satan had brought on the world through sin; he would restore things to God's proper order. Therefore, Paul can speak of Adam as an antithetical foreshadowing of Christ. Sin and death came into the world through Adam. Life came into the world through Christ (cf. Romans 5:12-21). Though his life, Jesus made it possible for others to return to God's intentions.

In 2 Samuel 7:8ff, God makes a series of promises to David. He promises to establish David's dynasty, making his name great and establishing his throne eternally. He promises one would come after David and that, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a son." While these promises can be understood on several levels, they find their ultimate rest in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Grappling with the enormity of what God had just told him, David began his response to these promises in verse 18 - "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house,

that you have brought me thus far? And yet this is a small thing in your eyes, O Lord God. You have spoken of your servants house for a great while to come, and this instruction is for mankind, O Lord God!" Walter Kaiser suggests a better translation for the last phrase - "and this is the charter for mankind, O Lord God!"¹

That is, in the reign of the coming Messiah, there will be something normative for all mankind. And it is in the framework of the Messianic reign we read throughout the prophets of the coming kingdom - where God's people are gathered from all corners of the earth, lions lay next to lambs and implements of war are converted to plowshares. Jesus marked the beginning of a new humanity, that through him we might return to the fulness God intended for us. He was the "firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29).

So, the New Testament speaks of Christians as walking in "newness of life" (Romans 6:4). We are told to put off the "old man" and take on the "new man" (Ephesians 4:17ff). We are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" and are "sojourners" and "exiles" in this world of sin (1 Peter 2:9, 11). The church is peculiar in the world because we have been called to cast off the distortions, values and broken structures of a sullied world for the sake of being fully human - as Christ was.

Perhaps this fresh beginning is best described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17, where there is reason to doubt the standard translation - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." Some scholars have suggested an alternate translation based on the construction of the phrase - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, creation is new. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."² In Western Christianity, we have become experts at separating spiritual and secular, private and public. Our "new life" in Christ is said to be "internal," "private" and "spiritual," which is set

in opposition to "external," "social," and "temporal." This is a dominant view in our religious culture, which bears no significant distinction from the sinful world outside. Our "newness of life" has been reduced to mere "forgiveness of sins" and life goes on, mostly unchanged.

Yet, a full accounting of the Scripture shows this notion to be false. When we come into Christ, we are called to more than an abstract, metaphysical view of forgiveness and justification. Through his propitiation - in which we do receive forgiveness and justification - we are made new men and women, called to live in a new reality - "creation is new." With Christ, everything changes. In Christ, we do not approach the same game with slightly different rules as we did when in the world. We are playing a completely new game. The church is made of those who live out this new reality, in Christ, in the midst of the distortions and manipulations of a sinful world.

Thus, we are called to be different and will be treated as "exiles." The implications are social as well as personal. They are public as well as private. We are called to refuse the barriers our society places in front of us - whether it be black or white, rich or poor, Democrat or Republican. In the new humanity - in the church - the walls have been torn down (cf. Ephesians 3:6ff). We are called to forsake our ambitions of power, wealth, fame, success and relevance for the way of the cross - humble service and self-sacrifice toward the end of simply being faithful to our king (cf. Philippians 3:7-11). We are called to reject the myriad idols of our age - materialism, sex, work, education, family, nationality, escapism, entertainment, ad nauseam - to worship the one true God. And this is what the world needs - the church that is willing to be the church, to be different from the world.

God's reign breaks into the darkness when we assign worth to all people because they are created in his image

rather than on the basis of their race, nationality, physical attractiveness, social standing or what they can do for us. God's kingdom finds expression when his people seek the well being of their enemies rather than the protection of "our rights." God's intentions for humanity are clearly seen when we refuse to vie for power and domination and control in our insecure and power-hungry world, contenting ourselves with ultimate power of Christ-like service.

In a world of pride, narcissism and sensuality, we speak profoundly to the ailments of our age when we embody the meekness, sacrifice and love of Christ's "new creation" in our worship, relationships and actions.

But, of course, this won't be easy. We are promised persecution. The worldly powers that be crucified our Lord for showing them to be less than human. We should expect nothing less. However, we must remember God, in Christ, has already won. The old world will pass away, taken in fire (2 Peter 3:7,12). The new will live on eternally. It is in this fact we find the strength and courage to proclaim the present reality of the kingdom of God to a dying and rebellious world.

Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur.
"Our Lamb has conquered; him let us follow."

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Footnotes:

¹Kaiser, Walter C. *The Promise-Plan of God: a Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. Pages 120-122

²Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pages 221-223.

WHEN THE RAINS CAME DOWN

by Dewayne Bryant

In August 2005, tens of thousands of people were caught helpless in the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina. Many watched helplessly as muddy water surged upward like an unstoppable juggernaut swallowing everything in its path. Parts of New Orleans were flooded for weeks. Historic homes that had stood since the Civil War were destroyed by the sheer immensity of the storm. Small coastal towns were wiped off the face of the earth. Floodwaters left a mark that will no doubt last for decades.

Floods – like earthquakes, lightning, and tornadoes – are one of many great natural disasters that have plagued man from the beginning. The first flood in human history is recorded in the book of Genesis. But it is much more than a simple natural disaster. It is truly an “act of God.” It is humanity’s enjoyment of depravity that forces God’s hand of judgment.

The flood story of the Bible is not unique. In fact, there are many versions of such stories ranging from the Middle East to America, from Greece to Hawaii. With the notable exception of Egypt, virtually every ancient civilization had a story of a cataclysmic flood that destroyed most of humanity.

One of the finds that sparked a great deal of excitement in the late 1800’s was the discovery of the Epic of Gilgamesh. The hero of the story is a king of the Mesopotamian city of Uruk who begins as a playboy tyrant. He is particularly gifted at womanizing, oppressing his people, and getting drunk. His poor subjects cry out to the gods for relief. In response to the desperate prayers, the gods send a part man, part animal creature named

Enkidu to battle Gilgamesh. They duke it out but become fast friends, adventuring and killing monsters together. One day the pair anger the goddess Ishtar, who in her fury kills Enkidu. The death of his dear friend forces Gilgamesh to put everything in perspective. The king hears of a man who received the gift of eternal life from the gods, so he sets out on a mission to discover the secret of immortality.

Gilgamesh eventually finds the immortal man named Utnapishtim. He tells Gilgamesh the story of how mankind offended the gods, prompting the upset deities to send a flood to wipe out humanity. One of the gods tells Utnapishtim to build a boat for his family to escape the coming deluge. He takes other living creatures on board. As the floodwaters abate, Utnapishtim sends out a series of birds to find dry land. Once he sets foot on the earth he offers sacrifices to the gods. Sounds like the story of Noah’s flood in Genesis, doesn’t it?

When the flood story was first published in 1872 in Europe, it caused quite a sensation. Some claimed that it proved that a great flood actually occurred, and that Noah wasn’t a mythical figure after all. Others argued the opposite; that it proved the Bible was not unique and was nothing more than a reworked copy of other ancient stories. If one were to poll scholars today, most would say that the flood of Noah is borrowed from other accounts. The average critic would agree.

But is the Bible dependent upon other stories? Many scholars are concluding that this option is highly unlikely. While the vocal critics of Scripture emphasize the similarities

between the biblical flood and other flood stories to suggest that the biblical writers borrowed from the others, they are also equally guilty of sweeping the dissimilarities under the rug. The differences include: the reason for the flood, the nature of the gods, the particulars of the boat, and the theological significance of the flood. With everything put in proper perspective, the two stories could not be more unlike.

If the ancient Hebrews adopted Mesopotamian flood stories for their use in Genesis, then they did something completely unique in the history of writing. The story of Noah’s flood would have required a complete rewrite. The biblical authors would have been forced to remove polytheism, change the reason for the flood, and completely alter the theological purpose of the story. Acclaimed Near Eastern scholar Alan Millard says that “All who suspect or suggest borrowing by the Hebrews are compelled to admit large-scale revision, alteration, and reinterpretation in a fashion that cannot be substantiated for any other composition from the ancient Near East or in any other Hebrew writing.”^[1] Millard makes his case quite plain: if the biblical author borrowed from another source, he did so in a way that goes against everything we know about ancient writing.

In studying the stories of the ancient world, two things become clear. First, the Bible does appear to be similar to other stories. But we also have to recognize that similarity does not mean dependency. Just because the story of Noah’s flood is similar to other flood stories does not mean that the biblical author plagiarized other material. In modern terms, it would

be like accusing the scriptwriters of the television show *Law and Order* of ripping off *Perry Mason*. Just because each of the two dramas feature lawyers arguing their cases before judge and jury and putting bad guys in prison does not mean that one depended upon the other for its material.

There are numerous examples throughout the Old Testament that the biblical authors wrote against the pagan beliefs of surrounding cultures. The story of Noah's flood is just such a case. It appears that the writer is aware of other flood stories, but is more interested in "setting the record straight." It is possible that the record of actual events of Noah's day filtered down through various cultures, each of whom put their own particular spin on the tale. The final product was a collection of stories that are similar in some respects and different in others. Ultimately, critics cannot rule out the possibility that the Bible is attempting to give the correct version of what happened during the days of Noah.^{2[2]}

God's author were not guilty of stealing intellectual property, nor is the Bible a second rate knock-off. As we continue to uncover more information about the ancient world, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to deny the truthfulness of God's Word. From studies in language and history to archaeology, the academic arena is increasingly confirming the Bible's reliability. Although borrowing is a charge often leveled against the Bible, Christians everywhere may be confident that God's Word is exactly what it claims to be. *Dewayne Bryant is a staff contributor at Focus Press www.focuspress.org.*

Footnotes:

[1] Alan R. Millard, "A New Babylonian 'Genesis' Story," Tyndale Bulletin 18 (1967):17-18.

[2] John Walton, "Flood" in Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch, T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 324.

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That God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked is amply demonstrated by the following factors: (a) the integrity of his word (note the oath format in the passage cited—"as I live, says the Lord"); (b) the known quality of the Creator's character (1 John 4: 8; Ephesians 2:4), not "wishing" that anyone should perish (2 Peter 3:9); (c) the profuse manifestation of his benevolence in the gift of his Son (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 9:15).

It is a tragedy of indescribable magnitude that so many careless souls reject divine love and proceed on the downward slide towards an irreversible and horrible destiny.

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www.christiancourier.com

THE HUMAN EYE
by Hugo McCord

It is refreshing, after one has become despirited with the pessimism of blind evolution, to examine the positive, optimistic, thoughtful design seen in the human eye.

First, the chemical elements making up the eye had to have a cause for their being in existence. Second, that those elements are arranged to form an optic nerve, a retina, lens, pupil, iris, and cornea means there was an arranger. Third, that all the caused and arranged parts cooperate to give sight appears to be the purpose of the designer. For nine months the parts being made and arranged in a dungeon are useless. Then, all of a sudden, the design is obvious, which design had to precede the making and the arranging of the multiple parts, and design reflects intelligence. An intelligence capable of producing sight cannot himself be blind: "He who forms the eye, can he not see?" (Psalm 94:9).

"In order to keep the eye moist and clean (which qualities are necessary to its brightness and its use), a wash is constantly supplied by a secretion for the purpose; and the superfluous brine is conveyed to the nose through a perforation in the bone as large as a goose-quill; or, more properly speaking, along two capillary tubes, one from

either eyelid, which enter a duct, lodged in a canal passing through the bone. When once the fluid has entered the nose, it spreads itself upon the inside of the nostril, and is evaporated by the current of warm air which, in the course of respiration, is continually passing over it. Can any pipe or distillery be more mechanical than this is? It is easily perceived that the eye must want moisture; but can the want of the eye generate the gland which produces the tear, or bore the hole by which it is discharged--a hole through a bone?" (William Paley, *apud* Irwin H. Linton, *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, p. 119).

Charles Hodge wrote that the eye "was fashioned in the darkness of the womb, with a self-evident reference to the nature and properties of light, of which the creature for whose use it was fashioned had neither knowledge or experience" (*Systematic Theology* I, 218). A "blind and unconscious adaptation of means to an end is inconceivable," wrote Hodge, but evolution is a blind and unconscious adaptation of means to an end.

John Stuart Mill was no friend of theism, but he was fair to make the following acknowledgements: "The particular combination of organic elements called the eye had, in every instance, a beginning in time, and must therefore have been brought together by a cause or causes." Further, "inasmuch as the elements agree in the single circumstance of conspiring to produce sight, there must be some . . . causation between the cause which brought the elements together and the fact of sight . . . Not sight itself, but an antecedent idea of it must be the efficient cause. But this at once marks the origin as proceeding from an intelligent will" (*apud* G. Frederick Wright, *The Logic of Christian Evidences*, pp. 85-86).

Skeptical David Hume also was fair to write: "Anatomize the eye: survey its structure and contrivance; and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation. The most obvious conclusion surely is in favour of design (*Hume Selections*, p. 316).

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