

The letters 'JTLL' are rendered in a large, bold, green, sans-serif font. The 'J' is a simple hook. The 'T' has a thick vertical stem and a horizontal top bar. The 'L' has a thick vertical stem and a horizontal bottom bar. The second 'L' is similar but has a slightly different horizontal bar shape. The letters are spaced out across the width of the page.

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JOURNAL OF TRANSFORMATIVE  
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The JTLL serves as a scholarly forum for the refinement and dissemination of research pertaining to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary implications of transformative learning and its applications for leadership in diverse contexts.

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THE LIFE AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD  
OF LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER  
Part 2 (Chafer's Methodology)

*David W. Gunn, PhD*

CHAFER'S METHODOLOGY

The nature of Chafer's foundational commitments and the impact of his personal background on his theological methodology having been assessed, an analysis of his theological method will now commence. The primary areas of concentration will be Chafer's hermeneutical approach, his procedure for correlating and integrating Scripture with Scripture and Scripture with extra-scriptural data, and his central interpretive motif.<sup>1</sup> It will be apparent throughout the following discussion that every element of Chafer's theological methodology rests on the conviction that Scripture is divinely inspired, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient.

**Hermeneutical Approach**

While Chafer never wrote a work specifically on Biblical interpretation, he did discuss the subject at several points in *Systematic Theology*. Chafer himself did not use the term, but it may fairly be said that he essentially adhered to the principles of *originalism*, or *literal-grammatical-historical interpretation*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This framework for analyzing a theologian's methodology is the approach developed by Michael D. Stallard and applied in his work *The Early Twentieth-Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein* (Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, "An Introduction to the Study of Prophecy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100, no. 397 (Ja-Mr 1943): 104. Elsewhere, I have

Concerning the definition and proper place of hermeneutics he wrote,

The doctrine of interpretation contemplates the science of discovering the exact meaning of the Spirit Author as this is set forth in a given Scripture passage. Such a science may be described theologically as *hermeneutics*. To fathom this doctrine it is necessary to know and follow the recognized rules of Scripture interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

Chafer then proceeded to quote, approvingly, the four hermeneutical rules formulated by his older brother, Rollin T. Chafer. That Lewis considered his brother's hermeneutical principles essentially identical to his own is demonstrated by his comment following the lengthy quotation from Rollin's work: "Since every student of Scripture ... is confronted with the problem of giving to the Sacred Text its precise meaning, the need of following these [Rollin's] rules is imperative."<sup>4</sup>

*Hermeneutical Principles in Volume Seven of Systematic Theology*

Rollin's hermeneutical rules were as follows. First, one must "Interpret grammatically; with due regard to the meaning

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argued that *originalism* is a better term than *literal-grammatical-historical interpretation* to describe this approach to biblical interpretation; see David Gunn, "Why Originalism?: The Need for a Sound Hermeneutic, Part 1," *The Baptist Bulletin* (Nov/Dec 2019): 22–24; "Why Originalism? Part 2: The Superiority of an Originalist Hermeneutic," *The Baptist Bulletin* (Jan/Feb 2020): 30–31; "Why Originalism? Part 3: Common Objections and Questions," *The Baptist Bulletin* (Mar/Apr 2020): 26–28.

<sup>3</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:203.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:205.



of words, the form of sentences, and the peculiarities of idiom in the languages employed.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, “The words of Scripture must be taken in their common meaning, unless such meaning is shown to be inconsistent with other words in the sentence, with the argument or context, or with other parts of Scripture.”<sup>6</sup> So, proper hermeneutical procedure, according to the Chafers, began with an evaluation of the normal meaning of the words of Scripture in grammatical relationship with the surrounding words.

Second, “Interpret according to the context. The meaning of a word, again, will often be modified by the connexion in which it is used.”<sup>7</sup> Rollin Chafer went on to stress the priority of context over etymology for determining a word’s meaning: “The etymological study of some words indicates that their significance has entirely departed from the root meaning. On the ground of etymology, therefore, it would be misleading for an interpreter to hold to the root meaning in such cases.”<sup>8</sup>

Third, when the immediate literary context “does not give all the light needed to determine the meaning of a word or phrase ... a third rule is necessary, namely: ‘Regard the scope or

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 203. In this quotation (and several others that follow), Lewis S. Chafer is quoting approvingly from Rollin T. Chafer, who is in turn quoting approvingly from Joseph Angus and Samuel Green [*Cyclopedic Handbook to the Bible*. New York: Revell, n.d.].

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Note how similar this principle is to David Cooper’s now-famous “Golden Rule of Interpretation:” “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.” [David Cooper, *The World’s Greatest Library Graphically Illustrated* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1970), 11.]

<sup>7</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:204.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

design of the book itself, or of some large section in which the words and expressions occur.”<sup>9</sup> Here, Chafer addressed the remote literary context, and the overarching theme or design of the book in which a text occurs. This point could be taken to imply the importance not only of contextual interpretation, but also of authorial intent (which transcends individual pericopae to encompass entire books), and possibly also the study of isagogics (in order to identify positively the purpose and theme of any given biblical book, so as to interpret the parts in light of the whole).

Fourth and finally, the analogy of faith was put forth as the

most comprehensive rule of biblical interpretation. ... Compare Scripture with Scripture. ... Scripture truth is really the consistent explanation of all that Scripture teaches in reference to the question examined; and a Scripture duty is the consistent explanation of all the precepts of Scripture on the duty.<sup>10</sup>

It would seem at this point that the line between hermeneutics and systematic theology was blurred somewhat. This language seems to pertain more to the synthesis of individual passages into one summary statement of “what the Bible teaches,” i.e., a movement of systematic theology, rather than to exegeting a particular text. This apparent conflation or confusion of hermeneutics and systematic theology occurs at several other points throughout Chafer’s work.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 7:205.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Yet it is probably overly simplistic to charge Rollin Chafer (and Lewis Sperry Chafer, by extension) with pure confusion on this point, as though he had held that one's systematic theology should exert a determinative influence over the exegesis of specific pericopae. This probably is not what Rollin had in mind, as can be seen in the comment with which he closed his discussion on the fourth principle: "Some interpreters who claim to accept the Bible as the revealed Word of God, reject specific revelations in it because they do not fit into the framework of their preconceived theology."<sup>11</sup> So the individual pericopae, it would seem, should take some degree of priority over the broader doctrinal synthesis derived from the Bible as a whole.

There would seem to be some tension in Chafer's proposed hermeneutical approach at this point, but it is not necessarily a full-blown contradiction. One possible strategy for resolving the tension is to posit that careful exegesis of individual texts is prior to theological synthesis of multiple texts, but that the synthesis may act as a check and balance on further exegesis. Within such an approach, doctrinal synthesis is ultimately controlled by extensive exegesis, but if at first the exegesis of a particular text seems to be in conflict with the synthesis of all or most other related passages, this may alert the exegete that he has committed an error at some point. This explanation is not spelled out as such by Chafer, but it would seem to be a charitable way of interpreting him, especially since it seems generally consonant with the way he typically interpreted Scripture and applied the analogy of faith.

In summary, sound biblical interpretation according to Chafer is driven by the normal meaning of the individual words

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

in grammatical relation with the surrounding words, read in light of the immediate and remote literary contexts and the overarching purpose of the book in which they are found, and taken in a manner that is consistent with the sum of related scriptural teaching on the subject at hand.<sup>12</sup>

*Hermeneutical Principles in Systematic Theology, Volume One*

In addition to presenting his brother's hermeneutical principles in volume seven of *Systematic Theology*, Chafer also discussed the interpretation of Scripture under Bibliology (volume one). There, he proposed several hermeneutical ideals that are not essentially dissimilar to the material presented in volume seven, though they are presented somewhat differently: the interpretation of Scripture should be contextual, lexical, and uncompromised by personal bias.<sup>13</sup>

Contextual Interpretation

The subject of contextual interpretation may be further divided into three subcategories: canonical context, literary context, and historical context. Interpreting according to canonical context means first to consider the part in light of the purpose of the whole. In particular, Chafer emphasized at this point that the central purpose of Scripture is to communicate spiritual truth such that men might be saved and brought into a right relationship with their Creator. Insofar as Scripture does touch on non-soteriological subjects such as history or science, it

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<sup>12</sup> Note that all of these elements are reflected, to one degree or another, in Ryrie's later explication of "literal" or "normal" hermeneutics [Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 129–30.]

<sup>13</sup> Note that Chafer himself did not precisely follow this organizational structure in presenting his material; instead, he jumped somewhat abruptly from principle to principle without classifying them.

does so inerrantly;<sup>14</sup> nevertheless, those elements are included in order that the broader (primarily soteriological) purpose might be served. That being the case, interpreters should not expect to find, for example, revelations about heliocentrism in the language of Scripture. It is not that God was unaware of such scientific facts, but simply that He did not see fit to explicate them in Scripture, since that would not have served the primary, spiritual purpose of the work.<sup>15</sup>

Another important factor in interpreting according to the canonical context is considering all scriptural data on the subject or theme addressed by the individual text. Chafer wrote, “A right interpretation will also depend very largely on an induction being made of *all* that the Bible presents on a given subject. The conclusion must be no less than the consensus of that full testimony.”<sup>16</sup> This principle reflects Chafer’s stance on the nature of Scripture: he saw the Bible as the unified work of one ultimate divine author. It was totally inerrant and harmonious in terms of its content. If this were not so—if the Bible were seen as the errant and diverse product of merely human authors—then what would such a comprehensive induction and synthesis benefit the interpreter?

The second category of contextual interpretation is the literary context. This includes both the remote context (the book in which a text is found) and the immediate context (the textual units surrounding the text at hand). Insofar as remote literary contextual interpretation is concerned, Chafer stressed the need to identify the “distinctive character and message” of the book under examination, “since a vital factor in any revelation is its

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:27–29.

<sup>15</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:115.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:117–18.

place in a certain book, and in the light of the specific message of that book.”<sup>17</sup> Interpreters must also give due consideration to the immediate literary context. This entails not only reading a text in light of surrounding texts, but also identifying natural thought-units and the relationships between them: “The student must learn to establish context boundaries regardless of the mere mechanical chapter and verse divisions.”<sup>18</sup> For example, Chafer criticized the placement of a chapter division between Matthew sixteen and seventeen, arguing that chapter seventeen should be seen as standing in direct fulfillment to Jesus’ prediction in Matthew 16:28.

The final element of Chafer’s proposal for contextual interpretation is the historical context. At this point, Chafer limited his discussion of historical context to the matter of the text’s compositional history, with a particular emphasis on a biblical book’s original audience. Every text of Scripture has valid primary and secondary applications, and the key to determining which is appropriate lies in the identification of the text’s intended audience.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, Chafer had dispensational divisions in mind here: New Testament Christians ought not to interpret Old Testament texts as though they continue to have direct applications after the Day of Pentecost.

In presenting these three different aspects of contextual interpretation, Chafer did not specify which (if any) of them should be the most prominent in the interpreter’s approach. However, judging by his own works it seems that consideration of the canonical context contributed most to Chafer’s

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:116.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:117.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:116–17.

interpretive framework. One of the prevailing characteristics of Chafer's theology was his tendency to see texts or subjects in light of their placement in the overarching (primarily soteriological, in his view) metanarrative of Scripture.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, this observation should not be pressed too far—since most of Chafer's published works were theological rather than exegetical in nature, such Scripture-wide synthesis is only to be expected.

### Lexical Interpretation

Lexical interpretation emphasizes the importance of interpreting individual words and terms according to their customary meanings. Chafer referred to this aspect of interpretation as the “discovery of the exact meaning of the determinative words in the text.”<sup>21</sup> A major consideration in this category is the importance of mastering the biblical languages, such that precise determination based on the original texts could be made: “Apart from the knowledge of the original languages in which the Bible was written, there can be no very accurate conclusions as to what a difficult passage teaches.”<sup>22</sup>

Two examples from Chafer's commentary on Ephesians illustrate this aspect of interpretation. First, in discussing Paul's prayer in Eph. 1:16–17 that God will give the Ephesian believers the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him,” Chafer capitalized on Paul's use of ἐπιγνώσις rather than γνῶσις: “Significant, indeed, is the use of the Greek word *epigenosis* at this point, which word refers to a *full* knowledge, and is much

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<sup>20</sup> E.g., Lewis Sperry Chafer, *The Ephesian Letter* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Co., 1935), 29–30, 67–68.

<sup>21</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:118.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

stronger than the general word *genesis*, which refers to the more restricted aspects of human understanding.”<sup>23</sup> Second, in discussing the “quickenings” depicted in Ephesians 2:5, Chafer saw doctrinal significance in the aorist tense of συνεζωοποίησεν:

Likewise, the fact that the verb is in a tense which denotes a transaction completed at some point in the past, is of doctrinal importance; for by one act of sovereign, saving power, *all* who have believed were, at the moment of believing, made alive with Christ. No subsequent achievement is implied.<sup>24</sup>

So, the lexical aspect of interpretation includes consideration of not only the denotative meaning of individual words, but also of grammatical considerations such as verb tense.

### Uncompromised Interpretation

Chafer was acutely aware of the ease with which interpreters might project their preconceived theological conclusions onto the text of Scripture in the course of exegesis, and he warned against it:

It is exceedingly easy to twist or mold the Word of God to make it conform to one’s preconceived notions. To do this is no less than “handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Cor. 4:2), and is worthy of judgment from Him whose

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<sup>23</sup> Chafer, *The Ephesian Letter*, 56. As this was Chafer’s only published commentary and his only published book of an expository (as opposed to synthetic) nature, it is very important to a consideration of Chafer’s hermeneutical methodology.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.



Word is thus perverted. At no point may the conscience be more exercised and the mind of God more sought than when delving into the precise meaning of the Scriptures and when giving those findings to others.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, apart from identifying the possibility for abuse at this point and warning his readers against it, Chafer did not provide any significant details on how he believed one could best avoid compromising interpretation with preconceived biases. However, judging from Chafer's comments elsewhere, it may be postulated that he would have seen primarily two important factors that could function as correctives to this tendency. First, the interpreter would need to be scrupulously textual in his formulation of theological positions. If the conclusion cannot be directly demonstrated from the text, then it is suspect. Second, Chafer would likely see this issue as one over which the illumination of the Holy Spirit exerts a profound influence, and encourage interpreters to ensure that they are fully yielded to the Spirit before engaging in the task of exegesis.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Other Implicit Hermeneutical Principles in Chafer's Writings*

In addition to the hermeneutical principles that Chafer explicitly affirmed while discussing biblical interpretation, there were clearly additional principles that informed his hermeneutical method. The following discussion will cover those principles that Chafer did not discuss explicitly and those that he did discuss but without classifying them under the category of interpretation or hermeneutics. These include the principle of

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<sup>25</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:119.

<sup>26</sup> For a thorough discussion by Chafer on how one becomes fully yielded to the Spirit, see *He that is Spiritual*, 70–133.

single meaning, typology, historical event context, and illumination.

### The Principle of Single Meaning

Chafer never directly discussed the principle of single meaning<sup>27</sup> under that title or any other, but it would seem that he did adhere to it at least to some degree. The clearest example of this tendency in Chafer's work would be his position on the New Covenant. On this subject, Chafer faced a puzzle: Scripture seems to speak of a future New Covenant for Israel (Jer. 31:31–34) but also employs New Covenant terminology in texts directed toward the New Testament Church (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 7:22; 8:7–13; 9:15; 12:22–24). So, given a dispensationalist precommitment to the distinction between Israel and the Church, to which of these two bodies does the New Covenant apply?

Chafer's solution was novel: He posited two separate New Covenants—one for Israel and another for the Church.<sup>28</sup> Obviously, Chafer's insistence on an inviolable line of demarcation between Israel and the Church lay at the foundation of his position on this subject. But why not conclude, as many others have done, that there is one New Covenant to which Israel and the Church are both parties? Or, alternatively, that there is one New Covenant with Israel, but its benefits have also been extended to the Church?<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, Chafer did

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<sup>27</sup> For a helpful discussion of what this principle entails, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 141–60.

<sup>28</sup> Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, 146–147; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:314–15; 7:98–99.

<sup>29</sup> Most dispensationalists today have not followed Chafer's lead on this point. For contemporary dispensationalist explorations of this issue, see

not reveal his rationale for rejecting these possibilities and positing instead two parallel New Covenants. However, the principle of single meaning would seem sufficient to explain his decision here (i.e., since Jeremiah 31 identifies the party to the New Covenant as Israel and Judah, that party can be understood to refer *only* to Israel and Judah), and such an adherence is in basic harmony with Chafer's consistent interpretive approach throughout his works.

### Typology

If Chafer may fairly be viewed as an adherent to the principle of single meaning, he must also be charged with holding to it inconsistently. He viewed typology as a legitimate lens through which to analyze the Scriptures—a lens that had been woefully neglected by responsible expositors. This neglect he attributed to the excesses in which practitioners of typological interpretation had often indulged: “The fact that extremists have failed to distinguish between that which is typical and that which is merely allegorical, analogous, parallel, happy illustration, or resemblance, may have driven conservative theologians from the field.”<sup>30</sup>

In an attempt to correct that trend, Chafer praised the merits of typological interpretation. He felt that recognizing typology reflected a belief that God had foreordained and sovereignly ordered all of history. Chafer was aware that within the practice of typological interpretation lay the potential pitfall

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Christopher Cone, ed., *An Introduction to the New Covenant* (Hurst, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2013) and Mike Stallard, ed., *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant: 3 Views* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:xxix–xxx.

of over-typologizing, but he seems to have regarded it as no less a danger than failing entirely to recognize legitimate types in Scripture, since the recognition and proclamation of types brings glory to God.<sup>31</sup>

Chafer rejected outright the idea that “nothing is to be deemed typical that is not sustained as such in the New Testament” on these grounds:

There are many easily recognized types which are not directly sanctioned by any specific New Testament Scripture. Like the problem of primary and secondary application of the Truth, the recognition of a type must be left, in any case, to the discernment of a Spirit-guided judgment.<sup>32</sup>

Instead, he offered an alternate set of rules by which to minimize excesses in typological interpretation. First, a type usually falls into one of five categories: people, events, things, institutions, and ceremonials. Second, types are found in the Old Testament, and usually in the Pentateuch. And third, the vast majority of types point to Christ.<sup>33</sup> The thinking here seems to be that if interpreters were careful to check potential types against these rules, there would be less abuse of typological interpretation.

At the theoretical level, these statements and observations by Chafer would seem to encourage a moderate use of typological interpretation that tentatively explores possible typological connections while exercising due caution against excessive typologizing. In practice, however, Chafer erred

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:xxx.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:xxxi.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:308–9.

significantly on the side of liberality in making typological connections. Specifically, he saw typological significance in all the following: The Passover lamb;<sup>34</sup> Abel's offering, Noah's altar and sacrifice, and the two birds (Lev. 14:1–7); the Day of Atonement, the Red Heifer, the coats of skin (Gen. 3:21), Noah's ark, Melchizedek's bread and wine, the offering of Isaac, Joseph's life story, the manna in the wilderness, the smitten rock (Ex. 17:5–7; Num. 20:7–13), and the Tabernacle;<sup>35</sup> the seven Jewish feasts and Melchizedek;<sup>36</sup> the rite of circumcision and the first day of the week;<sup>37</sup> Eve and Rebekah;<sup>38</sup> Aaron, Abel, acacia wood, Adam, the altar of brass, the altar of incense, the Ark of the Covenant, the two staffs (Zech. 11:7), Benjamin, sacrificial blood, the burnt offering, sheep, lambs, rams, goats, turtle-doves, pigeons, the golden lampstand, the corn of the Promised Land, King David, unleavened bread, the two goats (Lev. 16:5–10), Isaac, Joshua, the Kinsman-Redeemer, the laver, light (Gen. 1:16), Moses, the Nazirite, the peace offering, Aaron's rod, the brass serpent, the showbread, the sin offering, the sweet savor offerings, the trespass offering, and the veil of the tabernacle;<sup>39</sup> oil (Ex. 25:6; 40:10–15; Lev. 2:1–16; 14:10–32), water (Ex. 29:4; Lev. 8:6; Num. 19:2ff.; Ezek. 47:1–12), fire (Ex. 3:2; 13:21; Lev. 9:24; 2 Chron. 7:1; 1 Kings 18:38; Mal. 3:3), wind (Isa. 40:24), the dove (Gen. 8:8–12), the seal, and Abraham's

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1:31; 3:120–21.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 3:116–25.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4:64–65.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 4:119–20.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 4:137–41.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 5:43–44. This particular grouping of types is actually Walvoord's, listed in his unpublished notes on Christology. But Chafer quotes the list approvingly, indicating that he too sees all these as typologically significant.

servant;<sup>40</sup> the wave offering;<sup>41</sup> Asenath, Zipporah, Boaz, Ruth, Abigail, Solomon, and the Shulamite maid;<sup>42</sup> the mercy seat;<sup>43</sup> the Temple;<sup>44</sup> and Abraham, Sarah, Ishmael, the Exodus, the passage through the Red Sea, Jordan, Babylon, Egypt, the Sabbath, and the Israelite kingdom under David's rule.<sup>45</sup> After surveying this list, one wonders if there was anything at all in the Bible that did not hold typological significance for Chafer!

It should be noted that typological interpretation was an area of inconsistency for Chafer on at least two, and possibly even three, counts. First, he was inconsistent with his own evaluation of typology's proper place. A typological list as extensive as the one compiled above does not seem congruent with Chafer's warnings against excessive typologizing. Second, his use of typological interpretation goes well beyond the principles of literal interpretation that he himself advanced. And third, if Chafer's adherence to the principle of single meaning is sustained, then clearly his typological interpretation would be inconsistent with that principle as well.

That being said, it is important to note that Chafer allowed for such extensive typologizing not in spite of his view of Scripture, but because of it: As a committed Biblicist, Chafer emphasized (perhaps to a fault, in this case) the Bible's unity that it possessed by virtue of its divine authorship. That conviction, coupled with a view of God as one who foreknows everything exhaustively and delights in revealing the end from the beginning, resulted, in this case, in an undue eagerness to

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:47–56.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:20.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:62–63.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:236.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:300.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:308–9.

see prophetic patterns in the Old Testament text, even when the presence of such patterns would seem to go beyond the literal interpretation of the passage in question.

### Historical-Event Context

When Chafer touched on the place of historical contextual factors in interpretation, he explicated only the importance of identifying the intended audience of a text. But of course, “historical context” is a category far broader than merely the text’s intended audience. Sailhamer has suggested a distinction between the horizons of “text” and “event”<sup>46</sup>—a helpful distinction when considering the various applications of the term “historical context.” Chafer’s explicit discussion of historical context centered entirely on the historical context of *the text itself* (i.e., factors concerning when it was written, by whom, and to whom), but he also allowed the historical context of *the event being narrated* (i.e., historical factors pertaining to the actual event or subject that a passage records) to influence his interpretation.

Two examples are in order. First, when discussing the account of the Fall, Chafer focused on the serpent’s words to Eve: וְהָיִיתֶם כְּאֱלֹהִים. Because the noun is plural in form, the translators of the KJV had rendered this phrase, “ye shall be as gods.” But Chafer pushed back against this translation:

The phrase, ‘ye shall be as gods,’ is, for want of consistency on the part of the translators, quite misleading. ... [T]he word *gods* might be thought to refer to heathen gods; but since there were no heathen at the

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<sup>46</sup> John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 4–7.

time Satan appeared in Eden, nor had the notion of “gods many” occurred to anyone’s mind, such an interpretation is impossible.<sup>47</sup>

Chafer’s contention here has nothing whatsoever to do with the historical context of the *text’s composition*, but with the historical context of the *recorded event*. Chafer’s argument is that since prior to the Fall there would have been no concept of a pantheon, the serpent must have intended to communicate “you shall be as God.” The historical circumstances of the portrayed characters thus have direct bearing on the meaning of the words and phrases in the account.<sup>48</sup>

A second example can be found in Chafer’s commentary on Ephesians. On Paul’s teaching about the desegregation of Jews and Gentiles in the Church found in Ephesians 3:2–13, Chafer’s comments highlighted how very radical this concept would have been to Jewish converts in the first century. Toward this end, he briefly summarized the negative attitude that Jews almost unanimously exhibited toward Gentiles during the period in which Ephesians was written.<sup>49</sup> Once again, this is a clear case of historical data arising from outside the text itself making a direct contribution to Chafer’s interpretation of the text.

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<sup>47</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:267. Emphasis is in the original.

<sup>48</sup> Note too that this is an instance in which contextual and lexical interpretive sectors clearly overlap. Not only do interpreters need to consider the historical situation the characters faced, but they must also have some facility with Biblical Hebrew in order even to understand the interpretive dilemma, let alone to solve it.

<sup>49</sup> Chafer, *The Ephesian Letter*, 94–95.



## Illumination

The illumination of Scripture by the Holy Spirit occupies a major place in Chafer's understanding of how fallen humans receive divine revelation. He defines illumination as "[T]hat influence or ministry of the Holy Spirit which enables all who are in right relation with God to understand the Scriptures."<sup>50</sup> This ministry of the Holy Spirit was necessary because the finitude and depravity of men made them unable to understand spiritual things.<sup>51</sup> The unregenerate mind in its natural state was conceived of as "blind" to spiritual truth,<sup>52</sup> and to that natural blindness was added several layers of additional blindness, which stemmed from the judicial rulings of God, the oppressive machinations of Satan, and the seemingly endless cycle of human carnality.<sup>53</sup> So, to reverse this inundation of spiritual blindness, the Holy Spirit had to perform a miraculous work to open the minds of believers, enabling them to grasp spiritual truth.<sup>54</sup>

In our day, the Spirit's work of illumination has been variously understood and explained. Some see illumination as the Spirit's work in helping the believer *understand* the truth; others see the work as pertaining only to the *application* or

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<sup>50</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:50.

<sup>51</sup> Chafer, *He that is Spiritual*, 15–19.

<sup>52</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Classics, 1991), 17.

<sup>53</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:105–8.

<sup>54</sup> Although it does not bear directly on the subject of hermeneutics, it is interesting to note that Chafer also saw an application of the Spirit's illumination to unbelievers: namely, a ministry of opening the minds of the unsaved to their lost estate and the inevitability of God's judgment on sin. Cf. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual*, 31; *Satan*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1945), 145; *True Evangelism*, 48–51, 56.

*reception* of the truth.<sup>55</sup> In Chafer’s view, the spiritual blindness was so widespread and so debilitating that even accurate interpretation of Scripture was impossible apart from the Spirit’s illumination of the believer’s mind, so the phenomenon of illumination extends to both interpretation and application: “The Spirit of God is given to every saved person as an indwelling Paraclete, thus providing a limitless resource *both for understanding and teachableness*.”<sup>56</sup>

At this point there would seem to be a conflict in Chafer’s view of Scripture. On the one hand, as has been discussed, he clearly held to the perspicuity of Scripture, affirming that the language in which the Bible was written is simple enough to be comprehended by children. On the other hand, he saw depravity and spiritual blindness as nearly insuperable obstacles to understanding God’s written revelation. How can these two seemingly incompatible points be reconciled? Chafer explained: “While, as has been stated, the Bible is couched in the simplest of terms, its message, in many particulars, transcends the range of human understanding; but divine provision is made whereby these human limitations may be overcome.”<sup>57</sup> So, there is perspicuity at the level of expression but incomprehensibility (apart from divine illumination) at the level of content—

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<sup>55</sup> For several helpful discussions on this, see William Arp, “Illumination: What Is the Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation?” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 16 no. 1 (Spring 2012): 50–86; Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007), 264–66; and John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2018), 567–619.

<sup>56</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:9. Emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

especially content that relates directly to spiritual truths that are outside the realm of normal human experience.

In order to receive the illumination of the Spirit, Chafer held that an individual must be both regenerate and fully yielded to the Spirit, “not alone as to truth itself but [also] as to personal piety.”<sup>58</sup> In short, Chafer held that one could learn all the “nuts and bolts” of proper hermeneutical procedure and yet fail utterly to interpret Scripture properly if he was either unregenerate or a carnal believer. Just as God may be conceived of as both transcendent and immanent,<sup>59</sup> so also Scripture is seen as both transcendent (incomprehensible on the level of content) and immanent (perspicuous on the level of expression). And just as man cannot draw near to God without prior divine enabling action,<sup>60</sup> neither can he draw near to God’s revelation without prior divine illuminating action. Once again, Chafer’s methodology may be linked directly to his high view of Scripture.

### **Intra-Scriptural Correlation and Integration**

Chafer’s principal role was that of a systematist. The vast majority of his works were synthetic in nature, in that they drew together data from all across the canon of Scripture and combined them so as to present biblical teaching in a topical, systematic fashion. Therefore, an analysis of how Chafer went about choosing which passages to link together is of great importance to the present study. Unfortunately, he never explicitly discussed his method on this point, nor did he ever clearly demonstrate it. (This is probably to be expected: *Systematic Theology* alone is filled with thousands upon

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1:10.

<sup>59</sup> Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, 38.

<sup>60</sup> Chafer, *Salvation*, 13, 45; *Grace*, 42, 45.

thousands of linked proof-texts, and had he stopped to explain his rationale behind each linkage, the resulting tomes would have been bulky to the point of inaccessibility.) So, without a clear statement from Chafer, the analyst must resort to inference. In my opinion, Chafer's approach to intra-scriptural correlation and integration is best explained by highlighting his position on three related subjects: inductive Bible study, the unity of Scripture, and the dispensational metanarrative inherent to the unfolding storyline of the Bible.

### *Inductive Bible Study*

Chafer believed in the existence of countless themes and patterns within the Bible, just waiting to be discovered and synthesized via the inductive method.<sup>61</sup> On the importance of induction to the task of systematic theology, Chafer wrote:

Of the two methods of dealing with the truth of God's Word—*deduction*, by which a theme is expanded into its details of expression, a method belonging largely to the sermonic field, and *induction*, by which various declarations upon a subject are reduced to one harmonious and all-inclusive statement—induction is distinctly the theological method.<sup>62</sup>

This quotation furnishes both the aim of intra-scriptural correlation and integration (namely, the synthesis of diverse teachings into "one harmonious and all-inclusive statement") and a clue as to proper methodology for practitioners. If the inductive method is given pride of place, with all its

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<sup>61</sup> Richards, *The Promise of Dawn*, 89.

<sup>62</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:8. Emphasis in the original.

observational rigor and investigative thoroughness, then that would imply certain limitations on linking passages together. Specifically, superficial similarities between passages (such as similarity of expression, the operative consideration in Midrashic interpretation)<sup>63</sup> would be considered insufficient grounds for linkage, as would the imposition of a non-inductively derived organizational structure (such as is operative in Covenant Theology, in Chafer's estimation)<sup>64</sup> onto the text of Scripture. Instead, passages under consideration for linkage must be carefully examined and interpreted on their own according to sound hermeneutical principles in order to assure that the perceived parallel is a true parallel.

Recall, for instance, Chafer's position on the New Covenant. In terms of expression, there are clear parallels between the New Covenant passage(s) in the Old Testament and those in the New. Indeed, the covenant's name and spiritual benefits seem to remain constant in both sets of passages, and on one occasion a New Testament writer even quotes directly from Jeremiah 31 when discussing the New Covenant (Heb. 8:17–31), thus establishing continuity on at least some level. Nevertheless, an inductive study of each passage focusing on the details rather than merely the semantics apparently led Chafer to conclude that the Old Testament and New Testament passages referred to two separate (though related) New Covenants. Hence, Chafer refused to link Old Testament and New Testament passages concerning the New Covenant(s) in such a way as to intimate identical reference.

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<sup>63</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 180–81.

<sup>64</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:156.

Elsewhere, Chafer linked Ephesians 2 with John 3:16, propounding that the former advances several details concerning the phenomenon of salvation while the latter provides information concerning the divine motivation for providing salvation.<sup>65</sup> Whereas Chafer evidently saw similarity of expression but disparity of details between the various New Covenant passages, here he saw similarity of details despite the absence of clear parallelism in terms of expression. Although Jesus's language in John 3:16 was (for the most part) verbally dissimilar to Paul's language in Ephesians 2, to Chafer an examination of each passage rendered it clear enough that both referred to the same phenomenon (eternal redemption through faith in Jesus).

Another important feature of Chafer's inductive method is comprehensiveness as an ideal. He explained:

Inductions are either *imperfect* or *perfect*. *Imperfect* inductions result when *some* but not all the teachings of the Scriptures are made the basis of a doctrinal statement. A *perfect* induction is formed when all the teachings of Scripture, according to their precise meaning, are made the basis of a doctrinal statement. It is evident that to finite minds the perfect induction is more or less ideal, and the fact that varying and imperfect inductions are secured accounts, in some measure, for the wide divergence in doctrinal belief among men of equal sincerity.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Chafer, *The Ephesian Letter*, 76–77.

<sup>66</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1:8. Emphasis in the original.

So, in Chafer's system, the linkage of various passages from across the pages of Scripture should ideally be both inductively sustained and exhaustively comprehensive. One might well link a few parallel passages together and thereby discover part of the scriptural teaching on the subject, but by neglecting to incorporate *all* of the germane passages the theologian ends up with an incomplete or skewed conclusion.

An illustration: Chafer felt that amillennialists erred in their interpretation of Revelation partly by imposing an alien system on the text and partly by *failing to factor pertinent passages of Scripture into their doctrinal synthesis*. Only by ignoring Ephesians 6:10–12, 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, and 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10 could they maintain that Satan is presently bound, the first resurrection is past, and the Beast was Nero.<sup>67</sup> Chafer believed that by neglecting some of the pertinent data, these theologians had developed not merely incomplete theological conclusions, but downright incorrect ones.

### *The Unity of Scripture*

Chafer held an extremely high view of the unity (and, commensurately, the authority) of Scripture. Observe his description of the relationship between Scripture's divine and human qualities:

[O]n the Divine side, the Scriptures are the Word of God in the sense that they originate with Him and are the expression of His mind alone; and, on the human side, certain men have been chosen of God for the high honor

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<sup>67</sup> Chafer, "An Introduction to the Study of Prophecy," 130.

and responsibility of receiving God's Word and transcribing it into human form.<sup>68</sup>

Although Chafer rejected the mechanical-dictation theory of inspiration,<sup>69</sup> this quote is perhaps as close as one could come to the mechanical-dictation theory without actually embracing it. Consistent with this view of the Bible's origin, Chafer tended to view Scripture as a unified whole more than as a collection of diverse works.

Insofar as intra-scriptural correlation and integration are concerned, Chafer favored a harmonizing approach. This is unsurprising: if the entirety of Scripture came ultimately from one divine, inerrant author, then its constituent parts must necessarily be in harmony with one another. In linking texts that appeared to be in conflict, therefore, Chafer operated from the presupposition that the conflict was only apparent and that, in most cases, their truly harmonious relationship to one another could be discerned by careful examination.

Countless examples of Chafer's tendency toward harmonization could be reproduced, but two will suffice. First, in commenting on Ephesians 3:17 and Paul's prayer that Christ would come to "dwell in your [the Ephesian Christians'] hearts," Chafer argued on the basis of the aorist tense of κατοικησαι that the prayer referred not to a continuous indwelling, but to a "single, definite act."<sup>70</sup> But upon linking this verse to other New Testament passages on indwelling (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 13:5), Chafer discovered a conflict: if the Ephesian Christians were already regenerate, then they must have already been indwelt! How

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<sup>68</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:72.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:68.

<sup>70</sup> Chafer, *The Ephesian Letter*, 111.



then could Paul pray for them to be indwelt yet again? Chafer's solution was to nuance the concept of *indwelling* differently in Ephesians 3:17 than in Romans 8:9 and 2 Corinthians 13:5: "The Apostle is not here making petition that these believers may be indwelt, but rather that they may come by faith into a fuller knowledge of the indwelling Christ."<sup>71</sup>

Second, when discussing the names of God in the Old Testament, Chafer addressed the apparent contradiction between Exodus 6:3 (which seems to indicate that God did not reveal Himself to the patriarchs by the name *Yahweh*), and the numerous passages in Genesis which depict the patriarchs using the divine name (such as Gen. 15:2). Since his high view of Scripture did not permit him to accept the explanation that the earlier references to the divine name were cases of anachronism or prolepsis, Chafer took the approach adopted by many conservative apologists: "[T]he name [Yahweh] was used freely from Adam to Moses, as the Scriptures record, but ... its meaning was not at any time [up to Moses] disclosed."<sup>72</sup>

### *Dispensational Metanarrative*

Dispensational premillennialism—particularly its Israel-Church distinction—occupied an important place in Chafer's approach to theology.<sup>73</sup> Chafer tended to think of the unfolding storyline of Scripture in terms of the "big picture,"

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:262.

<sup>73</sup> Richards, *The Promise of Dawn*, 194–196.

considering the Bible's parts in light of its overarching metanarrative:

God's program is as important to the theologian as the blueprint to the builder or the chart to the mariner. Without the knowledge of it, the preacher must drift aimlessly in doctrine and fail to a large degree in his attempts to harmonize and utilize the Scriptures. Doubtless a spiritually minded person who does not know the divine program may discern isolated spiritual truths, much as one might enjoy a point of rare color in a painting without observing the picture itself or the specific contribution which that color makes to the whole.<sup>74</sup>

Presenting the sweep of biblical history in broad brush strokes, Chafer couched the entire biblical storyline, from beginning to end, in terms of seven distinct dispensations.<sup>75</sup> He tended to focus overwhelmingly on two dispensations in particular, however: Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church.<sup>76</sup> Generally speaking, he saw the Old Testament and the Gospels as primarily applicable to Israel, and the New Testament Epistles and Revelation to the Church.

This way of looking at Scripture in terms of a dispensationally-delineated overarching metanarrative had a direct impact on Chafer's method of linking passages together: passages written to one dispensation must not be carelessly

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<sup>74</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:xiii.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:xiv–xix; 4:29–35, 47–53, 127–133; “An Introduction to the Study of Prophecy,” 109; “Dispensationalism,” 448.

linked together with passages from another dispensation without accounting for the categorical distinction:

A recognition of the divinely indicated distinctions as to time-periods and the messages belonging to each is the very foundation of a science such as Systematic Theology, which proposes to discover and exhibit the truth relative to the works of God. *No accounting is possible as to the extent of error which is prevalent because of the careless reading into one dispensation or age of that which belongs to another.*<sup>77</sup>

That is not to say that Chafer never linked Old Testament and New Testament passages together. Indeed, he did so on many occasions; the Bible's fundamental unity required that truths concerning God and spiritual things would naturally be found across the pages of both Testaments. But before any such linkage could take place, due consideration would need to be given to the differences between each passage owing to dispensational distinctives. And quite frequently, when Chafer did link a passage in one dispensation together with one from another, he did so in order to contrast rather than to combine or synthesize them.<sup>78</sup>

At this point, the charge of inconsistency might again be raised. If Chafer truly favored the inductive approach to studying Scripture, shouldn't he have let each text speak for itself rather than imposing alien organizational systems upon it? And in allowing his dispensational view of Scripture to affect

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<sup>77</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:xi. Emphasis mine.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., Chafer, *Salvation*, 89–90.

his integration of individual passages, did Chafer not fall prey to the same thing for which he faulted Covenant Theologians? Chafer never addressed this charge directly, but he probably would have had an answer for it. Clearly, Chafer did not think that there was anything wrong with having a theological system, provided that system could pass the “acid test of Biblical proof.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, he had no problem with viewing Scripture through the prism of an organizational scheme, *provided the scheme itself was inductively derived from the text of Scripture*. Chafer made no attempt to conceal the fact that dispensational theology directly informed the premises from which he operated,<sup>80</sup> because in his estimation the primary difference between the dispensational and covenantal approaches was simply that the former scheme was inductively-derived from the Bible,<sup>81</sup> whereas the latter was not.<sup>82</sup>

### **Extra-Scriptural Correlation and Integration**

The next issue to be addressed is Chafer’s method of integrating scriptural data with extra-scriptural data. Once again, Chafer’s comments and practices on this methodological point reflected, first and foremost, a high view of Scripture. Conversely, he maintained a very low view of the capacities and achievements of fallen humanity.

#### *Human Incapacity*

At first glance, Chafer’s works may seem to furnish a theoretically positive framework for incorporating extra-

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<sup>79</sup> Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” 393.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>81</sup> Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” 445–48.

<sup>82</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:156.

scriptural data into a robust theological system. He defined the task of systematic theology as “the collecting, scientifically arranging, comparing, exhibiting, and defending of all facts *from any and every source* concerning God and His works.”<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, he spoke highly at times about extra-biblical scientific disciplines and even applied scientific terminology to the tasks of exposition and theological synthesis.<sup>84</sup> Also, Chafer clearly hinted at the possibility of an integration of theology with the secular sciences when he wrote:

Though it is highly impractical to encumber the science of theology with extended discourse covering all the “ologies” of the universe, it remains true, nevertheless, that the basic fact underlying each and every science is its relation to the Creator of all things and His purpose in creation. Though not usually included in the science of theology, the other sciences which engage the thoughts of men would be both sanctified and exalted were they to be approached, as they should be, with that awe and reverence which recognized in them the presence, power, and purpose of the Creator.

Yet, despite these initially positive tones (and in tension with his definition of systematic theology), Chafer concluded that revelation alone (particularly the written revelation of Scripture) constitutes a suitable source for theological data, while reason is wholly inadequate to discover or gauge theological truth. This negative estimation no doubt arose from

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 1:6. Emphasis mine.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 1:7–8.

Chafer's adherence to the doctrine of total depravity<sup>85</sup> and his resultant view on all-pervasive spiritual blindness. Add to these the reality of natural human finitude,<sup>86</sup> and it is easy to see how Chafer arrived at such a negative assessment of mankind's capacities to reason meaningfully about God.

Several quotations highlight Chafer's feelings about the contribution (or lack thereof) of extra-scriptural disciplines to the task and substance of systematic theology. First, while acknowledging the theoretical contribution that reason has to offer, Chafer downplayed its practical value: "Systematic Theology does draw its material from both revelation and reason, though the portion supplied by reason is uncertain as to its authority and, at best, *restricted to the point of insignificance*."<sup>87</sup> Second, in discussing theories on the method by which Scripture was inspired, he dismissed reason's contribution entirely: "The irrelevance which obtains between revelation and reason is as conspicuous in the field of inspiration as elsewhere."<sup>88</sup>

So, Chafer's view on the contribution of extra-scriptural disciplines to Christian systematic theology may be summarized as follows: Theology does not need the help of extra-scriptural disciplines. At best, such data would be irrelevant given the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. At worst, it would distort theological issues by introducing errant and questionable concepts into a field based on an inerrant book.<sup>89</sup> Theoretically, science could discover valid and relevant insights were the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 2:220–22.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 1:129.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 1:48–49. Emphasis mine.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 1:63.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 1:iv.

scientists neither fallen nor finite. But since they are, Christian theologians should be content with the Bible as their sole source of material for theology.

### *Theology as a One-Way Filter*

However, that extra-scriptural disciplines have no meaningful contribution to make to Christian systematic theology does not mean that there is no interplay between the two. Chafer believed that theological conclusions *should not* be influenced by extra-scriptural disciplines, but also that sound theology *should* exert an influence over the Christian's interpretation and acceptance of truth claims from secular fields. In this way, systematic theology—grounded solely in the immutable, infallible, and inerrant foundation of God's Word—could function as a sort of one-way filter by which all other truth claims are judged.<sup>90</sup>

An interesting example of this principle in Chafer's work is his discussion on the controversial topic of human origins. First, he rejected Darwinian evolution and theistic evolution as legitimate explanations on the grounds that Scripture plainly contravened them both (particularly Genesis 1:21–25, with its emphasis on each species' creation “after their kind”).<sup>91</sup> Beyond that, Chafer further rocked the boat by presenting a view that might well be described as *incipient young-earth creationism*.<sup>92</sup>

Although dispensationalists today tend to favor the young-earth creationist position, in Chafer's day this viewpoint

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 1:128–29.

<sup>91</sup> Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, 165–66.

<sup>92</sup> I am indebted to Dave Thomason for this observation. [Dave Thomason, “REVIEW: Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology*, [www.doctordavet.com/chafer\\_systematic\\_review.html](http://www.doctordavet.com/chafer_systematic_review.html).]

had not yet gained much traction.<sup>93</sup> Instead, at that time, most dispensationalists held to either the day-age theory or the gap theory.<sup>94</sup> The latter theory had attracted a significant number of dispensationalist followers, especially after its promotion in the *Scofield Reference Bible*.<sup>95</sup> These two theories were appealing because they seemed to allow Biblicists to retain a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 without rejecting the scientific consensus concerning the age of the earth. But Chafer was so committed to the authority of God's Word and the inductive method of interpreting Scripture that he rejected both the day-age theory and the gap theory; since they could not in Chafer's estimation be supported by clear statements of Scripture, they should not be sustained.<sup>96</sup> This is remarkable for multiple reasons: not only did Chafer cut against the grain of contemporary dispensational thought on this topic, but he was also willing to reject a view that his own mentor, C. I. Scofield, had popularized.

In addition to rejecting the day-age theory and the gap theory, Chafer was willing to extend the length of human history only "a few thousand years beyond the dates proposed by Usher [sic]." Furthermore, while he did not wholeheartedly endorse the view that the days of creation in Genesis 1 were literal solar days (Chafer held that there was room for legitimate disagreement

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<sup>93</sup> The inception of the modern young-earth creationism movement is usually attributed to the publication of *The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris in 1961.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Roberts, *Evangelicals and Science* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2008), 42–43, 141.

<sup>95</sup> R. Todd Magnum and Mark S. Sweetnam, *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009), 153–57.

<sup>96</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:142.



here among sincere, Bible-believing Christians), he did believe that that view had the strongest textual support.<sup>97</sup>

So, for Chafer, there is indeed interplay between Biblically-sourced systematic theology and extra-scriptural data, but it is strictly a one-way street. The findings of extra-scriptural disciplines are to be judged by the content of Scripture, not the other way around. Relatedly, Chafer viewed historical theology as a worthy field of study, but one that should only be consulted after one's systematic theology had already been initially formulated.<sup>98</sup>

### **Chafer's Central Interpretive Motif**

The prominence of soteriological themes in Chafer's work has already been mentioned in passing; here, it comes to the foreground. A theologian's central interpretive motif is usually understood to be that theological theme (or set of themes) that he emphasizes most prominently and that most cohesively integrates the diverse data of his system.<sup>99</sup> In Chafer's case, that theme is not difficult to identify: it is the grace of God.

When Lewis Sperry Chafer shifted the focus of his ministry from evangelism to exposition and theologizing, he never truly ceased to be an evangelist. His fervor for the propagation of the gospel and for the salvation of lost souls permeated all that he taught and wrote, and shaped the way he approached Scripture and theology. For Chafer, Christianity at its core is a soteriological worldview, concerned primarily with

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:109.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:xxxvii.

<sup>99</sup> For a helpful discussion on the concept and function of a central interpretive motif in systematic theology, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 63–64.

the salvation of sinners and their reconciliation to God: “The whole of the Christian faith is—perhaps more than elsewhere—compressed in the words, ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.’”<sup>100</sup> For Chafer, this theme was central to an understanding not only of the New Testament, but of the entire Bible:

Divine revelation is primarily unto redemption. Its progress of doctrine develops hand in hand with the doctrine of redemption. God has spoken to the end that man may be “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). God has caused a record concerning His Son to be written and men who believe that record are saved, and those who do not believe that record are lost (1 John 5:9–12)

God’s grace was the element of soteriology that most clearly defined Chafer’s theological thinking and in which his theological positions and conclusions found cohesion. Chafer defined grace as “pure unrecompensed kindness and favor,”<sup>101</sup> and he saw grace as the primary motivating force behind all of God’s actions. God’s graciousness motivated Him to decree all things;<sup>102</sup> to create all things;<sup>103</sup> and to provide and apply eternal salvation to humans.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Chafer noted that God’s grace not only motivated Him; it also motivates believers to voluntary, loving, responsive Christian service.<sup>105</sup> God’s grace (particularly in its salvific dimensions) was understood to be

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<sup>100</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:286.

<sup>101</sup> Chafer, *Grace*, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, 44.

<sup>103</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:257.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:60.

<sup>105</sup> Chafer, *Grace*, xiii.

utterly unlimited and available to all.<sup>106</sup> In short, for Chafer, all of history revolved around God's grace, and all the ages to come would bear witness to it.

An objection might be raised at this juncture: What about Chafer's insistence upon the discontinuity between grace and law? If the Mosaic dispensation is characterized by Law and the Church-age dispensation is characterized by grace, then would that not imply the absence of grace in the previous dispensation? How then could God's grace function as Chafer's central interpretive motif, if entire swaths of biblical history do not incorporate the grace principle?

A version of this criticism was leveled against Chafer in his own day. In 1938, James E. Bear accused Chafer's teachings of destroying the unity of the Scriptures and denying the operation of God's grace in the Old Testament economy.<sup>107</sup> It isn't difficult to see how and why Bear came to this conclusion: Chafer had indeed characterized the Mosaic dispensation and the Church-age dispensation as two distinct "religions,"<sup>108</sup> and had repeatedly emphasized the mutual exclusivity of grace and law.<sup>109</sup> But Chafer responded to Bear's criticisms with incredulity, insisting that he had been misunderstood and misrepresented. In his response to Bear, Chafer argued that he had only distinguished two separate *rules of life* between Israel and the Church—not two separate *means of salvation*—and

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<sup>106</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:182.

<sup>107</sup> James E. Bear, "Dispensationalism and the Covenant of Grace," *The Union Seminary Review* (July 1938): 285–307.

<sup>108</sup> Chafer, "Dispensationalism," 409.

<sup>109</sup> Chafer, *Grace*, 216–43.

affirmed his belief that “a holy God can [never] deal with sin in any age on any ground other than that of the blood of Christ.”<sup>110</sup> So, if Chafer’s own clarification is given any weight, he did not exclude the operation of God’s grace from any dispensation, but rather saw it as central to divine-human relations in every age.

Likely in an attempt to forestall future misunderstandings and misrepresentations, Chafer exercised a bit more caution in his terminology discussing Israel and God’s grace in *Systematic Theology*. There, he emphasized that while God’s grace is uniquely characteristic of the present dispensation (i.e., it forms the foundation for the Church’s rule of life, whereas theocratic law had formed the foundation for Israel’s rule of life), that does not mean divine grace was absent in previous dispensations.<sup>111</sup> In fact, Chafer insisted, it has been exercised in every dispensation, and it had a central role to play in Israel’s relationship to God just as it does in the Church’s relationship to God. Not only was God’s grace the foundation for the salvation of individual Jews, but it also underlay many of the other unique blessings that Israel experienced. Specifically, God chose Israel from among the nations because of His grace,<sup>112</sup> entered into covenant relationship with her because of His grace, and provided a sacrificial system for her (so that the Israelites’ sin would not necessarily jeopardize that covenant relationship) because of His grace.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, God purposed and promised to effect the future national regeneration and

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<sup>110</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Dispensational Distinctions Denounced,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 101 (September 1944): 259.

<sup>111</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4:181.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 4:15.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 4:181–82.

forgiveness of all Israel in the eschaton—once again, because of His grace.<sup>114</sup>

For Chafer, grace was all-pervasive, available to all, and central to an understanding of who God is and how He relates to His creation. The central place of God's grace in Chafer's theological system is aptly summarized in the following quotation:

It is evident, therefore, that the supreme motive of God in the creation, preservation, and consummation of the universe, in the permission of evil to enter the world, and in the mighty undertakings of salvation as it is now offered to sinful men through the death and resurrection of Christ, is that His "riches of grace" may be disclosed to all intelligences within the whole scope of creation.

## CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Having covered much ground in the preceding pages, it will prove beneficial in these final paragraphs briefly to summarize the findings of this study and to present in condensed form a summary overview of Lewis Sperry Chafer's theological method.

### **Impact of Chafer's Historical Background**

Chafer's theological method is impacted and informed by at least two major factors from his historical background: the evangelistic emphasis of his early ministerial career and the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. Ever since his days as

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

an evangelist, Chafer gave soteriological themes (such as grace, redemption, reconciliation, and atonement) pride of place in his preaching and teaching ministry. His years of preaching to a broad cross-section of the American populace may have also helped to reinforce his view on the perspicuity of Scripture, which directly impacted his hermeneutical approach and his theological method. As for the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy, it seems to have supplied Chafer with certain non-negotiable doctrines; fostered in him a negative view toward the world-system and the reasoning capacities of mankind; and reinforced the need for comprehensiveness in theological expression.

### **Hermeneutical Approach**

The hermeneutical approach advocated and employed by Chafer was essentially the literal-grammatical-historical method. It emphasized the importance of contextual and lexical factors on interpretation, and cautioned against permitting foregone theological presuppositions to color one's interpretation of Scripture passages. There was some degree of inconsistency in Chafer's interpretive method, as he seemed somewhat inclined toward the principle of single meaning and yet engaged in excessive over-typologizing. Chafer's presentation of the interpretive enterprise as a task governed by clear procedural rules was tempered by his insistence on the necessity of the Holy Spirit's illumination for proper interpretation.

### **Intra-Scriptural Correlation and Integration**

Chafer's approach to linking one part of Scripture with another was governed by the principles of inductive reasoning. Linked passages must be thoroughly examined to ensure that

they are truly parallel at the conceptual level, not just at the level of expression. Linkage proceeded on the foundational conviction that Scripture was one unified whole (due to its divine authorship), and this promoted a tendency toward harmonizing perceived inconsistencies. The organizational grid of dispensationalism (especially the Israel-Church distinction) functioned as a control on correlation and integration, as it restricted primary application to the dispensation for which each respective passage was originally written.

### **Extra-Scriptural Correlation and Integration**

Although he provided a theoretically positive basis for the integration of scriptural and extra-scriptural data, Chafer ultimately concluded that since mankind is finite and spiritually blind, he has little to offer as an input to theology. God had already provided an inerrant, authoritative, and totally sufficient form of revelation, so why would reason (which is fallible as well as fickle) even need to enter the equation? On the other hand, a theological system founded squarely on the sound exegesis of Scripture did have a part to play in validating or invalidating truth claims produced by human reason.

### **Central Interpretive Motif**

Chafer's central interpretive motif was the unmerited, extravagant, all-pervasive, universally-available grace of God. He saw that grace as God's supreme motive for decreeing all things, creating the world, permitting the inception of sin, and both providing and applying eternal salvation. In short, the prevailing purpose of God in all that He does is to demonstrate His grace for all eternity. Although he was perhaps misconstrued on the relationship between grace and Old

Testament Israel, Chafer maintained that salvation has only ever proceeded on the basis of God's grace via Christ's death on the cross, and that this was true even in dispensations wherein the divinely ordained rule of life was based on a law principle.

### **Foundation and Focus**

In all these layers of analysis, it is clear that the foundation of Chafer's thinking is not found in an *a priori* commitment to any particular confession, creed, theological system, or denomination; rather, it is found in a thoroughgoing commitment to Biblicism. In his hermeneutical approach, Chafer upheld literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics precisely because he understood the Word to be inerrant and authoritative. Furthermore, his propensity toward typological interpretation reflected a high view of the divine authorship and concomitant unity of the Bible. In his intra-scriptural correlation and integration, Chafer continued the trend of seeing the Bible as a unified whole proceeding from the creative activity of an inerrant God. In his extra-scriptural correlation and integration, Chafer stressed the infinite superiority of the Bible as God's inerrant, dependable, immutable revelation over the fickle and fallible reason of finite humanity.

The resulting emphasis of this theological method, founded as it is on a robust Biblicism, is a portrait of God as superaboundingly gracious—gracious not only in that He created humanity and purposed to save them after they fell, but also in that He saw fit to graciously reveal Himself to them (through the Scriptures) and to overcome their inability to understand that self-revelation. The Bible itself was understood to be a product of God's grace, even as it was the primary means



by which His grace was revealed. Biblicism was Chafer's foundation, and God's grace was his perpetual focus.



## IN EFFECTIVE PREACHING

Part 2 –Understanding and Nurturing Adult Learning<sup>1</sup>

*Randall C. DeVille, EdD*

## INTRODUCTION

In this study, research on adult learning concepts was incorporated with research on communication techniques, especially as they relate to lecture and preaching, and with research on ambient teaching. In the first three divisions of the review, I focused on adult learning and its nature, needs, and nurture. In the fourth section, I concentrated on elements of communication with a focus on relevancy, immediacy, and authenticity. I also focused on physical environmental features that have an impact on adult learning.

I accessed the Trimble, Winterset public, Kraemer family, St. Charles City-County, and the Walden University libraries to obtain sources for this literature review. Databases consulted included ERIC, Medline, ProQuest, and EBSCO. I searched for peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and books written in the last 5 years. The search terms used in the literature review included *andragogy, adult learning, adult religious education, church education, adult teaching, communication, immediacy, relevance, lecture, preaching, ambient teaching, ambient learning, physical learning environment, and transformation.*

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is adapted from Randall C. DeVille, “The Application of Adult Learning Principles in Effective Preaching,” (Ed.D dissertation, Walden University, 2012).

## ADULT LEARNING

### **Brief History of Adult Education**

The formation of adult education in the United States is different than from other places in the world. It has developed without defined goals, institutional forms, distinctive curriculum and methodology, or agreed upon goals (Knowles, 1962). Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was no agreement as to the components or goals of adult education or even whether or not it was a movement (Knowles, 1962). Only within the past 50 years has a theoretical framework emerged that separates adult learning from children's learning (Knowles, 1984). According to Knowles (1962), the one institution that was most influential for the first 2 centuries of the United States' national life was the church. The church continues to be involved with adult education into the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century but has not integrated adult education philosophy and techniques (Knowles, 1962). Before 1861, three other institutions formed the basis for the adult education movement in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The three institutions were the Lowell Institute and Cooper Union, the library, and the museum (Knowles, 1962).

Lai (1995) suggested that adult education in U.S. churches generally include a teacher-centered or lecture approach and incorporates the Biblical mandate to use preaching as the means to instruct churchgoers. Knowles (1962) argued that while the church has made an impact on adult education in the United States during the first 2 centuries of its history, the church has not integrated adult education philosophy and techniques into its work of preaching. McKenzie and Harton (2002) posited that there was still some resistance

to adoption of adult learning principles in adult religious education due to what they suggested was a reliance on theology over methodology. While religious educators emphasized “the application of theology to life results in religious learning” (McKenzie & Harton, 2002, p. 2), adult learning theorists have advocated transformative learning whereby the teacher becomes a facilitator for student-centered dialogue that stimulates critical thinking, leading to changes in behavior (Brookfield, 1987; Houde, 2006; Lai, 1995; Mezirow, 1991).

### **Lecture**

Lecture was the method of choice for higher education course instructors in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Butler, 1992). Carlson (2001) reported that any group size can be taught with only one instructor with some degree of effectiveness. The need for few additional instructional materials makes lecture attractive to both the teacher and the administrator. The lecture method allows the teacher flexibility in influencing the delivery of the material with their style or preferences (Carlson, 2001). However, there are difficulties with the lecture method. During a lecture, the learner tends to become passive and unmotivated. Lai (1995) described lecture as oppressive because it extinguishes self-directedness and implicitly teaches listeners to be passive and dependent on the teacher. Lecturers often seem unaffected by the boredom they inflict on their listeners (Brookfield, 1990). Teachers struggle with the practical aspects of how to make their lectures critically stimulating.

The length of the lecture has a great deal to do with its effectiveness (Oermann, 2004). Carlson (2001) stipulated the optimal length of a lecture as between 20 and 30 minutes.

Carlson suggested the use of a well-organized outline with a clear-cut introduction and conclusion and some form of visual enhancement to enhance student learning. Brookfield (1990) suggested several ways to improve lecture. The lecturer needs to know the audience, their interests, roles, and dilemmas. The asking of information-gathering questions can engage the audience and help the speaker by providing valuable feedback (Kraus & Sears, 2008; Oermann, 2004). Brookfield stated that the lecturer that takes an inquiry stance, especially at the beginning and the end of the lecture, encourages the listeners to investigate the big issues. Brookfield also suggested that the lecturer should speak from skeleton notes and not from prewritten scripts which can be perceived as boring and predictable. Brookfield preferred the use of notes because notes “create [the] appearance of being spontaneous, allow for idiomatic language, and require thorough knowledge of subject” (p. 79). Brookfield also suggested using visual aids to connect the main points in the lecture. Researchers have indicated value in the lecturer illustrating ideas by using analogies and metaphors as well as anecdotes from his or her life, pop culture, sports, or current events (Brookfield, 1990; Butler, 1992; Carlson, 2001; Chesebro, 2003; Kraus & Sears, 2008). Krause and Sears (2008) found lectures from teachers who are approachable, caring, creative, open-minded, realistic, fair, and respectful most effective. Krause and Sears further noted that teaching that included things that were interesting and involved students actively through discussion, labs, and projects held the students’ attention and aided in the students’ retention of the material.

Butler (1992) presented the findings from a research study conducted with freshman and sophomore students taking human biology courses at Dorset House School of Occupational

Therapy. The study was designed to evaluate perceived effectiveness of different teaching methods that can be incorporated into a basic lecture format. The 126 student participants were divided into the two groups taught by the same professor. Five different ways of using the 50 minutes of class time were tried. The five methods were worksheets, didactic or traditional lecture, uncompleted handout, completed handout, and the use of experimental tasks. The students were given evaluation sheets and asked to rank each method from one to 10, where one was least effective and 10 was most effective. Butler confirmed that traditional didactic lecture was the least effective method. The best method was the use of handouts, whether completed or uncompleted. Students added that the handouts helped them know where the lesson was going and what would be expected of them. The students especially appreciated the clearly stated objectives that served as study guides for reading and tests. The modified lecture with notes and handouts were shown to increase subject relevance while making the lecture more exciting, provoking, inspiring, and effective (Butler, 1992).

### **Definition of Adult Education**

The term adult education has been used with three intended meanings. One meaning is to describe the process of continued learning after formal schooling has been completed (Knowles, 1962). Adult education can also be defined as a movement, classification, or field (Knowles, 1962). Adult education can also refer to a set of educational exercises that institutions design for adult men and women for the reaching of certain educational objectives (Merriam, 1991). It is this last

definition for adult education that is the focus of this literature review.

### **Andragogy**

Andragogy is a system of intentional strategies aimed at creating an environment that encourages adult learners to participate in transformational learning (Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 1991; Vella, 1994). Andragogy is not an idea that competes with pedagogy but is at the opposite end of the same spectrum. Pedagogical strategies are applicable in applications where the andragogical model is not (Knowles, 1980). The andragogical model comes with certain assumptions. Four of the assumptions are that the adult learner has (a) self-direction or autonomy; (b) more experience triggers to learning than youth; (c) a task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning; and (d) action or some other way of indicating learning has happened (Knowles, 1984; Merriam, 1991). The importance of dialogue is one of the basic assumptions in adult learning (Shor & Freire, 1987; Vella, 1994). Vella (1994) explained that adult educators have to have confidence in the adult learner because they have enough life experience and can learn new knowledge they deem helpful.

### **Adult Religious Education**

During the period from 1920 to 1960, adult religious education developed as a subfield in adult education (Elias, 1993). Religious organizations were slower than other bodies to expand their adult education programs. Rapid growth of such programs after 1960 is credited to church leaders' response to declines in the frequency of religious activity amongst church members (Foltz, 1990). During 1980 to 1990, there was an



increase in theory and research concerning adult learning with virtually no research focusing exclusively on adult religious learning. Many Protestant churches had begun expanding their adult religious education programs leading to the hiring of directors of adult education (Elias, 1993).

According to Foltz (1986), adult religious education needed was a reconceptualization of its purposes and scope. Foltz called for a reconceptualization “based not only on theological perspectives but also on principles of adult education, an understanding of educational anthropology and contextual metalanguage, research information regarding adult development, and on the principles of marketing” (p. 21). This call for learning the teacher’s art is also a call for the Christian minister to develop and keep alive a scholarly approach to his or her profession (Palmer, 1937). Adult religious education needs to develop professionals who will integrate theory and practice, acknowledging the need for not only the professional but also for the practitioner to ensure future progress (Foltz, 1986).

The purpose of adult religious education is to challenge an individual or culture’s ideals, feelings, and living (Vogel, 1984). Most of the laity assumes that the Christian faith should make a difference in the way an individual lives (Foltz, 1990). Palmer (1932) stated that adult religious education makes a Christian character or “efficient Christian personality” (p. 35). Education in the church, Palmer posited, is not just a department or special service but it is the work of the church itself. Vogel (1984) described the function of Christian religious education as that which affirms the worth of every individual and their power to make responsible decisions. Vogel further described religious education as witnessing to the acts of God in

history, thereby urging individuals to reflect critically on what they have seen and heard.

One of the challenges of adult religious education is that the church in the United States exists in a pluralistic society and a constantly evolving world. The institutions of family, church, and school have seen their importance wane while persons have experienced growing flexibility and personalized life choices (Vogel, 1984). Another obstacle to religious learning is seen in the increasing trend towards secularism, rationalism, relativism, plurality, and individualism (Elias, 1993). Given this background, it is appropriate to consider the goals of adult education.

### **Goal of Adult Education**

The goal of adult education and adult education activities is to provide for the multifaceted growth of each participant. In Knowles's (1980) view, the purpose of education is to produce competent people who can apply what they learn to life's ever-changing situations. The focus is not simply on learning, as Carter (2009) suggested, but on transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991). The development of adult education will lead to better conditions of individuals and throughout society (Knowles, 1962). The change that adult education can effect occurs when participants enter into critical discourse on subjects relevant to them that are reflective of social norms and cultural codes (Mezirow, 1991). Adult educators have a responsibility to create opportunities for learners to become more critically reflective. The goal of andragogy in Mezirow's (1991) view is to develop critically reflective and self-directed learning adults. Some of the values that adults must wrestle with include freedom, democracy, equality, justice, and social cooperation.

Through critical thinking, adults can be better equipped to expand their way of looking at and behaving in their world (Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991; Vella, 1994).

### **Needs for Adult Learning**

Adult learners are avid learners who are motivated by different things in which they place value. Whether it is for vocation or vacation, realization or acquisition, adults are motivated learners (Merriam, 1991). Adult learners are self-directed and ready to learn what is needed in order to function more competently in some area of their lives (Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). The role of the adult educator is one of many that provide needed support for the learner. Knowles (1980) listed the functions of the teacher of adults as diagnostic, planning, motivational, methodological, resource, and evaluative (p. 26). The diagnostic function is seen as helping the learner focus on the needs for particular learning activities. Sequencing of the learning experiences by teachers is considered a planning function. Teachers who create conditions that are conducive to learning perform a motivational function (Knowles, 1980). When teachers make decisions and selections concerning teaching techniques and methods, they are engaging in a methodological function. The resource function is illustrated by a teacher providing human and material resources needed for the learning activity (Mezirow, 1991). Teachers of adults perform the evaluative function as they help the learner measure the outcomes of their educational experience (Knowles, 1980).

In an educational program designed for adults, the curriculum is developed around the interests and needs of the student. The adult learner has a wealth of experience which will

serve as a living text (Jackson, 2009). This same experience fosters greater differences in the adult student (Knowles, 1984). Consequently, the task of adult educators is to assist the learner in evaluating and analyzing critically their values, beliefs, and conduct as each has developed in the context of their lived experiences (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) described this task as assisting adult learners through several phases of transformation. The first phase is a disorienting dilemma wherein the learner's previously held belief comes into conflict with a newly identified value, leading to a sort of unrest or disequilibrium. Several phases lead through the transformation of feelings, values, relationships, and finally result in action. The final phase of the transformational learning process is theorized as occurring when the learner has built competence and confidence in their new skills. The transformed adult learner has acquired knowledge that he or she can reintegrate into life with different conditions dictated by a new perspective (Mezirow, 1991). The use of Mezirow's phases of transformation informed this study and the research questions by exploring how a sermon might create a disorienting situation for the listener. The preacher might understand and use the impact of core elements of a transformative approach to teaching. The list of elements the preacher might incorporate in a sermon includes individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context, and an authentic practice (Mezirow et al., 2009).

The use of critical incident exercises, criteria analysis, and crisis-decision simulations are three ways Brookfield (1987) suggested to prompt adult students to examine their assumptions. Critical incident exercises are used to ask students to identify some event that held particular significance to them,

particularly their greatest personal satisfaction. Criteria analysis is an exercise that helps students identify and make explicit the standards and values they use in determining whether an activity is good or profitable. Crisis-decision simulations get students to imagine themselves in situation where they must choose from a number of unsettling choices (Brookfield, 1987).

## THE NURTURE OF ADULT LEARNING

### **The Climate for Adult Learning**

Adult educators have come to realize that they should focus on facilitating learning by creating an environment that is conducive to learning (Brookfield, 1990; Knowles, 1984; Merriam, 1991; Vella, 1994). Merriam (1991) listed people, structure, and culture as three organizational factors that can encourage learning. Knowles (1984) argued that the teachers can set a psychological climate that influences the adult learner. Knowles prescribed a climate of “mutual respect, collaborativeness, mutual trust, supportiveness, pleasure, humanness, openness and authenticity” (p. 15). An environment that optimizes learning is described as one that features utilitarianism, attractiveness, comfort, and flexibility (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Knowles posited that even the arranging of chairs and the lectern is important because the arrangement reveals the mindset of the instructor.

### **The Adult Teacher**

Brookfield (1990) described an adult educator as someone who has a personal vision of teaching that reflects on whether or not they are helping their students learn in the context that they

find themselves working. The educator will continually evaluate his or her methods and techniques in order to sharpen his or her skills in cultivating learning.

Kersson-Griep (2001) studied teacher communication competence and its effect on student motivation in a university setting. Kersson-Griep concluded that teachers who are schooling students for democracy can significantly improve their results by employing adroit *face-support*. Face-support refers to the way students interpret how teachers communicate with them. Three related concepts that Condon (2008) connected to teacher communication competence described a student's feeling of being misunderstood as feeling unheard, ignored, and/or misinterpreted. Three face-needs of adult students that Kersson-Griep highlighted were described as autonomy, belonging, and competence. Autonomy is communicated when an instructor gives students a choice or an opportunity to be self-directed as the notion of andragogy explains. Belonging refers to the student's need for fellowship or camaraderie. The student needs assurance that he or she is accepted and fits in the group. The face-need of competence describes the student's need to believe that he can learn as well as believe that the instructor believes she has what it takes to master the material. The student's need for a feeling of competence runs counter to the student feeling that the teacher is demeaning or talking down to him or her (Kersson-Griep, 2001).

Trust is a significant factor in whether or not students will experience significant learning from their teacher (Brookfield, 1990). Brookfield stated that "the more profound and meaningful the learning [will be] to the students, the more they need to be able to trust their teachers" (1990, p. 163). Brookfield perceived two components for trustworthiness—

credibility and authenticity. Credibility is the component that is comprised of the teacher's knowledge, skill and expertise--in a word, their competence. Authenticity, the other component of trustworthiness, when perceived by students comprises the teacher's character with his or her passions, frailties, and emotions. Authenticity reflects on the teacher's personhood and whether he or she is able to admit to errors and fallibility while being consistent in words and actions. Brookfield instructed teachers seeking to build trust to: "be explicit about your organizing vision, be ready to admit your errors, reveal yourself unrelated to teaching, demonstrate that you take students' concerns seriously, realize the power or role modeling, don't play favorites, and don't deny your credibility" (p. 165). In Brookfield's view, trust in the teacher is built up over time as the teacher is given opportunities to reveal competence and authenticity. The nurture of adult learning is enhanced by the three organizational factors of people, structure, and culture. The adult teacher who leads students to significant learning is one who is trusted. A teacher's perceived credibility and authenticity lead students to trust them.

### **Preachers as Adult Teachers**

Some ministers fail to realize that they are in a role of an adult educator (Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1980) contended that large meetings such as church preaching services as they are generally conducted do not produce much learning. Knowles stated that the educative quality of any such meeting is directly proportional to the quantity and quality of the interaction during the meeting. The three loci of fields of where interaction can be stimulated are the audience, the platform, and the interplay between the audience and the platform (Knowles,

1980). Lai (1995) agreed with Knowles that a new model for Christian adult education is needed in churches where the principles of andragogy are considered. Lai argued that approaches where theology is taught through a teacher-centered lecture need to give way to a model that encourages dialogue with listeners in order to produce individuals that are “biblically literate, critically conscious, and actively involved Christians” (p. 2). Lai listed two reasons why it is time for a change in the way the Bible is taught in churches. Lai first reason was that the printed Bible is now available to the people in the pew and they have become enabled independent learners. Lai’s second reason related to his view of the changes in the church and society through the expansion in information availability that has left the church and its antiquated educational modalities less functional.

### **Communication**

While there are many different qualities that are given for effective teaching and preaching, two that appear frequently on researchers’ lists are the qualities of immediacy and relevance (Furman, 1992; McCroskey, et al, 2002; Morgan, 2002; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004; Warren, 2007). In the following division of the literature review the literature on the topic of communication with a focus on relevancy and immediacy in preaching will be synthesized. Relevancy in communication is understood by connection, character, and context. The literature on the topics of verbal and non-verbal forms of immediacy and their impact on the learning process are also synthesized.



## Relevance

The concept of relevance seems to encompass much more than a teacher or preacher contextualizing the subject matter in a contemporary setting. Strangway (2004) explained relevancy in preaching as tying the message into the concerns, hopes, and dreams of the listeners. In Strangway's view, the perception of being relevant is the work that the teacher does in order to connect with the listener.

In the literature reviewed for this study, not only was agreement found on the influence of relevance on the effectiveness of preaching, but there was agreement as to what constitutes relevance (Butler, 1992; Furman, 1992; Lai, 1995; Morgan, 2002; Strangway, 2004; Warren, 2007). Preaching that is relevant is consistently presented as communication that helps the learner connect to the lesson (Luntz, 2007; Strangway, 2004). There are several ways the preacher can encourage this connection. One method is the presentation of the lesson in a way that helps the listeners to visualize it as the story of their lives (Furman, 1992; Daggett, 2005; Luntz, 2007; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004). Being practical or giving the "how to" after teaching spiritual principles or truths was also suggested as characteristic of adding relevance (Furman, 1992; Luntz, 2007; Strangway, 2004). A third characteristic presented in the literature reviewed for this study focused more on the character of the speaker than on a technique. The integrity and good character of the preacher were stated as important elements in promoting relevancy (Furman, 1992; Morgan, 2002; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004). One other descriptor of relevance discussed was the teacher giving a clear overview of the lesson ahead and how it would connect to what had already been

learned or presented (Butler, 1992; Furman, 1992; Daggett, 2005).

Luntz (2007) stressed the need for communicators to make their presentations relevant. Luntz stated that the speaker needs to “take the imaginative leap of stuffing yourself right into your listener’s shoes to know what they are thinking and feeling in the deepest recesses of their mind and heart” (p. xiii). While the notion of relevance lends itself to speaker creativity, it is also practical in nature. Relevance in teaching can be gained by using instructional strategies that help students connect with the material. A teacher who tells the class what to expect in the next chapter and how it compares or contrasts to what they are currently learning, improves the instruction and adds relevance to the lesson (Marzano, 2003). Robles (1998) built on this notion by listing the relevance terms that describe important concepts which connect the student with the lesson. Robles delineated the concepts of experience, present worth, future usefulness, needs matching, modeling, and choice. A broader description of relevance included the context of the speaker’s character (Morgan, 2002; Warren, 2007). Warren specified humility, integrity, generosity, civility, and clarity as attributes that are needed to engage the listener (2002).

Furman (1992) scrutinized baby boomers, those U.S. citizens born between 1946 and 1964, and their unique characteristics that influence how they receive spiritual truth. Furman interviewed ministers contemporary Furman’s time, reviewed previous research, and drew conclusions concerning what constitutes effective preaching to baby boomers. Furman’s analysis of the findings indicated that young to middle age adults choose a church based on the meaningful content of sermons. The conclusion of Furman’s research was that effective

preaching could be described in the terms biblical, personal, and practical. While Furman did not use the word *relevance*, the meaning and spirit of relevance was found in all three points of Furman's conclusion. Biblical was defined as preaching that is only effective when it "introduces and explains characters, background, and doctrines in contemporary terms" (Furman, 1992, p. 165). Personal preaching was described as preaching that emphasizes how the story of the sermon can be understood and visualized as the story of the listeners' lives. Furthermore, practicality in the message was embodied in the concept of relevance. The conclusion of Furman's study was that preaching is most effective when it tells the listeners "how to" live, do, or be in light of revelation given (Furman, 1992).

Strangway (2004) conducted research in order to better understand how to preach effectively in a postmodern context. Strangway termed effective preaching that which is "incarnational" (p. 4) meaning it is based on the view that the message presented is delivered to a specific group of listeners in a specific context. Strangway listed 10 qualities of effective preaching, one of which states that the goal of preaching is relevance. For Strangway, the ideas of the audience listening taking the message seriously, interacting with the message, and considering the claims and promises is directly related to its relevance. Strangway connected relevancy to authenticity and to life. Strangway's findings indicated that relevancy is composed of two elements. First, whatever is preached must be shown to be pertinent to a person's life. The message presented needs to address needs, concerns, and questions that the individual is already contemplating. The second element of relevancy is the need for whatever is taught to hold value.

Relevance in the sermon must be connected to how this important message can make a difference in the listener's life.

Strangway (2004) declared that relevance affects the preacher's view of application and impact. The effective preacher is one who is a student of culture and is aware of the macro and micro concerns of the people. The application of the sermon is a time for connecting the message to the issues, events, and concerns that confront the listeners. Thus, preachers should list some micro issues as family, marriage, sin, and spirituality and include macro issues such as world peace, terrorism, employment, and social concerns in their sermons. The preacher is person who can bridge the gap between deep spiritual truth and the need for practical everyday wisdom while communicating a compassion for and interest in the listeners' daily struggles. Relevancy in this context has an effect because the speaker creates a dialogue with the listener by using stories, questions, and objects. An effective preacher not only speaks about the things that are commonplace but also the matters of the heart (Strangway, 2004).

Daggett (2005) developed a framework for planning and instruction that was designed to assist teacher practitioners with rigorous and relevant instruction (Appendix A). The idea was to help teachers and the developers of teachers take a deeper look into how they were planning their curriculum and teaching. This framework was centered around a taxonomy of knowledge which was based on Bloom's taxonomy (Forehand, 2005), and Daggett's action continuum application model. The rigor/relevance framework (Daggett, 2005) has four quadrants that are labeled from A to D, and to each is assigned a level-acquisition, application, assimilation, or adaptation respectively. Each of these levels represents a different type of

knowledge and a higher level of understanding. When the instructor uses the lecture approach, he or she only supports learning in the A and C quadrants (Daggett, 2005). Quadrants B and D are the quadrants of application and adaptation which correspond closely to life-changing types of education. To enhance student learning, Daggett challenged teachers to change their focus of instruction. Daggett stated that deeper level meaning can be attained if the teacher takes into consideration students' interests, facilitates students' active construction of meaning, uses questioning and feedback to stimulate student reflection, and uses a variety of resources to promote understanding.

In Luntz' presentation on context and relevance, Luntz (2007) explained and illustrated Luntz' notion of what is critical for anyone who wants their message to be understood and cause the listener to act. Luntz presented context for the "why" of the message so that the listener will be ready for the "therefore." In Luntz' view, the value of the message lies in its relevance to the context. Relevance is the complement to context and is focused on the individual and the personal meaning of the message. Luntz (2007) challenged speakers to shed their own perspective in favor of seeing the environment through the listeners' eyes.

Relevance and context are needed for successful sermon delivery. Warren (2007) stated that if a person is not worried about staying true to the biblical message, relevance is easy. Warren also stated that if teachers are narrowly focused on making sure they remain biblical in their teaching, they might easily abandoning relevance. Warren's response to this dilemma was to consider relevancy not as a strategy but as a lifestyle (Warren, 2007).

## **Immediacy**

Immediacy is the manner in which the teacher stimulates the student to have affect for the content and for the teacher. Immediacy is described in terms of being verbal or nonverbal. The action of the speaker may include speaking in a way that communicates the speaker's emotional bond with the listener (Olenowski, 2000). This emotional bond is one outcome that Simmons (2007) noted in reporting the outcome of adult learning experiment. Simmons stated that the building of community and relationships in the class Simmons studied aided students in their retention of information. This outcome can also be supported by the speaker using proximity to the listeners and purposeful expression.

Morgan (2002) argued that preachers have a responsibility to connect with their audience through an inspiring transmission. The problem, according to Morgan (2002), is linked to the minister's habit of reading, competence in language, passion, emotional affectation, and/or ethical persuasion. Morgan's solution or prescription for curing a lack of relevance in preaching is for preachers "to fortify themselves with competence in language, involve not only the mind but also the emotions of the hearers, and be respectable both morally and intellectually" (p. 4). The facility with language, Morgan said, has a predictive ability as to whether a speaker will have the ability to persuade effectively. Learning rarely happens in an emotional vacuum (Brookfield, 1990; Olenowski, 2000). Language is also at the center of the need for the speaker to touch the emotions of the listener. Knowing the mind and feelings of those being taught allows the preachers to identify with the ones they wish to influence. Morgan contended, "in every era when memorable sermons flourish, dynamic preachers

implement passionate persuasion” (p. 3). Truth by itself will not always persuade, Morgan argued. Preachers are called to be more than “mere pulpit disc jockeys playing God’s records” (p. 4). She stressed that impassioned persuasion makes a tremendous difference in whether or not preaching is effective or not (Morgan, 2002).

Preachers need to speak in such a way as to bond emotionally with their listeners. The emotional bonding theory declares “there exists a group of skills that together can allow for verbal and nonverbal communication between the speaker and the listener or create an emotional bond” (Olenowski, 2000, p. 11). This facility with language is said to have a predictive ability as to whether a speaker will have the ability to persuade effectively. Language is also at the center of the need for the speaker to touch the emotions of the listener. Knowing the mind and feelings of those being taught allows the preacher to identify with the ones he or she wishes to influence. The reality of the need for emotion in persuasive speaking is emphasized in the statement, “in every era when memorable sermons flourish, dynamic preachers implement passionate persuasion” (Morgan, 2002, p. 3). Luntz (2007) presented 10 rules of effective language: (a) simplicity, (b) brevity, (c) credibility, (d) consistency, (e) novelty, (f) sound and texture, (g) aspirational speech, (h) visualization, (i) asking a question, and (j) providing context and explain relevance. Luntz demonstrated the connection between immediacy and relevance in his discussion of what people really care about, and 21 words and phrases that connect emotionally with listeners. Luntz (2007) argued, “It’s not what you say, it’s what people hear” (p. xiii). Luntz posited that no matter how good the message or lesson is, it will only be understood through the prism of someone’s emotions, ideas,

experiences, and presuppositions. Vella (1994) echoed the need for the learning task to contain an element of actions, ideas, and feelings.

Olenowski's (2000) research on the emotional bonding theory and effective preaching, stated "thirty-seven percent of homilies didn't have any of the applications of the teaching presented" (p. 9). Olenowski argued that this lack of application results in a certain coldness where emotions of the spirit are missing. The emotional bonding theory is promoted as the answer to bridging the gap and finding common ground of shared experience between the minister and the congregation. Olenowski's approach is one that encourages the speaker to identify with the listeners in such a way as to help the listeners to perceive that they are "in the same boat" with the speaker. The emotional bonding theory focused the spotlight on the emotions found in the preaching process. Emotion is referred to as a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and the range of propensities to act. Olenowski stated that emotions are what attract individuals to certain people, objects, actions, and ideas, while moving people away from others. Words have emotion and thoughts connected to them, therefore preachers would do well to consider their choice of words and the emotion and thought they communicate. Olenowski also focused on strategies that can help the preacher to offer messages that will relate to the human condition. Olenowski explained, "Creating this "common ground" involves imaging, painting and clarifying our interior emotional lives" (Olenowski, 2000, p.10). Olenowski advocated the use of metaphor, illustration, humor, storytelling, and self-disclosure to create a common ground between preacher and listener.



Nonverbal immediacy has also been shown to greatly affect cognitive learning and to promote favorable outcomes in students (McCroskey, et al., 2002). There is a connection between teachers who are more nonverbally immediate and a favorable response of their students to their lecture. Students interpret nonverbal immediacy in a teacher as being caring, understandable, and indicating better teachers than those who are less immediate (McCroskey, et al., 2002). Nonverbal immediacy is nonverbal behaviors that communicate approval, fondness, or positive affect to others. McCroskey, et al. suggested several behaviors that teachers do that communicate immediacy such as the teacher looking in the direction of the student, smiling, sitting in proximity to the student, or even touching the student in a nonthreatening manner.

### **Ambient Teaching**

The climate for adult learning is impacted by the physical characteristics of the space in which it is to take place (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; Knowles, 1984; White, 1972). Environmental features are important because they have a direct and powerful impact on learning. White (1972) noted, “general estimates indicate that while about seventy-five percent of learning is accounted for by motivation, meaningfulness, and memory, the remaining twenty-five percent of learning is dependent upon the effects of the physical environment” (p. 1). Adult students are more likely than children to be affected by the physical learning environment with an increase in their motivation due to sufficient space, attractive decoration, and functional furnishings (Lane & Lewis, 1971). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) suggested that the physical environment “enhances learner commitment” (p. 246). The term “ambient teaching” is used (K.

Lynch, personal communication, December 27, 2010) to describe “the way in which the preacher uses the space and the characteristics and conditions of the space to enhance the message of the oral communication and support adult learning.” Hiemstra and Sisco stated that the physical environment for adult learners is a subject that is often ignored in literature on adult learning. The reasons offered for ignorance of the physical location included these: (a) adult learning takes place in spaces designed for other age groups, (b) adults lack of perception of the seriousness of the environmental problem, (c) the lack of a budget designated to improve the adult learning physical environment, (d) administrators and teachers do not embrace the responsibility to ensure the learning environment, and (e) those who want to improve the learning environment do not know where to start. Four areas of concern when evaluating adult learning environments are *anthropometry*, *ergonomics*, *proxemics*, and *synaesthetics* (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990), terms that will be explained in the following paragraphs.

### **Anthropometry**

Adults display different shapes and sizes. *Anthropometry* focuses on the dimensions of the human body. These dimensions are important to consider when designing adult learning spaces (White, 1972). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) posited that the choice of chairs, their size, padding, shape, and arrangement are real areas of concern. They further submitted that attractiveness or décor concerns may influence selection of seats more than the size or shape of the adults participating (Vosko, 1991). Some other concerns of the furniture that should be considered in a learning environment are those which pertain to movement and interaction. Round tables are optimal for encouraging eye

contact and interaction between students (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; White, 1972).

### **Ergonomics**

The target audience or student should dictate the design of the learning space. Ergonomics deal with bringing comfort to those who occupy a space or use an instrument (White, 1972). The aspects of size and shape enter into the philosophy or expectation that the teacher has for the instruction within that space. A straight row of seats in a narrow rectangle of a room indicates one way communication of a lecture mode by which knowledge is deposited into passive students or listeners (White, 1972). A semi-circle or wider arrangement of seats indicates the teacher is seeking discussion and dialogue between the students and with the instructor (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990).

### **Proxemics**

The use of space not only defines a physical setting but it also indicates and in some cases creates a culture. Several issues connected to proxemics include gestures, touch or avoidance of touch, eye behavior, and posture (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Sociofugal and sociopetal are two different settings that affect the use of space for adult learners. Sociofugal settings are used in environments where interaction among the students is discouraged and attention is primarily forward towards the lecturer. This arrangement creates a status distinction where students see themselves as nonspecial and having no distinct identity compared with the instructor (White, 1972). Sociopetal settings encourage interaction and can facilitate conversation by having the learners seated facing towards one another. Hard architectural spaces, like those with fixed seating, do not provide

for or encourage individual movement or interaction (Fulton, 1991). A common arrangement for a sociopetal setting is a large square where the students are seated around the outside edges or the use of a circular setting or round tables. Soft architectural spaces have furnishings that can be moved or changed and have inherent flexibility (Fulton, 1991; Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; White, 1972).

Adult learners have learned to choose their seating preferences to accommodate their desired amount of interaction (Vosko, 1991; White, 1972). Hall (1966) claimed that there are four distance zones, the intimate, personal, social, and public, from which the students may choose. Students who have the freedom and ability to move or change their seats benefit through stimulated social and personal growth (Hall, 1966; Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; White, 1972).

### **Synaesthetics**

Synaesthetics involves the study of how students are affected by the simultaneous use of several of their senses. Many instructors have faced the challenge of extraneous noise from construction, planes, or a noisy adjoining class that interferes with the hearing of their class (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; White, 1972). The lack of light or the over abundance of illumination can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of an instructor's presentation. The key idea is for teachers to be able to select or change the amount of lighting as needed for the task at hand. The impact of colors on the learning environment can affect participation and productivity (White, 1972). Comfort concerns can be noted in temperature and humidity levels as well as in the availability of suitable chairs, bathrooms, and refreshments (Vosko, 1991). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) and Knowles (1980)

indicated that much more research needs to be done on the relationships between the human senses such as touch, smell, and taste the outcomes adult learners experience in an adult learning environment.

### CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE METHODS FOR THE STUDY

I used a case study design to analyze the bounded phenomenon which is preaching. Merriam (2009) defined a qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 46). A case study explores a case or multiple cases over time utilizing multiple sources of data (Creswell, 1998). The case being studied can be a single site or program or several programs in a multi-site study where the focus is on individuals, an activity, or an event. Within a case study, many methods of collecting data can be used with the researcher as the primary instrument for collecting data (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Information regarding the research problem can be collected by various means including interviews, focus groups, and field notes. Qualitative data research supports the hermeneutic paradigm because it explores the lived experience of participants (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative data are presented in a rich, thick narrative to convey the participants’ experiences. A constructivist paradigm “assumes that multiple, socially constructed realities exist and that the meanings individuals give to their experiences ought to be the objects of study” (Hatch, 2002). Interpretative analysis fits well with a study that focuses on making sense of situations where there is a certain social aspect to the event and the researcher is exploring explanations for what goes on within the event (Hatch, 2002).

Triangulation is as a strategy to strengthen the internal validity of the study (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The hermeneutic paradigm provides tools that the researcher can use to connect interpretations to data in an effort to construct meaning that explains the social phenomena in the study (Hatch, 2002). The paradigm will provide tools to expand the researcher's sensitivity to the complexity of the data collected from the three sources he or she intends to use. This paradigm guides the researcher towards a specific priority as the study is conducted.

### SUMMARY

The literature synthesized here encompasses topics that inform and relate to the conceptual framework for the study on effective preaching. The review of literature on adult learning included literature on the potential for transforming learning environments into dynamic learner-centered spaces where dialogue is encouraged and interaction is a valued commodity. Literature on communication theory focused on two key characteristics of effective communication, relevancy, and immediacy. Relevancy in communication was explained by the concepts of connection, character, and context. The literature on communication also included the topic of verbal and non-verbal forms of immediacy and their impacts on the learning process. The literature review also includes a section on ambient teaching, which covered the important aspects of an effective learning environment. The last section of the literature review contains literature on the research methods selected for the study. In the following section the justification for the study is presented along with the justification for using a qualitative

design. Furthermore, details concerning the population, how the interviews were administered, and the data analysis used are included.





ERASURE: EGYPTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION  
IN THE PRESENTATION OF ANCIENT HISTORY  
FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATORS

*C.R. Twombly*

ABSTRACT

This is a paper applying critical secondary considerations to the historiography of the Egyptian golden age and the events of the exodus as related in the Jewish Torah. This paper considers how the issue of historiographical erasure in Egyptological sources reframes prioritization in the presentation of events related to Hebraic-Egyptian interaction. It also assesses the comparative qualities of the Jewish Torah account, beyond its Divine authorization, to illustrate its credibility for construction of an accurate presentation of the events in question. The goal of this paper is to consider the relationship between the Egyptological resources and the Jewish resources in order to inform transformative educators concerning reliable bases for constructing accurate presentations of history to their learners.

ERASURE

In historical education there is a persistent problem when presenting ancient history between the detailed accounts of the Jewish Torah concerning the exodus and the silence of Egyptological records. The exodus event itself is gargantuan in proportions, shifting the ancient geopolitical landscape of the

levant. And while few would be so bold as to claim that no such event could have occurred, due to the cultural insensitivity such a statement would imply in an age which rightly recognizes and fears the horrors of antisemitism, the silence of accounts in Egyptian records has been cause for concern among historians about the veracity of the Jewish account. In response, transformative educators have frequently attempted to integrate the Jewish accounts into the known Egyptological record in order to provide a synthesized history.<sup>1</sup> These attempts do little to resolve the issue of divergence between the accounts and frequently learners encounter considerable inconsistency between individual educators, even within the same institutions. However, based on a more critical secondary consideration, there is a plain rationale for the silence of the Egyptian record, which lends far greater credence to the Jewish account in its sufficiency to provide an accurate history despite Egyptological silence.

Firstly, we must acknowledge, as a matter of principle, that the Jewish account of the exodus event as it appears in the Torah is beyond the scope of secondary considerations. The human author of the text claims the account comes from divine origin and inspiration, a claim verified by the Divine Son.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bietak, Manfred. "The Exodus: Fact or Fiction." Biblical Archeology Society. [Biblicalarchaeology.org](https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org), Oct 27, 2023.

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/exodus/exodus-fact-or-fiction/>

This article, provided by the Biblical Archeological Society, provides an illustration for the manner in which historians treat the exodus narrative, looking to Egyptian documents and archeology to confirm the events in question, and leaving those issues which the Egyptian resources cannot confirm as unable to be proven. This is often the case in both historiographical and theological fields.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:27

Therefore, the Jewish account lies firmly outside applications of secondary consideration used to determine veracity.<sup>3</sup> However, should one choose to subject it to such an examination, it is notable that the Jewish accounts, when compared with the Egyptological accounts, garner greater trust from a reader based on certain features uncommon for the era. The issue of erasure as a feature of ancient historiography in particular, and its seeming absence from the Jewish account, cements this trust in the researcher.

*Damnatio Memoriae* is a term adopted by some historians to describe the erasure of historical figures and events from historical accounts of their era. The term derives from ancient Roman practice in which a shameful individual was stricken from public records by the Senate.<sup>4</sup> The term is somewhat unbecoming of other cultures of the ancient world in that while the Romans maintained some record of these individuals stricken otherwise, other ancient cultures practiced holistic erasure of historical figures and events. The Egyptians notably practiced erasure in their histories, a matter known by

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis Gaddis, John. "The Landscape of History." Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print. 45-48.

According to historian John Lewis Gaddis, the process historians undergo with regard to documents is an intuitive one which begins at interpretation, moves to secondary consideration for verification, then to composition of an account, then to peer review and critique. The second step, verification of the account as communicating an accurate summation of a series of events, is what is referred to here as "secondary consideration." Divine writings do not require such a step being that their veracity has been attested to by a truthful witness - namely, God.

<sup>4</sup> Davis, Mati and Sara Chopra. "Damnatio Memoriae: On Facing, Not Forgetting, Our Past." sas.upenn.edu. Descentes, Aug 21, 2022. <https://web.sas.upenn.edu/discentes/2020/08/21/damnatio-memoriae-on-facing-not-forgetting-our-past/>

Egyptologists and other ancient histories, but frequently overlooked or softened.<sup>5</sup>

The subject of Egyptian erasure practices seemed implied in the discovery of Tutankhamun, who is absent in the Egyptian list of Kings.<sup>6</sup> Being a previously unknown ruler of the Egyptians, historians were left to wonder why records did not seem to confirm his existence despite the discoveries made at his tomb. The discovery of Hatshepsut, Egypt's 15th century female ruler, cemented the fact that the Egyptians practiced erasure in their histories regarding figures they did not prefer to remember as more and more evidence of the act of erasure became available.<sup>7</sup> But it is the discovery of Akhenaten, the only known monotheistic ruler of Egypt, that reveals the great extent of Egyptian erasure. In the case of Akhenaten, his entire dynastic

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<sup>5</sup> Mark, Joshua J. "Amarna Period of Egypt." World History Encyclopedia. World History Publishing, Aug 03, 2017. [https://www.worldhistory.org/Amarna\\_Period\\_of\\_Egypt](https://www.worldhistory.org/Amarna_Period_of_Egypt)

Some Egyptologists believe they have compensated for these erasures, often treating them as isolated incidents. The extent and repetition of significant erasures however, speaks to a larger cultural practice of erasure that goes beyond isolated usages. For example, see: Richard Wilkinson, "Damnatio Memoriae in the Valley of the Kings," in the Oxford Handbook of the Valley of the Kings; Carney, Elizabeth D. and Sabine Muller. "The Routledge Companion to Women and Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World." Taylor Francis, 2022. Ebook. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Dinh, Jason P. "We Celebrate King Tut, But He Was Once Erased from Ancient Egyptian History." . Discover Magazine. [discovermagazine.com](https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/why-are-we-so-obsessed-with-king-tut), Nov 04, 2022. <https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/why-are-we-so-obsessed-with-king-tut>

<sup>7</sup> "Hatshepsut - Facts and Information." National Geographic. [Nationalgeographic.com](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/hatshepsut), Feb 22, 2024. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/hatshepsut>

Tyldesley, Joyce. "Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis: a royal feud?" BCC History. [bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk).

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/egyptians/hatshepsut\\_01.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/egyptians/hatshepsut_01.shtml)

line was erased from Egyptian histories, which included the figure Tutankhamun, with repeated and extensive erasures surrounding the whole dynastic period.<sup>8</sup> Further erasures have since been found and documented such that it has become clear to historians that the Egyptians not only erased individuals who were disfavored, but based on the example of Akhenaten may have erased entire dynastic epochs based on their shame regarding specific individuals or events.

Public presentations of Egyptology frequently do not touch on these events. Transformative educators, in their inspection of issues related to the exodus account, such as the date and dynastic placement of these events, have often similarly overlooked the issue of Egyptian erasure entirely.<sup>9</sup> This is odd considering the clear and present implications of significant erasure obscuring the timeline and dynastic orders of Egyptian historiography would have on all subjects concerned in this field. Being that the Egyptians erased individuals, dynastic successions, and the events thereto related, it is plausible, if not likely, that the account of the exodus and its details could be absent due to erasure.

Taking these two prominent examples of erasure, Akhenaten and Hatshepsut, and assuming for the sake of the argument that these erasures, while significant, are isolated to their time periods, the problem of erasure and the exodus only become more significant. Hatshepsut's reign ended a mere 12

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<sup>8</sup> Carney, 44. Carney and Muller note that Ramses I, Ramses II, and their successors, participated in extensive erasure of the historical records of the dynastic period in question, in addition to the more well known erasures under Horemheb.

<sup>9</sup> Kaiser, Walt C. "The Pharaoh of Exodus." *Archaeological Study Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. Print. 98.

years prior to the theoretical early date of the exodus event.<sup>10</sup> Akhenaten's reign happened only sixty years prior to its latest estimated dating and one hundred years following the earliest estimated date.<sup>11</sup> The line of his succession which was erased extends to the estimated late date of the exodus. This means that all of our most notable and extensive examples of the erasure practices in Egypt and subjects of their erasure center on the same time estimated period as the exodus event. Therefore, while one may argue erasure was isolated and occurred during a particular moment within Egyptian culture, the period in which significant erasures were practiced is the exodus period. While an argument for undiscovered erasure would be assumptive, the existence and prevalence of erasure in Egyptian record keeping concerning this period of history, along with the existing rationale being the *Damnatio Memoriae* of disfavorable people and events, the issue of erasure provides adequate rationale for viewing the Egyptian records surrounding the period of the exodus with a secondary consideration of greater skepticism.

By contrast, the Jewish record exemplifies characteristics that lend credence to a more generous, good faith reading in its relation of facts. While some historians have attempted to claim that the Exodus account is laden with features of polemic, the far more notable and applicable characteristics are those which cast an unfavorable (even degrading) light on the author and the Jewish people in general. An account more laden with polemic

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<sup>10</sup> Tyldesley, Joyce. "Hatshepsut." Encyclopedia Britannica. Britannica.com, Feb 02, 2024.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hatshepsut>

<sup>11</sup> Dorman, Peter F. "Akhenaten." Encyclopedia Britannica. Britannica.com, Feb 09, 2024.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Akhenaten>

and bias would see Moses and the Israelites jubilant, submissive, and eagerly compliant to their electing deity; and yet that is not what one finds in the Jewish account. Moses is not only hesitant to obey God's commission, but outright refuses it.<sup>12</sup> Moses himself is shown to be a coward,<sup>13</sup> not a heroic folk figure. Moses's lack of compliance even reaches the point where God conspires to kill Moses.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the Jewish people do not shout for joy when God comes to remove them from Egypt, but disbelieve God based on Pharaoh's pursuit.<sup>15</sup> Even following the plagues of Egypt, the Israelites show little faith.<sup>16</sup> And their own lack of compliance leads to a declaration by God that He will destroy the Israelites, in similar fashion to the threat to Moses.<sup>17</sup> The Israelites of the Book of Exodus are idolaters, complainers, and God's election seems to be in spite of the people's character. These features lend greater credence to the veracity of the account, especially during its time period and cultural context. One would have expected Moses and the Israelites, acculturated in Egypt, to have practiced the same erasure regarding shameful occurrences. And yet, the text unabashedly records events to the shame of the people and their leadership. One would have similarly assumed that an author whose purpose was to record God's divine election of Israel would have cast the elect in a favorable light, and yet the account's details seem to actively play against its theological purpose. For this reason, it seems far more appropriate to lend greater credence to the Jewish account

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<sup>12</sup> Exodus 3:11

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 4:10-17

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 4:24

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 5:21

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 32

<sup>17</sup> Exodus 32:9-10

over the silence of other heavily redacted and manicured accounts of the period.

John Lewis Gaddis explains that the task of the historian is one which is practiced with intuition. Knowing what sources to trust, when to trust them, and which resources hold higher authority is honed through increased familiarity with the history, culture, and authors involved.<sup>18</sup> As we continue to understand the practices of historiographers in the Egyptian golden age, our abilities to discern when the account can be trusted and when to hold other accounts in precedent sharpens. In the present, based upon the available evidence surrounding the redactive practices of that era in regard to disfavorable characters and events, our view of the Egyptian accounts requires a higher degree of skepticism. This will need to be reflected in transformative education as it applies to presentations of the history of this period and the significant events hereto related. By contrast, the Jewish account, when placed under the scrutiny of secondary criticality, contains features which lend to greater credibility than the alternative.

In application of these considerations, transformative educators may consider presenting the history of the early Egyptian golden age, the exodus, and the establishment of the people of Israel in the levant, with a greater reliance on the Jewish text, fitting Egyptological details within its frame as they overlap, rather than the opposite. Transformative educators may also find it necessary to explicitly discuss the issue of Egyptological erasures to provide learners with transparency regarding the available material and the rationale for greater reliance on the Jewish accounts. Thirdly, transformative

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis Gaddis, 45-48.



educators may consider using the example of the exodus account and Egyptological erasure as a case study to introduce learners to the specific complexities related to the cultures of the ancient world and our attempt to recreate the ancient past. Within each application of these considerations, one can assure their learners that the Divinely Authorized account is reliable, having been verified by the Witness who is incapable of assenting to falsehoods; and that when the Divinely Authorized account is subjected to the same scrutiny as the human account its content shows evidence of its credibility.

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## THE CONSTELLATIONS OF JOB: INSIGHTS INTO THE SUPERIORITY OF GOD OVER THE GODS OF SUMERIA

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### INTRODUCTION

Both Job 9:9 and Job 38:31-32 describe God as the Creator of the constellations. Yet a closer examination shows several distinctions between the two as to the speaker, the names of the constellations, and even purpose for the description. The similarities between the two passages seem to indicate that they are related, while their differences may indicate why. In this study we will examine the two in the broader context of the book of Job and ancient Sumerian astronomy and religion. Along the way we will observe the difference between the general and special revelation of God, and ultimately be encouraged to greater worship of our Creator from both passages.

### THE PURPOSE FOR THE LIGHTS

Before examining the passages on constellations, it will be useful to review Scriptural knowledge on the stars. The first mention of the stars and other heavenly bodies is found in Genesis 1:14–15 "14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; 15 and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so." We see that the writer of Genesis gives three reasons for the creation of the lights in the

heavens: First, to separate day and night; second, to mark the passage of time and the repetition of seasons; and third, they are there to give light itself on the earth. From the rhythms of daily life to the span of generations, the heavenly lights regulate and enable our function on God's earth. However, in the future Day of the Lord, God will withdraw the stars and their constellations to discipline mankind:

Isaiah 13:9–11: 9 Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. 10 For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. 11 I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

There is a fourth great purpose for the stars given in the Psalms: the lights in the heavens reveal His majestic power and awesome beauty. Psalm 19:1 testifies to this, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands." Viewing the stars in the night sky can indeed be compelling evidence for the existence of the awesome God of the Bible. Simple observation is enough to call our Creator's work glorious. When at night we look to the heavens, we see the sun, the moon, innumerable stars, planets, nebulae, clusters of stars loose and globular, and even whole galaxies. They are on display, fashioned in shapes, sizes, colors, movements, and even pulsations of intensity and luminescence, all purposeful, all from His genius and power, and all telling us

of His greatness. Modern advances in astronomy have given us an ever-growing sense of the vastness and beauty of the universe that is our home.

Within this purpose the Scriptures relate three facts about God and the stars that stagger the imagination and give an even greater reason for reverent worship: First, He knows the exact number of stars in our universe, Psalm 147:4a, and as if that were not incredible enough, He calls them all by name, Psalm 147:4b (see also Isaiah 40:26). But then, perhaps the greatest of all is that God made it all by merely speaking, Genesis 1:3. Consider how great is our God, who made stars by speaking, stars uncountable by us, and He knows each one by name.

### BUT WHAT ABOUT CONSTELLATIONS?

Constellations are “A grouping of stars on the celestial sphere perceived as a figure or design, especially one of the 88 recognized groups named after characters from classical Greek and Roman mythology as well as various common animals and objects.”<sup>1</sup> The Bible is specific about the purpose of stars and other lights in the sky, and even acknowledges God as the Creator of constellations, Amos 5:8: “He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning And makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the face of the earth; The LORD is His name.” Still, no specific purpose is given for them.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition.

From ancient writings we see the constellations employed as a kind of crude agricultural calendar. Hesiod, in the second book of his *Works and Days* writes,

Orion and the Dog, each other nigh,  
 Together mounted to the midnight sky,  
 When in the rosy morn Arcturus shines,  
 Then pluck the clusters from the parent vines.  
 Next in the round do not to plough forget  
 When the Seven Virgins and Orion set.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, twice the Bible records the use of the constellations in a negative sense, but this hardly establishes a divine purpose. If anything, it is an anti-purpose.

2 Kings 23:5 gives the record of the use of constellations as idols in King Josiah's day: "Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven." The writer of Kings indicates the constellations with the Hebrew *mazzaloth*, a loan word from Akkadian.<sup>3</sup> The Rabbinic writers used this word of the planets and constellations in connection with the concept of fortune.<sup>4</sup> As idolatry, the constellations replace God as ruler of the universe and guide to life.

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<sup>2</sup> E. Walter Maunder, *The Astronomy of the Bible*, p.152.

<sup>3</sup> G. Lloyd Carr, "מַזְלֹת 1173," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 498.

<sup>4</sup> *Dictionary of Targumim, Talmud and Midrashic Literature* by Marcus Jastrow (1926), New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, p.755.

Furthermore, Isaiah employs the plural of *kesil*, “fool” to describe the constellations. Isaiah 13:10: "For the stars of heaven and their constellations (“fools”) Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine." Isaiah may well call them fools because of what fools tend to with constellations – make them into objects of worship. What God intended with constellations remains to be seen in our study, but there is an answer to be found.

### A COMPLICATED CHOREOGRAPHY

Pertinent to our study of Job 38, it will also be fruitful to examine the way that stars and constellations seem to move against the background of the night sky. The earth is not a stationary viewing platform. Similar to one’s observation of other moving objects from a car, stars and planets can seem to move in strange ways. Many heavenly objects only seem to move because our planet is moving along its own wobbly path. Astronomers note three kinds of the *apparent* motion of stars.

First, stars seem to move because of the rotation of the earth on its axis. Night after night they move in faithful relative position to one another, east to the west thanks to the rotation of our planet. It is not the stars moving in their nightly show, but the earth on its axis. God did this to divide the day and the night, and to regulate our daily lives.

The second kind of apparent stellar motion is that of the sun’s movement against the background of the stars along its path: what most people call the Zodiac. This is not the Zodiac of the horoscope, but the careful observation of the apparent movement of the sun against the backdrop of certain

constellations as the earth orbits the sun. Each day, the earth moves  $1/365^{\text{th}}$  of the way around the sun, giving earthbound viewers a slightly different nighttime background as they view the sky away from the sun. From earliest recorded history, observers have divided up this view into periods of time and regions of stars. During Job's time and where he lived, there were seven periods of the zodiac. It was not until more than a thousand years later that ancient astronomers wrote about twelve regions for constellations of the zodiac. The orbital passage of the earth around the sun regulates the times and seasons for mankind.

The third kind of stellar motion is even more intriguing: A very fine apparent movement is due to the tottering of the earth on its axis, like a top losing its rotational speed. For our planet, this tottering works on about a 12,000 year cycle, which causes an exceptionally slight annual shift in where the sun rises on the horizon at the same moment each year, usually measured at the summer solstice. In essence, this shift is  $1/4.38$  millionth of a day's worth of movement. This is called the precession of the equinoxes and cannot relate to a single generation. There is no biblical purpose expressed for this kind of apparent motion, but there has been one third of a precession since Job's time. The constellations do not mark the same seasons as they did in 2000 B.C.

Despite all the relative movement generated by our rotating, orbiting, wobbling planet stars do indeed move on their own. Each has movement and velocity in three-dimensional space. Some move faster, others more slowly; they move up, down, back, forward, left, and right, and every variation in between. Only recently have astronomers come to detect these movements through the advent of the telescope. Over thousands



of years, the shape of constellations changes ever so slightly because not all the stars which are close to each other in our field of vision are in reality close to or related to each other in the vastness of space. They may each have their own direction and speed! Indeed, what we see now in our night sky is a little different than what was seen four thousand years ago at the time of Job.

### THE NATURE AND CORRUPTION OF GENERAL REVELATION

Mankind's observation of creation is theologically termed *general revelation*. The Moody Handbook of Theology has this definition: "General revelation, which is preliminary to salvation, reveals aspects about God and His nature to all mankind so that all humanity has an awareness of God's existence." General revelation is what mankind can ascertain through the use of his senses and rational and moral mind because God set it there in the universe and even the moral conscience of man.

The planet we live on is surely meant as a platform to observe what God has done. God placed stars near and far from our solar system. His creation was intentional. He put in our nature the inclination to make sense of the patterns, willing those shapes exactly as they are, knowing that they would be names and used to tell tales. Much like Adam's naming of the animals, it was only human for earth's early humans to observe familiar patterns and name what they saw, and to even make stories about them. The familiarity of the Big Dipper or Orion draws us to tell stories from their shapes, and so from the beginning of history we have been telling tales with great relish.

Yet the sinful corruption of man led many to tell their own empty and evil explanations of the origins of men and the gods. They assigned the names of their pagan deities, to the constellations. When Job speaks to his friends of the constellations, he not only uses the familiar names used in their culture, he changes them to reflect his faith in the One God, the Creator of the universe. Though the heavens declare the glory of God, at the same time they represent a temptation to distort and deceive.

Job, a man who lived nearly four thousand years before our time, was no different from many of us in his curiosity about the stars and their patterns in the sky. Indeed, in his time there was no light pollution. How brilliantly the heavens and their objects must have shined! Already by his time, not all that many centuries after Noah's great flood, great civilizations had risen and formed their religions based on the starry figures in the great black deeps of the night.

## PART ONE: THE STRUGGLE OF JOB AND HIS KNOWLEDGE OF CREATION

Job, a righteous, wealthy, and famous man of antiquity (Job 1:1-5), a contemporary of Abraham, found himself in the spotlight of the angelic conflict. Satan, the chief of fallen angels, called into question before God the integrity of Job's faith (Job 1:6-12). God permitted Satan to test Job, first with the loss of his family and wealth (Job 1:13-19), and second with the loss of his health (Job 2:4-8). Although after the first horrific round of suffering Job remains completely faithful to God, continuing in his worship of Him (Job 1:20-22 "Blessed be the name of the Lord."), after the second round his wife turns against him and the corruption of his mental attitude commences (Job 2:9-10).

His friends come but stand aloof and without a word for an entire week (Job 2:11-13).

Job 3 records the agonized raving of Job against God. He wishes he had never been born or even conceived. Whatever righteous thinking Job possessed previously, he has now become embittered toward God.

The first friend of Job to speak is Eliphaz (Job 4-5). He equates God's perfect justice with all that transpires in the lives of men, correlating Job's initial suffering with his sinfulness, and disregarding his righteousness in former times. All the while Eliphaz remains blind to the possibility of undeserved suffering as a test of faith and opportunity to worship. Ultimately, he lays the blame for Job's suffering firmly with Job himself. The ideas of love and grace remain out of view.

Job responds to Eliphaz by glamorizing his suffering and challenging his friends to find fault with him (Job 6). He continues by recounting the plight of man in life, and challenging God to find fault or forgive him. In either case, he demands relief (Job 7).

Job's second friend, Bildad, then speaks forth. He accuses Job of falsehood and calls upon him to repent before God. He leaves him with a message of hope for a future where his relationship with God is restored and his blessings are returned (Job 8).

Job first offers some agreement with Bildad (Job 9:2) but then goes on to demonstrate that there is no possibility of winning an argument with almighty, omniscient God. He eloquently describes God's many virtues and powers, concluding that the only hope for man is with a mediator (Job 9:32-33). Here are the first points of an outline of Job's argument to this end, the context of our first passage on the constellations:

1. Job describes the impossibility of disputing with God, vv.1-3:  
"1 Then Job answered, 2 "In truth I know that this is so; But how can a man be in the right before God? 3 "If one wished to dispute with Him, He could not answer Him once in a thousand times."
2. He also describes the greatness of God's omniscience and omnipotence as proof of His indisputability, 4 "Wise in heart and mighty in strength, Who has defied Him without harm?"
3. He then relates five works of God as demonstration of His omniscience and omnipotence, vv.5-9:
  - a) The work of moving mountains, 5 "It is God who removes the mountains, they know not how, When He overturns them in His anger;
  - b) The work of quaking the earth, 6 Who shakes the earth out of its place, And its pillars tremble;
  - c) The work of eclipses of sun and stars, 7 Who commands the sun not to shine, And sets a seal upon the stars;
  - d) The work of creation, of heavens and seas, 8 Who alone stretches out the heavens And tramples down the waves of the sea;
  - e) The work of making the constellations, 9 Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades, And the chambers of the south;
4. Job concludes this section by noting the innumerability of the great works of God, 10 Who does great things, unfathomable, And wondrous works without number.

In context, then, Job uses God's making of constellations as proof of His omniscience and omnipotence, which in turn he

employs to demonstrate the irrefutability of God. Let us now examine the four constellations Job mentions as God-made.

### **Anu, the Supreme god of the Sumerians**

Job first beckons Bildad to look at the Hyades asterism, the face and horns of the bull in the constellation we call Taurus, but which he calls in his own language, *ysh*. A big misunderstanding has occurred with regard to *ysh*. It is commonly translated “bear,” a reference to our Ursa Major, also known as the Big Dipper.<sup>5</sup> Since only here and in Job 38:32 is *ysh* [*ayish*] mentioned in the Bible, there is no real foundation for establishing its meaning from within the biblical text. Association with Ursa Major is an assumption based on mistaken writings more than two thousand years after the fact. This misunderstanding began in the fourth century, A.D. Latin Vulgate, when Jerome its author mistranslated *ash* as Arcturus of the constellation Bootes. “Qui facit Arcturum...” This was miscarried without verification from the original into the 1611 King James Bible “Which maketh Arcturus...,” and then incorrectly construed again in 1885 in the Revised version, “who made the Bear...”. Most if not all modern versions follow the idea of the Bear, aka, Ursa Major. However, studies in Akkadian bright a clearer light onto the translation. In Akkadian, a cognate language to archaic Hebrew it is “bulls jaw” [i.e.] constellation Hyades.<sup>6</sup> In the opinion of an archaeologist and linguist, “It seems like either we have an abbreviation of *ish lé* to *ish/ysh* or actually we have *ish le* (Akkadian) rendered as ( *ysh l* ) in the Hebrew text. The latter seems a better

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<sup>5</sup> John N. Oswalt, “1617 וַיֵּץ,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, Theological

<sup>6</sup> Black, Concise Dictionary of Akkadian. P.132.

transliteration scenario to me, rather than abbreviation.)”<sup>7</sup> The Hyades are an asterism, a grouping of stars within a constellation, in this case Taurus. Added to this lexical observation are the conclusions of 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish scholars who followed the work of 11<sup>th</sup> century rabbis. “Kohut (“Aruch Completum,” s.v.) derives it, as Stern and others before him, from the Greek Ὑάδες, and explains it as a cluster of seven stars in the head of Taurus.”<sup>8</sup>

There is another sound reason for taking *ysh* as the Hyades: together with Orion and the Pleiades, it occupies the same sector of the sky, so that, as they are all three mentioned in a single sentence, so also they can be seen with a single glance. The narrator Job never indicates a shift in view from North to South or East to West or any other direction. There is no need. It is readily apparent they are all right there.

The people in Job’s time in Mesopotamia associated this cluster with the god An, the god of the sky and their ultimate ancestor. By using the common name for a well-known star cluster, Job does not necessarily approve of the local mythology. It was merely the common name of the cluster in his time. We do much the same today when we refer to Orion or Perseus or Hercules in our modern night sky. Neither do we believe in Greek mythology! However, to set the stage for what is to come, let’s summarize the Sumerian legend of Anu. Anu was one of three main Sumerian deities, all related to the universe. Anu was the god of the sky and had ultimate authority over the other gods, while Enlil’s realm was the air and earth, and Enki ruled

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Titus M. Kennedy, email to author.

<sup>8</sup> Jewish Encyclopedia v.4 p.245 (accessed 12/26/2019 in the Jewish Encyclopedia Online, <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4626-constellations>)

the abyss. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, his daughter Ishtar convinces him to give her the Great Bull of Heaven whom she sends to attack Gilgamesh in revenge for rejecting her advances. Instead, Ishtar murders his friend Enkidu who dies after the bull is slain by the two.<sup>9</sup> From this came the beginning of worship of the sacred bull.<sup>10</sup> The people of ancient Erech (the Ur of the Bible) recorded their astrology on 77 tablets, associating their deities with the stars, and the stars with events in their own lives, even as modern astrology does. These tablets have references to Anu, although it seems Enlil and Enki were more active in the affairs of mankind.<sup>11</sup> Even today, we refer to the great V shape of the Hyades as Taurus, the bull.

In the TWOT, John N. Oswalt points out a distinction between the pagan creation myth *Enuma Elish* and the Bible (*italics mine*):

The particular contexts of both chapters 9 and 38 suggest overtones of both the Mesopotamian and the biblical creation accounts. In both of these the deity fixes the times and seasons. Furthermore, in the *Enuma Elish*, Marduk fixes the places of the gods in the heavens—rather patent references to the sun, moon and stars. *In the biblical account God also fixes these, but not as gods, simply as created objects, the work of his hands.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Epic of Gilgamesh.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> John N. Oswalt, “1617 שׁוֹר,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 665.

By directing his friends' attention to the star cluster of Anu, and declaring God as its Creator, Job indicates the infinite greatness of God, even related to contemporary local mythology. But if he is making this point, the implication may have relevance to his friends. Are they really believers in the Yahweh of the Bible, or possibly followers of the religion of their place and time? In reality, other possibilities exist for Job's use of pagan vocabulary in his description of God as the Creator of the stars. Before we enumerate these, let us continue to the asterism, the Hunter in the sky.

### **Nimrod aka Marduk aka Orion aka Kesil**

Second, Job points to *kesil*, the "Fool." Orion is a southern constellation, below and to the left of the Hyades. The form of Orion in our night sky is perhaps the most recognizably human of the constellations. Feet, shoulders, three-starred belt, glittering, glowing sword; and bow aimed at Hyades. Longfellow describes him thus:

Begirt with many a blazing star,  
 Stood the great giant, Algebar,  
 Orion, hunter of the beast!  
 His sword hung gleaming by his side,  
 And, on his arm, the lion's hide  
 Scattered across the midnight air  
 The golden radiance of its hair.<sup>13</sup>

The well-known British scholar, E. Walter Maunder describes the history of the naming of the constellation:

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Occultation of Orion."



In accord with the form naturally suggested by the grouping of the stars, the Syrians have called the constellation Gabbārā; and the Arabs, Al Jabbār; and the Jews, Gibbōr. The brightest star of the constellation, the one in the left knee, now generally known as Rigel, is still occasionally called Algebar, a corruption of Al Jabbār, though one of the fainter stars near it now bears that name. The meaning in each case is "the giant," "the mighty one," "the great warrior," and no doubt from the first formation of the constellations, this, the most brilliant of all, was understood to set forth a warrior armed for the battle.<sup>14</sup>

These observations seem to accord with Genesis 6:4, which designates the Nephilim, the "fallen ones," as the mighty men, renowned men of old, "4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men (Hebrew *gibborim*) who were of old, men of renown."

After the flood and its eradication of that mighty race, there was Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, who was also designated a mighty man (Hebrew *gibbor*) and established many cities, including Babel, Nineveh, and Erech, Genesis 10:8–12:

8 Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." 10 The beginning of his

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<sup>14</sup> Maunder, p. 234.

kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, 12 and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

But how in the heavens can we connect such diverse names as Nimrod, Marduk, and Orion to one ancient person, and then to *kesil*, the “fool” in the night sky? Maunder helps us again by connecting them.

There was at one time surprise felt, that, deeply as the name of Nimrod had impressed itself upon Eastern tradition, his name, as such, was "nowhere found in the extensive literature which has come down to us" from Babylon. It is now considered that the word, Nimrod, is simply a Hebrew variant of Merodach, "the well-known head of the Babylonian pantheon."<sup>15</sup>

The ISBE writes regarding Marduk, “Chief god of the Babylonian pantheon... ..Upon the political ascendancy of Hammurabi of Babylon (ca 1750 B.C.), Marduk the god of Babylon became supreme among the older Sumerian gods as creator and ruler.”<sup>16</sup> This equivalency is established by comparing the Cuneiform records in Babylon with Genesis 10: As we have noted, Genesis states that Nimrod founded Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, while in the cuneiform records of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.235.

<sup>16</sup> P. W. Gaebelin Jr., “Marduk,” ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 244.

ancient Babel, Merodach built Babel and Erech and Niffer, (probably Calneh). E. Walter Maunder also guides us as to the etymological journey from Merodach to Nimrod, (from Maunder)

The Hebrew scribes would seem to have altered the name of Merodach in two particulars: they dropped the last syllable, thus suggesting that the name was derived from Marad, "the rebellious one"; and they prefixed the syllable "Ni," just as "Nisroch" was written for "Assur." "From a linguistic point of view, therefore, the identification of Nimrod as a changed form of Merodach is fully justified.<sup>17</sup>

The English name Orion comes from the Greek which goes back to around 800 B.C. and the early writings of Homer and Hesiod. As the ancient classics rose to preeminence and were eventually translated into English, the name Orion stuck, and even became the common designation for the constellation we know today. But how did this person come to be known to Job as *kesil*, "the fool?"

Emil G. Hirsch in the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia guides us to the designation of this god as the fool of the heavens:

Orion is undoubtedly designated by the Hebrew "Kesil" ("Fool"; see below) in Job ix. 9, xxxviii. 31; Amos v. 8; Isa. xiii. 10. Of the ancient versions, the LXX. has "Orion" in Job and Isaiah, while Targum and Peshitta render by "Giant." In this there is a reminiscence of an ancient,

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<sup>17</sup>Maunder, p.235.

perhaps pre-Semitic, myth—also current in variants among the Greeks—concerning a giant bound to the sky, whom the Hebrews, with characteristic reflection upon his presumption to resist and defy heavenly power, labeled "Fool." Nimrod was associated with this "Fool" by later folk-lore.<sup>18</sup>

At least in North America, Nimrod can be used as a synonym for "a very stupid person."<sup>19</sup>

Thus, it seems likely that Job has pointed to the Orion constellation (as we know it), and identified him as *kesil*, "the fool." *Kesil* appears often in the Old Testament, 69 times. "Fools hate knowledge," Proverbs 1:22; and, "A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind," Proverbs 18:2. But Job does more than call Marduk a fool. He designates God as its maker, giving even greater emphasis to the superiority of the God of the universe. The greatest god of the Babylonians was only a famous, ancient fool, and the stars that make his image in the sky were made by God. Truly, God is great!

### The Heap

Third, Job turns to *kemah*, the "heap," which we know as the Pleiades, found in the constellation Taurus. Job is still looking in the same direction as he speaks, toward the Hyades and Orion, but a bit to the right and higher. The path of the sun, the ecliptic, divides evenly between the Hyades and the Pleiades. The Pleiades intrigues the naked eye with their seven

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<sup>18</sup>The Jewish Encyclopedia, V.4, p.245, Accessed online 12/26/2019, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4626-constellations>.

<sup>19</sup><https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/nimrod>

heavenly gleams. Through a modern telescope the seven and others nearby dazzle, reflecting blue light on a nebula local to them all. In nights of the ancient world unpolluted by light and smog they must have made an astounding show.

During the time of Job and Abraham in ancient Babylon this heap of seven stars represented two sets of seven gods, seven each for heaven and the underworld<sup>20</sup>. The Heap also carried practical significance according to the season, as the rising of the Pleiades meant it was time to plow in preparation for planting.<sup>21</sup>

The seven great gods of heaven are found in the writings of the Babylonian astronomers in Job's day.

Among these heptads, "...the Pleiades are identified in first instance with the seven major gods of the pantheon, namely the three main gods An, Enlil, Enki/Ea, and the three astral gods (moon, sun, Venus), plus a seventh god, often the mother goddess Ninhursagâ or the Netherworld goddess Ereškigal. These are referred to in the expression 'the seven great gods' identifying the Pleiades in several references among others in the Astrolabe B and the MUL.APIN..."<sup>22</sup>

The ancient Sumerians also associated the seven stars of the Pleiades with seven demons, offspring of gods and men, who are in opposition to the seven gods of the heavens and plot to

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<sup>20</sup> Lorenzo Verderame, "Pleiades in Ancient Mesopotamia" *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, Vol. 16, No 4, (2016), p.110.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.113.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p.110.

overthrow them. In these myths, the Pleiades are equated with the planet Mars: “No surprise thus that the Pleiades are equated with the Seven demons and are often associated with the Netherworld god astral form, the planet Mars, and its different names and aspects (Reynolds, 1998).<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the Greek and Roman pantheons had twelve gods each, but the Sumerian pantheon had seven. Job tells us that God made this “heap” of stars, the symbol of *all* the great Babylonian gods who also influence human affairs. That Job designates the Seven as a heap is significant in itself. The Oxford Dictionary defines a *heap* as “An untidy collection of objects placed haphazardly on top of each other.”<sup>24</sup> Like his designation of Merodach as a fool, it points to the silliness of the Sumerian pantheon of his time. The gods are meddling, feuding, capricious and chaotic, causing grief in the lives of men without righteous cause. They are truly a “heap,” ripe for derision and condemnation, and, present an opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of the Creator and Savior of mankind. If God put the Pleiades in the heavens by His mighty power, no symbol of other gods can be superior to Him.

### The Stars Unseen

Lastly, Job reminds his listeners of “the Chambers of the South.” A *Heder* is “a “compartment” or “room” (within a building) which affords privacy.”<sup>25</sup> As Job looked South from Mesopotamia, there were areas of the sky hidden partially or

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.112.

<sup>24</sup>Oxford Dictionary Online

<sup>25</sup> Carl Philip Weber, “612 777,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 265.

wholly from his view due to the curvature of the earth. There are many constellations hidden from northern observers even as there are in the North to those looking from the South. From modern Basrah, Iraq, near where Job observed in his time, everything south of the Southern Cross is mostly hidden from view, and the Cross itself is partially obscured.<sup>26</sup> The UBS Handbook on Job affirms,

Pope suggests that, since “chamber” is the source of the tempest in 37:9, the reference may be to the place from which the south winds blow. TEV and others understand it to be a general term for southern stars. In many languages it will be best to translate chambers of the south as in TEV, “stars of the south,” or “stars in the southern skies.”<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the idea that the Chambers of the South may refer to the zodiacal constellations, a popular notion since the Renaissance, one struggles to find ancient citations. Indeed, as already mentioned, the Sumerian pantheon had seven gods, not twelve.<sup>28</sup> It would be a long time, until the time of Babylon in the first half of the first millennium B.C. (ca. 800 B.C.), that the twelve constellations of the zodiac would first be mentioned by ancient observers of the night sky.<sup>29</sup> Job had no precedent in his day, and would not have reasonably imagined such an

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<sup>26</sup> Observation of author, using Pocket Universe app.

<sup>27</sup> William David Reyrburn, *A Handbook on the Book of Job*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 183.”

<sup>28</sup> Verderame, p.110.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

arrangement. This text is sufficiently clear without need to impute an idea from a millennium in the future.

Job mentions the Chambers of the South in sweeping fashion, pushing the remaining stars of the south into the realm of mystery, into many hidden rooms. But these obscured areas have one thing in common with the rest: God made them just the same. This too is powerful. God made all the stars and constellations we cannot see. And consider further that beyond the imagination of Job lay the stars now revealed by the instrumentation of the age of the telescope. The Hubble Space Telescope and other earth-bound instruments reveal galaxies and stars innumerable, impossible to see at Job's time, and yet all these were made by the all-powerful Creator. The deep sky is our modern Chambers of the South, and many, many more objects remain undiscovered. Psalm 19:1 still rings true: the heavens declare the glory of God.

### **Job's Great Gesture to His Friends: A Summary**

Job, eager to demonstrate the indisputability of God because of His omniscience and omnipotence, turns to the stars. In a grand gesture he mentions three well-known constellations by the names given in their time, and then adds that all the unknown ones are made by God as well. The names that Job employs refer to the gods of ancient Sumer, and he is quite demeaning in his description. All along, he works within the framework of general revelation, the observable universe and experience of man's own senses. He speaks of what he sees and of what he has learned from the "scientists" of the day.



Job 9:9–10: "9 Who makes Hyades, the Fool, and the Heap, and the chambers of the south; 10 Who does great things, unfathomable, And wondrous works without number."

Does Job's great description of the heavens, using pagan names for constellations and asterisms imply that his friends accept that worldview? Not necessarily. He uses the commonly held terminology of his day even as most Christians do today as we gesture to Orion, the Pleiades, and Taurus, and wonder about undiscovered heavenly objects. Might those friends be affected by the world around them, and the worldview of their times? They most certainly were, as the visit of the evil spirit to Eliphaz in chapter 4 surely affected him. Regardless, Job's words remind us of the majesty of God and refresh us even today.

And yet, as we will see in Job 38, even Job falls short of the Creator's knowledge of His Creation, and by this ignorance God will humble Job.

## PART TWO: THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CREATOR OF THE CONSTELLATIONS

The dispute between Job and his friends wore on, as recorded in our Bibles, for another 29 chapters. They debated knowledge and theology without much love between them. Job remained indignant at his friends while his friends continued in suspicion of his sin, according to them the source of his travails. One friend, the youngest, brought in a late voice of reason, and he alone did not provoke the wrath of God (Job 42:7-8).

God looked upon Job, a believer in the coming Redeemer of mankind (Job 19:25-27), desiring his restoration. Before that could take place, before grace, must come humility in the heart

of Job. He must repent of his theological pride before he can enjoy the blessings of restoration. And to accomplish this, God decides to demonstrate His superior knowledge and power to Job. Job 38:1–3: "1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 2 "Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3 "Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!" God goes on to detail His creation of planet earth (vv.4-11), the God-given power of the light of dawn over the wicked (vv.12-15), His knowledge of places impossibly hidden to mankind (vv.16-18), and He also declares His knowledge about the source of light and darkness, winds and weather and hydrology, (vv.19-30).

And then God turns to the stars and constellations, the very ones that Job has mentioned in chapter 9. Since God's purpose is to show His superior knowledge, to set forth matters to Job so that he will fully submit to Him as Creator and God, He must reveal information that only He can know, and that has not been revealed or understood by the observation of ancient men. He speaks thus to Job, Job 38:31-33, "31 "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, Or loose the cords of the Fool? 32 "Can you lead forth a constellation in its season, And guide the Hyades with her satellites? 33 "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens, Or fix their rule over the earth?"

This is special revelation: Again, the Moody Handbook of Theology provides a definition: "Special revelation usually has a target audience in mind, and a special mode of conveyance: the prophet, the written word, a miracle, by God Himself, and most of all Jesus Christ, God in the flesh."<sup>30</sup> God reveals directly to Job His understanding as Creator of the constellations. These

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<sup>30</sup> Moody Handbook of Theology

details were impossible for Job to know, and indeed impossible for anyone in his time to know through general revelation. They simply were not observable by the unaided human eye. In God's great plan, and because of modern instrumentality, we now know exactly what God revealed to Job in a special revelation and for a holy purpose.

It is easy to compare the statements of Job and God. This comparison of the constellation names in the two chapters shows changes in order and even in names.

Job, in Job 9:9 says that God made:

1. The Hyades (*aysh*)
2. The Fool
3. The Heap
4. The chambers of the south

But God, in Job 38:31-32 relates that He (changes underlined):

1. (3) Bound the chains of the Heap;
2. (2) Loosed the cords of the Fool;
3. (4) Leads forth the constellations in their season;
4. (1) Guides the Hyades (*ayish*) upon her sons.

God placed the Heap and the Fool first and second in order, recounting the work He did on them. He then placed the constellations and the Hyades third and fourth and relates how He set their motions in the skies. He notes that all the constellations follow a seasonal pattern in the sky, while He guides the Hyades and her sons in the same relative positions to one another.

### “Can You Bind the Chains of the Heap?”

God begins with the Heap, the asterism we call the Pleiades, *kemah* in the Hebrew. These seven visible stars were to the ancient Sumerians analogous to two sets of seven great deities, one seven in heaven, and one seven in the underworld. As such, the stars represent the Sumerian pantheon.<sup>31</sup> According to Job, God, the Maker of these stars, is superior to the Sumerian gods because He even made the Heap. But God responds by including details that only He could know. He says, “Can you bind...” *qashar* describes a physical binding of one thing to another. The words of God’s law are to be bound to the forehead (Deuteronomy 6:6-8), while it is foolish to attempt to bind a wild ox with ropes (Job 39:10). *Ma’adannoth* is a bond or fetter. God asks Job if he can bind the Heap with bonds, as He has done. Every night those stars remain in the same place relative one to another and will do so for tens of millions of years to come. Astronomers classify the stars of the Pleiades as an open cluster, currently bound to one another by gravity, heading in the same direction.<sup>32</sup> Although this will not always be the case, from their creation until the present day they are bound to one another, occupying a space about seven light years across. God has bound them there, and for the span of human history, there they will stay.

All the visible stars in the Pleiades are B-spectrum stars, very close to one another in light blue color. They are much larger, brighter, and much, much hotter than our own sun<sup>33</sup>. During the current time, the stars are passing through an emission nebula, and so give the gas cloud a light blue sheen,

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<sup>31</sup> Verderame, p.110.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Burnham Jr., *Burnham’s Celestial Handbook*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1978), 1879-1880).

<sup>33</sup> Burnham, p.1876.

which can be visible with binoculars and which clearly indicates their mutual proximity. Knowing that the stars have a single Creator makes their common color and place more significant. Their color, their grouping in the night sky, their nebula, all point to a Creator Who wanted to make them significant.

In all this, God has given Job details about the creation of the Heap which Job could never know by himself, and which have not been uncovered until the advent of modern astronomy. By binoculars, or a wide-field telescope, we can now see the God-revealed details of this glorious asterism and remember its God-given significance to Job. It is not just what God did, but what He knew.

### **“Can You Loosen the Cords of the Fool?”**

Second, in contrast to the binding of the Heap, God asks of Job, “Can you loosen the cords of The Fool?” The constellation we know as Orion is vast, reaching across our night sky in stars, nebulae, and clusters we struggle to perceive in its scope, variety, beauty, and detail. With binoculars or a telescope, we would not tire of the discoveries for a season, for years, and even a lifetime. Perhaps the most striking feature of Orion is his three-starred belt, angling across his mid-section. It seems clear that this is God’s point of reference, that in some way He has set loose what was formerly fixed.

When God created *Kesil*, He set cords on him, so that like a belt with our clothing the rest may stay together. Later, yet still before the time of Job, He released this harness. Similar to the Heap, these three stars were formed at roughly the same

time. They also share the same characteristics of color and temperature<sup>34</sup>.

Yet the belt is not as it seems (see illustrations). From our modern viewpoint the three stars form an almost-straight line. This is an optical illusion, for the three are each moving in different directions, at different speeds, and are at different distances from us, according to their true and not apparent motion. The star to our left is moving up and to our right at about a 60 degree azimuth (heading ENE if on a compass), at 18.5 km/second. The middle is moving star down and to the right at 25.9 km/s at a 135 degree azimuth (heading ESE). Meanwhile, the right hand star is again moving at 18.5 km/s and around the same azimuth as the middle, 135 degrees (ESE). All three are also moving away from us. Furthermore, the middle star is twice as far from us as the other, outer stars! The stars to the left and right are about 1200 light years from our planet, but the middle star is 2000 light years away! The meaning of this is clear: with the most recent data available, the harness, or belt of the Fool has indeed been loosed. There is no gravitational relationship between the “belt” stars of Orion. Created at the same time, made similar in color, given different brightness, the three form the belt of the Fool.

There is something perhaps even more astounding. Moving these three stars back in time along their current paths and velocities does not put them in proximity with each other. God must have moved them across many light years to take them from their points of origin to where they are now and where they are going.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.constellation-guide.com/orions-belt/> (accessed February 17, 2022).

What evidence from astronomy do we have of this? Looking closely at the region of Orion's Belt, even with the naked eye, hazy, luminescent nebulae abound. Truly, The Great Nebula of Orion is one of the most remarkable of all sights in the night sky.

And what caused this Great Nebula and the other clouds nearby? Although astronomers will not admit to a divinely-caused source, the possibility remains that the power of moving stars from their places through clouds of Hydrogen gas would leave the record of nebulae.<sup>35</sup> In fact, astronomers do admit that the nebulae of the region were the "star-nursery" of Orion's belt.

God declared to Job that He had at some point loosened the cords of Orion, three stars (and perhaps others) which were formerly bound together. Through modern astronomy we observe that these stars are indeed in a loosened state. It staggers the imagination to consider how those stars may have looked before God set them loose. As Tennyson wrote in his Palace of Art,

*...regions of lucid matter taking form,  
Brushes of fire, hazy gleams,  
Clusters and beds of worlds, and bee-like swarms,  
Of suns and starry streams...*

This perhaps gives us something astounding in addition to original creation: the activity of God in the physical universe post-creation, changing the courses of comets, moons, planets, asteroids, stars, and even galaxies! Why? We have no other

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<sup>35</sup> Kroupa, P., Aarseth, S.J., Hurley, J. 2001, MNRAS, 321, 699, "The formation of a bound star cluster: from the Orion nebula cluster to the Pleiades"

answer than His desire to demonstrate to mankind that He could. He is truly the Lord of creation.

### **“Can You Make the Mazzaroth Go Forth in Season?”**

Third, God asks Job whether he can lead forth the Mazzaroth in season. This word parallels “the chambers of the south” in Job 9:9, which is a reference to the unseen portions of the sky below the Southern horizons and all they contain. Since God does indeed know what stars and constellations reside in those hidden chambers, and He desires to leave no question in Job’s mind regarding His superior knowledge and ability, He teaches Job on His own role in the constellations.

The verbal picture painted by God is of Himself, the Creator, leading the Mazzaroth out of those hidden rooms. Therefore, the Mazzaroth, a plural noun, are the occupants hidden in the chambers of the south, whom God leads out in their season. God is constantly performing wonders hidden to the human eye. Indeed, the constellations of the Southern Hemisphere are wondrous in every way, breathtaking for us to behold. Like all the stars in the sky, they have seasons, times when they are visible and other times when they are invisible; times when they are in the eastern sky at midnight, then overhead, then in the west. God did that. He does that even now.

There is a long and checkered history of interpretation concerning the word *mazzaroth*. By the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish scholarship had only come to an unsettled place of many ideas. Emil G. Hirsch in the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia summarizes:



What "Mazzarot" (Job xxxviii. 32) may be is still unsettled. Perhaps it is identical with "Mazzalot" (II Kings xxiii. 5). If so, it might designate Saturn or the seven planets. Stern (l.c.) would have this strange expression denote the Hyades. Ewald, for the passage in Job, claims the reference to be to the Northern and Southern Crowns, corresponding to the "chambers of the South" ("Teman") in Job ix. 9. Others have suggested the constellation of the Southern Ship, characterized in an Arabic translation as the "heart of the South"; others again suggest Sirius. Friedrich Delitzsch leaves the problem open, simply transliterating the Hebrew (see his "Hiob," p. 169, note to verses 31 et seq.). It has also been held to designate the Zodiac.<sup>36</sup>

Almost a hundred years later, Christian lexicography seems to have settled on the idea of constellations, but without any explanation on how they arrived at the conclusion:

מַזָּלוֹת (mazzālôt) constellations. (ASV "planets," RSV similar.) "Appears in II Kgs 23:5 and Job 38:32. The Akkadian cognate refers to the phases of the moon, but the usage of the term in Judaic writings indicates that zodiac constellations are being referred to in Hebrew."<sup>37</sup>

Even the Oxford Dictionary Online testifies to the varied nature of modern interpretation of *mazzaroth* as an English

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4626-constellations>

<sup>37</sup> G. Lloyd Carr, "מַזָּלוֹת 1173," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 498.

word: "(A) Treated as plural. The twelve signs of the zodiac. (b) With singular concord. The star Sirius; (also) the constellation Canis Major (which contains Sirius). Also (occasionally) applied to other individual stars or constellations. Now rare."<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps a chronological survey will help reconstruct the meaning of *mazzaroth* from the ancient writings:

1. Job 38:32, written around 2000 B.C., "Can you lead forth *mazzaroth* in its season?";
2. The Enuma Elish, considered to be written anywhere from 1600-900 B.C. (Translation from E.A. Speiser);

He constructed stations for the great gods,  
Fixing their astral likenesses as *mazzaroth*.  
He determined the year by designating the zones:  
He set up three constellations for each of the twelve

3. Around the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. there is 2 Kings 23:5. We are not sure that *mazzaloth* and *mazzaroth* are the same word, but here it is: "He did away with the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah and in the surrounding area of Jerusalem, also those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and to the moon and to the *mazzaloth* and to all the host of heaven."

Three times over the course of almost 1500 years in two languages we have the word *mazzaroth* or its possible variant.

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/mazzaroth> (accessed 9/17/19)

That is hardly enough! Can we even project a meaning for *mazzaroth* backward to Job from Enuma Elish or 2 Kings?

Some have done so: “Another Sumerian word may be concealed in the word for the constellation Mazzaroth (39:32 and “north” in 37:9 AV). It is possible that the “r” reflects the “l” of the Sumerian word for stars which still appears in the Jewish greeting “Mazal tov”—good luck!”<sup>39</sup>

But this is absolute folly! *Mazzaroth* cannot be a miswriting of a word that appears 1500 years later! But perhaps we can start with Job and the Hebrew language and make significant progress in the other direction to understand this rare and mysterious word. Let us begin with *mazzaroth*, which has an unclear meaning, and go forward a few or many centuries to the Enuma Elish, where it clearly means “constellations,” the fixing of the likenesses of gods in the heavens. Even without any other clues, it seems reasonable to include constellations as the most likely meaning.

As we have seen, this tendency of man to see gods and heroes in the sky is a corruption from his sinful nature, and this is confirmed by a normal understanding of 2 Kings 23:5, which judges the ascription of the constellations as gods to be idolatry. In all three cases, “constellations” works well.

But what is the basic, the intrinsic meaning of *mazzaroth*? One suggestion is “scatterings,” from the Hebrew verb *zera'*. Hebrew words have a consistent pattern of formation. Hebrew has dozens of prefixes and suffixes, and reasons that words are modified simply to make them sound better. Also, Hebrew words are usually formed with three consonants. Thus, a student of Hebrew may perform a dissection, paring away

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<sup>39</sup> “The Book of Job and Its Doctrine of God” R. Laird Harris, *Grace Journal* 13, no. 2 (1972): 48.

prefixes and suffixes and getting at the root word. Let us take our paring knife to *mazzaroth* to see what may be there. The first letter is an M, an extremely common prefix which tells the reader that the word is a participle. Let us remove the ‘M’ to get at the root. Also the last three letters form an easily recognized and very common suffix. OTH simply denotes that this participle is the feminine plural. Let us remove these letters also. This leaves us with *azzar*. However, we may now drop the initial A, since it is only there to aid in the pronunciation of the M prefix. Furthermore, since we are looking for three consonants, we can drop the second A, which is there for pronunciation reasons as well. That leaves us with *zzr*, but there is no Hebrew root word with those three consonants. However, we are not done with our paring. One more cut and a surprising addition must occur before we find our root. The *zz* is actually the form of *z* with a dot next to the letter, called a *daghesh forte*, which effectively doubles a letter. That little dot in a consonant is a signal to the reader that another letter has disappeared. If we do this, we may conjecture that the disappeared letter from the doubling is an ayin, this could well be *zr`*. There is a Hebrew verb, *zr`*, “to sow,” or “to scatter”, especially with reference to seed. One can easily imagine God scattering the stars like so much seed from His hand. With this in mind, let’s apply the picture to our passage. God asks Job, “Can you make scatterings [of stars] go in their seasons?”

The *mazzaroth* work well as the sprinklings or scatterings of stars below Job’s horizon in ancient Babylon, the contents of the “Chambers of the South.” Almighty God causes them to go forth faithfully in their season, year after year, from time immemorial until the stars in their courses shall cease. By them we can measure our lives a season at a time, knowing when

to plant, and when to harvest. As God said to Noah, Genesis 8:22: “While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease.”

### **Which Brings us Back to Ayish, the Hyades**

God now finishes his tour of the heavens by returning to the Hyades asterism, the face and horns of the heavenly bull whom we know as Taurus, but whom they worshipped as ANU. Ayish, like *aysh* in Job 9, is a feminine noun. God asks, “Do you lead Ayish upon her sons?” The addition of the yodh (English ‘y’) is probably by a scribe in order to help with pronunciation, but it may also exist as a correction in pronunciation from God Himself.

Like the previous teachings, God adds details to Job’s citation in chapter 9. God leads this constellation, “and her sons.” Who are the sons of the Hyades in the heavens? The full sentence is “lead the Hyades above her sons.” Close observation of the moving night sky shows that as the hyades sets, the twin asterism of Gemini follows, heading straight down at the western horizon. In Sumerian mythology, Anu had two sons, Enlil and Enki, and these were represented by the Gemini twins in the sky.<sup>40</sup> Now our picture includes not one, but two constellations (see below).

Job did not mention the sons of the Hyades in his description in Chapter 9, but here God expands the sky greatly for Job to realize that even other portions of the constellations were His to name and guide. God seems to designate our modern Gemini as a part of the Hyades cluster, namely, “her sons.”

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<sup>40</sup> Burnham’s *Celestial Handbook*, vol.2, p.915.

God's final statement to Job builds upon Job's observation of Aysh in Job 9, connecting two constellations together in their movement. But the essence of this is that the all the constellations have constant positions, never shifting in the slightest. James seems to echo this idea when he writes, James 1:17: "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."

Inspired nearly 4,000 years ago, long before the advent of modern astronomy with its advance instrumentation and mathematical calculations, God reveals to Job the fixed state of the constellations in the sky. He leads them faithfully year upon year. Of course, so it seems from the observer's viewpoint. In reality, we know the earth as a sphere that hangs in the emptiness of space, rotating on its axis, and revolving around the sun in its annual course. It is not the constellations which move, but the earth which rotates and revolves that causes this apparent motion to the earthbound observer.

Elsewhere Job indicates his knowledge of the earth in space, Job 26:7: "He stretches out the north over empty space And hangs the earth on nothing." He also knew of the terminator line, which is the demarcation of light and darkness on the face of the earth. Job 26:10: "He has inscribed a circle on the surface of the waters At the boundary of light and darkness." Surely he had a rudimentary understanding of the earth as a sphere, rotating on its axis. In our very context, God completes His discourse on the making of the heavens with, Job 38:33: "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens, Or fix their rule over the earth?"

The most modern of astronomers and astrophysicists will say the exact same thing. The constellations move through the

night sky. No one is stating an error. This is simply the fact from an observer's relative position on the face of a spinning sphere. One could hardly say that Job is ignorant of the heavens as God made them, and as we have seen, God states to Job things that have barely been uncovered in the past century, a golden age of science and extremely sophisticated telescopes.

But God's point remains: He is the One who leads the constellations in their fixed courses in the night sky. He has put the earth on a course around the sun, tottering on its axis and revealing all the constellations in their seasons. He alone is the Creator of it all, and it all remains faithful to His purpose. Job may observe, but God created.

### **Why Does God Rearrange Job's Order?**

Finally, we cannot help but notice that there is a difference in the order of the starry figures mentioned by Job and later by God. As we observed previously:

Job, in Job 9:9 says that God made:

1. The Hyades
2. The Fool
3. The Heap
4. The chambers of the south

But God, in Job 38:31-32 relates that He:

1. Bound the chains of the Heap;
2. Loosed the cords of the Fool;
3. Leads forth the constellations in their season;
4. Guides the Hyades upon her sons.

Modern astronomy “science” gives relative ages to stars. In order, their ages are given as follows: The Hyades, about 165 million years old, Pleiades 100 million years of age, and Orion’s Belt a very young 4 million years. This is in contrast to the order given both by Job and by God, and based on the assumptions of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century observation and calculation. More recent work by Bible-believing astronomers well-support a young universe in line with the biblical account.<sup>41</sup> It is good to reflect that God created the heavens in a moment of His spoken word, (Genesis 1:14). In essence, there was no chronology in the creation of the heavens, just an instantaneous and simultaneous creation of all. If God’s order is *not* chronological, why then did He change the order from Job’s arrangement?

First, it is good to consider what each event represents. Binding the chains of the heap does indeed represent their original creation. Also, as we noted the final two are not chronological. The first is about what happens in every season, while the second regards the whole picture of connected constellations, not when they were created. For those two, no chronological inconsistency is here. They simply observe the perpetual. There is perhaps a precise *logical* order to the account of God of His creation, reasons for mentioning these events in the order He does, binding of the Heap first, then loosing the cords of the Fool second, and *then* mentioning the movement of the constellations. This is in fact very logical: first is the creation of the physical bodies of the stars (and other heavenly objects), while second is the launching of the movement of those bodies.

The order given by God is reasonable and further emphasizes His power and wisdom in the creation of the

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<sup>41</sup> See *The Created Cosmos and The Expanse of the Heavens* by Danny Faulkner for great discussions on astronomy and the Bible.



heavens. He made the Pleiades with their special gravitational relationship and at the same time the Fool in its unbound yet recognizable form. Having set them in the heavens, He set them in motion. The constellations in their seasonal parade due to the annual movement of the earth around the sun, and in their nightly display retaining their order as they move from their rising to their setting. All is in order, all in glory, and all testify to His infinite power, wisdom, and glory.

### **The Power of Special Revelation**

Job observed the constellations and even praised God as the One who made regions of stars that they could not observe. His observations reveal attention to detail, but also may convey a certain mockery of the Babylonian idolatry of the stars. The constellations to him were the Heap, the Fool, and Anu, a Babylonian god. In all, he recognizes not only God as Creator of the known and unknown heavens, but as superior to the foolish idols and ways of understanding the universe in his time. He does so to illustrate the indisputability of God, Job 9:2–3: "2 "In truth I know that this is so; But how can a man be in the right before God? 3 "If one wished to dispute with Him, He could not answer Him once in a thousand times." Job designs this effort before his skeptical and accusing friends to defend his innocence in connection with his personal tragedies.

Truly, "The universal disclosure of God penetrates deeply into all man's confidences and doubts."<sup>42</sup> But how much greater must special revelation be? By speaking at last from the whirlwind, revealing the impossible to obtain knowledge of the heavens, God goes from indisputable to irrefutable. He shows

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<sup>42</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 151.

himself to be infinitely greater than what Job was able to observe, and with His grace, infinitely better than what he imagined. He reveals things about those same constellations mentioned by Job that he could never know as an earthbound observer of his day. Special revelation does this. "God's revelation has been conveniently classified in two main types: general revelation, or the disclosure of God's eternal power and glory through nature and history; and special revelation, or the disclosure of God's redemptive purpose and work."<sup>43</sup> In our modern era of astronomy we can at last describe in scientific terms the binding of the Pleiades and the loosening of Orion. What a powerful testimony to the veracity and durability of God's Word!

When God revealed His work in the heavens, His intent was the reconciliation to Him of His beloved creature, the great man Job. As Job repented, Job 42:6: "Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes." God restored, Job 42:10: "The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold."

Thus may we also remember that God has done far beyond what we can perceive, measure, calculate, or imagine. Best of all He desires us all to be saved and to be reconciled to Him. As Job declared so long ago:

*Job 19:25–27, "25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; 26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, 27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"*

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<sup>43</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 223